

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR

174. Mr J.N. CAREY to the Minister for Local Government:

What is the government doing to raise standards across local government, modernise the sector and ensure councils are meeting community expectations?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

I thank the member for Perth for his question and also acknowledge his contribution to local government before entering this place as the Mayor of the City of Vincent. He made an outstanding contribution to that important municipality in metropolitan Perth. I also include the member for Kalgoorlie, the member for Wanneroo, the member for Darling Range and the member for Bicton and the many other members in this place who were members of local councils before entering this place, and their contribution.

The short answer is a lot. We are doing a lot. We will be reforming the local government sector in Western Australia. That is because in the last eight and a half years of course, that sector was simply battered by the previous government, and attacked and belittled by the previous government, and nothing was done in terms of modernising a sector that is very important to the future of Western Australia. One of the commitments that we made at the election was to look at the Local Government Act, which we know is an act that is now over 20 years old. We have now commenced a two-phase review of the Local Government Act. I might point out the previous government actually said there is nothing wrong with the act; it does not need to be reformed. We disagree. The first phase of the review will of course focus on increasing community participation in elections and making sure that we have a modernised system of local government. So the first phase will focus on those key elements, including identifying ways of reducing impediments to good governance. It will also focus on dealing with the magical issue regarding gifts, which of course has been an ongoing issue for local governments and was not dealt with by the previous administration.

Phase two will focus on the issue of increasing community participation and decision-making. We want more people in Western Australia, more residents and ratepayers, to be actively involved in their local council's business and in their local council's delivery of services. We want those services to be quality services that deliver what the people of those communities need and aspire to.

We are going to work closely with the sector and other stakeholders that have a direct interest in local government to make sure that Western Australia has modern legislation and a modern local government act that delivers quality and efficiency, transparency and effectiveness.

As members know, we are also about to debate in this place—probably next week—the Local Government Amendment (Auditing) Bill, which, of course, devolves responsibility for auditing local governments to the Auditor General. The focus on that is to ensure that we have a template of transparency with financial audits. That is very important. I hope that those opposite will support that. It will also provide the Auditor General with a performance oversight role. Why are we doing this? It is because we want an efficient local government. I look to the Speaker's gallery and I see a former Speaker of this place, who is now an elected local member in the City of Mandurah, Hon Fred Riebeling. I welcome him to the house again.

Ms R. Saffioti: He was the best Speaker.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, he was the best Speaker apart from the one we have now. When the Sergeant-at-Arms marched in and called out "Mr Speaker", I saw Hon Fred Riebeling rise slightly in chair. I was not sure whether it was a pocket of wind or whether he was simply rising because of affection and notoriety!

We will also ensure that under the Local Government Amendment (Auditing) Bill, local governments, no matter where they might be in Western Australia, metropolitan or non-metropolitan —

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: — will understand the importance of delivering transparency to their communities. That is underlined. We will do it by modernising the Local Government Act, which is over 20 years old and needs to be reviewed.