

CHILD DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE - REFERRALS

541. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Premier:

- (1) Is the Premier aware that the criteria for referral of child deaths to the Child Death Review Committee prevents the committee from examining cases in which the deceased child or his or her siblings have been the subjects of an allegation of abuse more than two years before the death of the child?
- (2) Is the Premier also aware that the criteria for referral exclude child deaths when the child's family had numerous contacts with the department if these contacts were more than two years before the death of the child?
- (3) Will the Premier concede that these restrictions mean that the Child Death Review Committee is unable to fully investigate failures within the Department for Community Development and that they may have contributed to the premature death of these children?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:

- (1)-(3) I am aware of some of these issues. The Child Death Review Committee was established by the minister as one response to the Gordon inquiry, and commenced in January 2003 under order of the Governor in Executive Council under section 22 of the Community Services Act 1972. At the request of the minister, it carries out a review of the operation of relevant policies, procedures and organisational systems of the department in circumstances in which a child known to the department has died and the child and family have had significant contact with the department within the previous two years. The operations of the committee have evolved over time, as has the staffing and support. The committee has been supported by a senior adviser and half-time administrative assistant since its inception. The committee had four members until July 2006, when an additional member was appointed. The external panel of reviewers was appointed through a tender process in June 2006. Prior to this the department had made additional staff available to work under the direction of the committee to manage the workload in 2005-06.

It is interesting that an opposition that, when in government, did absolutely nothing in this area and just let things roll along, now comes out with this pious, hollow, politically motivated criticism, and nothing beyond that. I thought it might be of some interest to alert the chamber to the comments made today by Dr Denzil McCotter, chair of the Child Death Review Committee, about her view of the resourcing of her committee. I have here a copy of a letter she has written, in which she expresses concern at the article published on the front page of *The West Australian* today, in that the emphasis is on difficulties that have now been addressed.

Mr T. Buswell: What about the past five years?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: How many years?

Several members interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: There is an ignoramus on the opposition front bench making completely ignorant comments. The letter reads -

It is true that the Child Death Review Committee's (CDRC) activities were limited by its lack of resources and as a result a backlog of cases had accrued. Government has responded to our requests and a new model is in place, staff have been provided, the CDRC membership has been expanded, and an office is forthcoming.

We do not want anything beyond what we need for our task.

Several members interjected.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I will repeat that -

We do not want anything beyond what we need for our task.