

NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY CENTRES

619. Mrs A.K. HAYDEN to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to an important community resource in my electorate called the Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre, which is experiencing significant uncertainty at the chaos associated with state government funding.

- (1) Can the minister clarify why organisations can secure only three-month funding?
- (2) What are the issues in the Empowering Communities program that are causing the funding delay, which is obviously doing anything but empowering our communities?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) I find it astounding that the member has raised this issue about one of the neighbourhood community centres, because it was actually the member's government that cut accommodation support to those centres. Her side cut the funding for accommodation support, which we have now reinstated. That is the first point.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Ms S.F. McGURK: The second point is that it was also the Liberal–National government that decided to put those contracts out to tender. It decided to put all those contract arrangements out to tender and commence that process. In fact, I did decide as minister to continue with that process. The reason was that the funding for the neighbourhood community centres had never been out to tender in that section that I know about. For 20–25 years, the only organisations that could apply for funding were those that already had access to funding. That meant that over 20 or 25 years, as the profile of our communities changed and the suburbs and regional areas developed, those neighbourhood and regional centres did not have an opportunity to bid for funding. So short of putting in new funding, which we are not in a position to do because the member's side left us with a dirty big debt, we decided to continue with the process of going out to tender.

There was concern among the neighbourhood centres; that is true. What their organisation, Linkwest, said to me was that they could have handled the tender process, but because they have inherited uncertainty about their accommodation funding—a decision made by the member's side when it was in government—they cannot do both. So we decided to pull back and have a longer period of consultation with the sector, which is what we have done. That is why there has been an extension of the tender process, so that we can consult with the sector about the criteria. For instance, one of the concerns of the neighbourhood centres was that large not-for-profits, or even perhaps for-profits, could come in over the top and bid. So we made sure that one of the provisions in the tender criteria was that the organisations had to demonstrate that they were building local capacity and local presence. People have given us overwhelmingly positive feedback about extending the tender process, and about including those organisations in the criteria development. Those tenders have now gone out. I think the tender process has actually finished and is being decided at the moment.

As I have said, it is incredible that anyone from the member's side would raise this, because she has done nothing but insult and create uncertainty for those neighbourhood centres.