

## **DISABILITY SERVICES**

### *Grievance*

**MR M.P. MURRAY** (Collie) [9.32 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Disability Services and concerns access for people with disabilities to public and private sector organisations in our community. I raise the grievance because of the unfortunate frequency with which members of the Collie community have been injured in recent times in both boating and motor vehicle accidents. This has led to a major change to the town's structure. I know that four young people with severe disabilities have returned to town in the past year. To their credit, these individuals have returned to Collie to undertake rehabilitation in familiar surroundings with the support of family and friends. This situation has also meant that services and facilities for people with disabilities have been in great demand.

Private sector organisations, such as businesses operating in commercial premises and so forth, are required to provide to people with disabilities a minimal level of access to services and facilities so that they are not discriminated against. This is right and proper. Members should congratulate those individuals who meet and exceed their obligations, as well as work in a constructive manner with those who have some way to go in that regard. Under the Disability Services Act 1993, state and local government agencies are required to develop and implement disability service plans as a mechanism to outline how the agency will work to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access facilities and services.

I outline some examples in Collie and surrounding areas in which I feel that some public sector organisations are falling short of their obligations. The *Australind* is a well-known transport service; it is vital for the people of the south west. A young man recently contacted my electorate office to inform me of his experience in trying to travel on the *Australind* service. This constituent had previously been required to book a wheelchair seat one day in advance of intended travel. When he recently tried to book a wheelchair seat, he was informed he needed to book two days in advance so that seats on the train could be removed to accommodate him. The constituent informed me that he had seen no such information notifying passengers in his circumstances of such changes; and that, in general, limited information was available for disabled passengers informing them of special booking requirements. I had a quick look at the Transwa web site and could find limited information about wheelchair access on the *Australind*. When I heard about the treatment my constituent received, I took the matter to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and I congratulate her for the way in which she promptly dealt with this situation. Two seats have now been permanently removed so that wheelchairs can be accommodated on the *Australind* at all times.

Another example relates to my electorate office in Collie, the front entrance to which is designed in such a way that constituents in wheelchairs, those using walking frames or crutches or those with visual impairment would find it difficult, if not impossible, to gain access. The layout and toilet facilities of the office are also inadequate for constituents in these circumstances. It is embarrassing to the constituents and me when I must listen to their business outside on the footpath in public. Therefore, constituents with a disability are unfairly disadvantaged as they are not able to be represented by me in the same way as my other constituents.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Shire of Collie for recently installing a disability friendly lift in the entrance to the shire offices. The lift allows disability access to the first floor of the building, which was previously unavailable to people with disabilities as only stair access was available. The council also has a disability services project that works across council services to ensure that it meets the needs of people with disabilities. These are positive examples of what can be achieved in the community to make improvements in this area. It shows that people should not put disability services in the too-hard basket. I encourage other government agencies and the private sector to examine their own provisions for servicing clients with disabilities and to make improvements where necessary. Appropriately, the State Government places obligations on the private sector to provide a minimum level of services and facilities for people with disabilities. Local and state government agencies are also required to meet minimum standards. However, the examples I have highlighted today demonstrate that the State Government can improve.

I look forward to hearing from the minister about the initiatives for which she has ministerial responsibility to address this issue. Further, I look forward to the opportunity to work with the minister to identify other initiatives to enhance access for people with disabilities to state government services and facilities.

**MS S.M. McHALE** (Thornlie - Minister for Disability Services) [9.36 am]: I thank the member for raising this grievance and I acknowledge his commitment to people with disabilities. His opening remarks about road trauma victims and the impact of this trauma on rural communities were absolutely correct. We see a severe and disproportionate impact on small towns and communities when road trauma accidents occur and severe disability results. I know that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and Community Safety is targeting this area through some campaigns, particularly those directed at young men. I acknowledge those issues. I am

pleased that the member for Collie has raised this issue, because disability is a mainstream issue. All members of Parliament ought to be aware of this matter and make their own office spaces accessible to people with disabilities. The member will know that Collie has more than 2 400 individuals with disabilities, a quarter of whom have a profound or severe disability. The member's concerns are well founded. I thank him for raising the matter.

The member raised the *Australind* issue. We take for granted access to public transport. The young person referred to provides another clear example of people's needs. I am pleased that, with the member for Collie's intervention and a quick response by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, the matter has been addressed. It was a relatively simple solution. People often think that changes to provide accessibility require a lot of money and large structural change to buildings. It is not always the case. Some buildings - particularly heritage buildings with no lifts, doors that were made 100 years ago and steps - are not accessible for people in wheelchairs and may require significant upgrade. The *Australind* matter is a great example of a simple solution. Two seats were permanently removed from the train to ensure passengers with a disability have the same opportunity and freedom as others in the community to travel on the *Australind*. This had not been taken up until the member for Collie intervened on behalf of this young man.

It is a concern that the office of the member for Collie is not as accessible to people with disabilities as it should be. The member for Collie has been concerned about this since he inherited the office from the previous member. As a result, he has been impeded in some of the great work he wants to do. All renovations and fit-outs undertaken by the Department of Housing and Works must meet building codes and disability services requirements. Indeed, our parliamentary handbook states that access for people with disabilities is an important consideration for members. The member for Collie's situation in inheriting this building is working against him. Sometimes in country towns we must use commercial premises that are inadequately designed for people with disabilities. The Government is doing some good work. The Department of Housing and Works is aware of this issue and is endeavouring to ensure that all new offices are accessible. I am very happy to offer the member for Collie the services of my office to provide him with information about how to eliminate the physical barriers to accessibility. He might not be aware of a number of other things that he can do to increase accessibility. I am very happy to ensure that he is provided with all the information he might need to address the problems in his electorate office.

The member has raised some good examples. I would like to reassure him that over the past couple of years some really good initiatives have been implemented. The single biggest initiative that will provide improvements is the recent review of the Disability Services Act and improvements to disability planning. The member referred to the Shire of Collie and the requirements of public authorities, including local government, to develop disability plans, which has led to a cultural shift and numerous improvements in state and local government planning. We are not there yet. The member for Collie raised some practical, basic examples that he should not need to raise, but that reflect the reality. It is this Government's intention to strengthen planning to cater for people with disabilities. In a nutshell, the Government will broaden the definition of who is required to develop access and disability inclusion plans to ensure that people report in a meaningful way on what they have been doing. We will also require public authorities to review their plans every five years. The issue is not static. We must ensure that the agenda looks forward and we continue to achieve objectives. Public authorities will be required to make provision for the services they contract to meet the requirements of disability planning. We are pushing the envelope and broadening the requirements of planning for people with disabilities. The Minister for Disability Services will have to report annually to Parliament on achievements and compliance.

The member for Collie has raised some very practical examples. I am delighted that the *Australind* seating problem has been resolved. The accessibility issues in the member's office are something on which we must work with the Departments of the Premier and Cabinet and Housing and Works. I offer the member the opportunity to use the strength and support of my office to do that. Good things are happening in this area throughout both state and local governments. I have a long list of capital works in which improvements have been made but unfortunately I do not have time to read them. The overarching message is that we are working for an inclusive community. That means not only Perth but also towns like Collie and Bunbury. The Government is committed to that outcome for all people. I thank the member for Collie for being a flagship in his local area.