

HOMELESSNESS — SERVICES

519. Mr J.N. CAREY to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the state Labor government's \$5.5 billion recovery plan, which includes investment in measures that support the most vulnerable Western Australians. Can the minister outline to the house what this government's investment in the state's first common ground facility in East Perth will mean to those Western Australians who are experiencing homelessness; and advise the house how this will build on the state Labor government's significant investment in homelessness services?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for Perth not only for his interest in addressing homelessness, but also for a lot of the hard work he has put in to draw together City of Perth stakeholders, businesses and community sector organisations in his electorate. I was pleased to be with the member for Perth and Commissioner Gaye McMath of the City of Perth when it was announced that we had secured the first location for a common ground in Perth. People might be aware that many other capital cities in the country have a common ground; some have two. I think Canberra is on its way to having its second common ground. When we worked on a strategy to address homelessness, we took time to sit down with stakeholders, particularly community sector organisations, researchers and people with lived experience, to understand what an evidence-based strategic approach to homelessness would be. When we announced the strategy, we also announced an amount of \$72 million, part of which would be spent on building two common ground facilities. We have now announced the location for that in Perth. It will be on the corner of Hill and Wellington Streets, across from Wellington Square and the Royal Perth Hospital precinct. I was very pleased to see the positive response across the community for that location as well as for the concept of the common ground—that is, at least 70 self-contained units, half of which will be for people who are street present, to give people the support that they need. In addition, there is the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, which, again, is an evidence-based approach. With the advent of COVID-19, we started to fast-track the rollout of that approach by awarding contracts and making sure that case workers could get out there on the ground and link up with people who need supports. Part of the allocation of that money will also be for private rental subsidies.

We are also working with the Minister for Housing on a \$150 million housing investment package and a \$319 million social housing economic recovery package. That is a big investment in public housing, social housing and affordable housing that will make sure that there is more stock out there for those people. That is really important. Finally, there will be an allocation of \$6.8 million. The Premier has commented a few times that sometimes these numbers can just roll off the tongue, but these important on-the-ground resources will grow community sector organisations to support those who are homeless.

We said that there will be two common grounds. Now that we have announced the site for the first common ground in Perth, we know that there will be a positive development once we get the build. We have done planning, communication and consultation with the local community. Interestingly, the second location is still to be decided. We said that we will develop and build it in broader metropolitan Perth. I now have an options paper from the Department of Communities, which has shortlisted three local government areas for the second common ground. It will be an interesting test to see what these local communities think of having a common ground in their vicinity.

I think it will also be a test for the opposition to finally step up and show what could be its real support for people who are homeless and vulnerable in their community. So far, the opposition has been quick to label people, point the finger of blame and chase headlines for political purposes when it comes to homelessness. I am happy to announce that the shortlist includes three local government areas. There is the City of Mandurah. I know that the member for Mandurah as well as the local government there supports this and understands that there is a vulnerable cohort in that area. There is the City of Fremantle. I certainly can say, hand on heart, that our community recognises that there is a need and supports a common ground. The other is the City of Stirling. A mix of state seats are represented in the City of Stirling, so it will be interesting to see whether the Leader of the Opposition supports a common ground in her area—if she is listening to the answer to this question. It will also be interesting to see whether the member for Carine supports a common ground in his electorate. Let us see whether they will step up and let us know whether they really support the vulnerable in our community. I guess we will have to wait and see, but I am not holding my breath.

The SPEAKER: Members, the lights that the member for Perth damaged cannot be fixed today, so we will be a little bit in the dark for the rest of the day.