

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM — TENDER OUTCOMES

35. Ms E. HAMILTON to the Minister for Community Services:

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the outcomes of the tender for the Empowering Communities program?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how the measures that this government has put in place will ensure that communities across WA retain access to their community and neighbourhood centres.

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) I am very happy to speak on this issue and I thank the member for Joondalup, who I know is very active in her community, including with the services and activities that occurred at what were previously the neighbourhood centres and that are now being funded under the Empowering Communities program.

The tender process has been the subject of some discussion in the house and was a process commenced under the previous government. That is the first point to make. One of the big concerns of the individual organisations, as well as their peak body, Linkwest, when we came into government was that they were concerned about the tender process because there had never been a tender process. Over 20 years of funding for these programs—not all individual services had been funded for that long but the program had been going or over 20 years—there had never been an open tender process. That meant that unless we put new money into it, the only organisations that could apply for funding under the program were those that had already received money in the past.

The other uncertainty that was created for a number of the centres was that the previous government took away some accommodation assistance, but not all of them. There were a number of different arrangements. Some of it was rent; often it was insurance, maintenance and the like. However, they are such small organisations that any of that uncertainty created quite a bit of disquiet amongst the organisations. I had been involved in this issue in opposition. When I became the minister responsible, I thought it was fair that the tender process should continue so that emerging new communities that had not had an opportunity over the previous 20 years to put up their hand for access to this funding had a chance to make a bid and that existing services should be required to explain how they met criteria for the funding. We committed to extending the process, so we went through an extensive consultation with those community centres and their peak body to see what the criteria were and the sorts of things that they wanted to see their neighbourhood and community centres doing. The feedback we got was that they appreciated that we had taken more time. They had been involved in a co-design process and the like.

We went out to tender and out of all the centres, a number that had previously been funded were not funded under the tender arrangements. For some communities, that caused some disquiet because the centres did not meet the tender criteria but there was no alternative for those centres. The member for Vasse raised this question yesterday in her contribution to the Premier's Statement. We have committed to continue funding those centres notwithstanding that they did not meet the tender criteria because we understand that in some locations there is no alternative. Examples of that are Busselton, Collie, Kalgoorlie, Karratha and Newman. They are all communities that need community support. In particular, we will continue to work with those communities and centres to try to get them up to speed to make sure that they can meet the agreed tender criteria. We also agreed to give them funding for 18 months, until the middle of 2020. I think that will give them a fair amount of opportunity to meet the tender criteria. In fact, the person responsible for the People Place in Busselton said that he could not for the life of him see why that centre did not meet the tender process. I understand he wrote the tender application, so I guess he would think that. However, the department will continue to work with those centres to try to make sure they meet the agreed tender criteria. It was not just government setting that criteria; it was an extensive process.

A whole lot of organisations across the state will be the recipients of this funding—Escare in Esperance; the Jerramungup Community Resource Centre in the great southern; the Kununurra Neighbourhood House; the Nintirri Centre in Tom Price; the Manjimup Family Centre; Gowrie Karawara Family and Community Centre; the William Langford Community House in Langford; the Rostrata Family Centre in Willetton and the like. Across the state a range of these centres are doing fantastic work. I know that this tender process has caused some disquiet, but we have done everything we can to put an arrangement in place to ensure we can get those centres that did not meet the criteria across the line and leave no community unrepresented.