

ROUGH SLEEPING COORDINATION GROUP

26. Ms K.E. GIDDENS to the Minister for Homelessness:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to reducing homelessness in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house the actions that this government is taking to reduce homelessness by providing accommodation for rough sleepers?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether he is aware of any alternative policy approaches?

Mr J.N. CAREY replied:

I want to thank the member for her question.

- (1)–(2) Last week, I spent two hours sitting with about 30 to 40 organisations at the rough sleeping coordination group. This group meets on a fortnightly basis to make assessments about rough sleepers. We helped to establish this group as part of a wider package of reforms to drive better outcomes from the huge investment that is being made in the homelessness arena. What became very apparent to me after sitting there for two hours and listening is that the issue of trying to break the cycle of rough sleeping is deeply complex; indeed, outreach workers outlined the years it has taken them to develop relationships with rough sleepers to help them move to the next part of the cycle. It is very complex and it is a challenge.

The Leader of the Opposition made claims today about Boorloo Bidee Mia and filling a building with people. It does not work like that, and it is disappointing to see the deliberate ignorance by the opposition on these matters. I announced a major reform package, part of which is around the Housing First approach and assisting rough sleepers to get into accommodation. After a substantial time of review and looking at buildings in the city, I announced that we would purchase the Murray Street lodge, a 30-room building, to assist people to break that cycle. I also announced on 12 January that we would be investing with a community provider to run that facility. That is on top of a range of other reforms, including additional funds and our 100 social homes program in which the government will spot-purchase homes and refer rough sleepers to those homes with support, recognising that it is likely to be in the same area in which the rough sleepers have a street presence.

I want to put on the record that the key leaders in the sector applauded this. Ruah, which is recognised as a credible provider, said, "We applaud the continued steps this Government is taking toward addressing chronic rough sleeping and ending homelessness in our state." Shelter WA, the other key leader in the sector, said, "We congratulate Minister Carey on this announcement and commend him on the momentum he is building in this space." It also said, "This investment will change lives." David Pearson from the WA Alliance to End Homelessness said, "We commend the government's leadership on Housing First." Those are comments from the three most credible leaders in the homelessness space. This is where the politics kicks in. The opposition, at every opportunity, can never say, "This is a good initiative." There was one sole voice criticising this proposal and that was Hon Steve Martin, who attacked it. I am interested to know about the Liberal and National Parties' solutions. In two years, they have had zero policy. Another thought bubble from the Leader of the Opposition was to convert CBD office buildings into accommodation—not hotels that are ready made, which the opposition has criticised. No, we should look at converting those buildings—but at what cost and getting what trades to do that in what time frame? I offer a pragmatic and real solution using ready accommodation but the opposition criticises it. When the opposition was pressed about its solution—this was on ABC last year—Hon Steve Martin said, "I think we'll do maintenance." Since July 2020, our government has issued 500 000 maintenance work orders—we are already doing it. There is a stark contrast between this government, which is delivering pragmatic and real solutions, and the complete and absolute policy vacuum on the other side.