

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, COUNCIL ADVICE PROGRAM

154. Mr MASTERS to the Minister for Local Government:

In the light of the Shire of Busselton's recent decision to request that a council advice program be provided to the shire, will the minister please advise how a CAP would normally operate within a local government body?

Mr OMODEI replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. A council advice program is a peer review of the overall operation of a local government. It is undertaken at the request of a council, usually by a panel comprising persons experienced in local government. The panel will prepare a report on the review and make recommendations for consideration by the local government. A CAP is not an inquiry, and the persons undertaking the review have no statutory authority. The program includes reviewing the local government's acceptance of the four principles of the Local Government Act 1995, which are autonomy, public participation, accountability, and efficiency and effectiveness.

The program also reviews the roles of the council, councillors, mayors or presidents and the chief executive officer, as prescribed in the Act. Additionally, the program looks at the relationship between councillors, councillors and the CEO, council and the CEO, and council and the community. The information for the review is initially gained from a questionnaire completed by councillors and senior staff before the program begins. Other issues can be addressed by the CAP, but only at the request of the local government. Generally, the program does not include direct community involvement, but this can be accommodated if the council requests it.

Participation in the council advice program is beneficial to local governments as it presents them with a good opportunity for a group of experienced local government practitioners that is independent of local issues to assess the council's performance. Councils that have participated in the council advice program have found it worthwhile and I commend the Shire of Busselton for its maturity in requesting it.