

SELECT COMMITTEE INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2020**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Hon Simon O'Brien (Chairman)
Hon Laurie Graham (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Charles Smith**

Hearing commenced at 11.20 am**Councillor MALCOLM CULLEN****President, Shire of Coolgardie, sworn and examined:****Mr JAMES TRAIL****Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Coolgardie, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIR: Today's hearing is going to be broadcast. It has been suggested that I remind everyone involved that if you have got any private documents with you, to keep them away from the cameras or be sensitive to that. Let us now commence the broadcast, please. Good morning. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to our hearing. Could I ask you, firstly, gentlemen, if you could state your full name and the capacity in which you are appearing before the committee?

Councillor CULLEN: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. My name is Malcolm Cullen. I am the shire president of the Shire of Coolgardie and also the chairperson of the Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils in the goldfields–Esperance region. Certainly, my position there represents quite a majority of the goldfields region as well. Thank you for the opportunity to present today.

Mr TRAIL: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am James Trail, CEO of the Shire of Coolgardie. I have that privilege and I am also the chair of the CEOs group, representing the GVROC regional council. Given the president is chair of that, I am lucky enough to chair the CEOs group as well.

The CHAIR: Thanks for that, gentlemen. I now ask you to take either the oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

The CHAIR: Gentlemen, you will have signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The CHAIR: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast on the internet. The broadcast will also be available for viewing online after this hearing. You should let us know if you object to the broadcast being made available in this way. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, I ask that if you are quoting from a document, you give it its full title and description, just for the record. I remind you your transcript will be made public. If you wish to provide the committee with details of personal experiences during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in private session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not covered by parliamentary privilege.

Firstly, gentlemen, on behalf of the committee, I would like to publicly acknowledge you for going to the trouble to come to Perth to participate in our inquiry; our regrets we were not able to come to you, but your gesture in coming to us is very much appreciated, and I am sure that is reflected outside this hearing as well. Can I also thank you for your submission, which was lodged with us a little while ago. That has been of great benefit, along with so many other submissions we received, but we were very pleased to receive yours. You have touched on a number of themes that we are going to try to explore in the time available to us today. We do have the capacity, of course, to

follow up on matters subsequent to the hearing if time beats us, but we would like to get into some questions now and get the benefit of your experience, please.

To open the batting, one of the first matters that has come to our specific attention concerns the local government insurance scheme. We would appreciate your advice as to what your experience has been with it. For example, we note that your shire left the scheme at some point and then, at least partially, bought back in. Can you maybe tell us a bit about why you left and why you went back?

Councillor CULLEN: Can I start that and then I will hand over to the CEO?

The CHAIR: Yes; thanks, Mr Cullen.

Councillor CULLEN: There was quite a concept throughout the local government sector that there were significant savings to be made in the first instance by looking at other options and shopping around for a better deal, so to speak, with other insurance processes in that regard. It was not until about 12 or 18 months down the track that some of the local governments that had opted out found that the content that we were getting and the insurance that was being sought did not give that coverage that was the belief in the first instance when those premiums were taken out. That is one of the reasons that the Shire of Coolgardie has gone back in, because what we thought we were getting in insurance cover when it came to claims, we were not actually getting that in return. There is a little bit more to the side of that that I will hand over to the CEO.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: When you initially came out of the scheme, was there any period where you were lobbied to come back in or did you come under any pressure to come back in, from any parties?

Councillor CULLEN: I do not believe there was pressure applied. I am also on the state council in that regard, with WALGA. I do not believe there was any pressure for the ones that opted out to come back in. WALGA did a lot of work to, I guess, emphasise to the membership that it was a benefit for the members to stay as a united group within the LGIS deal. I think that has borne fruit now where everyone has gone back into that, other than I think one local government.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Did they come to see you, for example, and present to you information?

Councillor CULLEN: They did put out a lot of information and we had a couple of members of the WALGA executive who actually came to one of our GVROC meetings and did a presentation to emphasise the benefits of remaining within the group.

Mr TRAIL: To pick up on what the president has said, honourable Mr Smith, what I would say is that senior officers at LGIS certainly met with me on probably three or four occasions during that time. What I would say is that they were genuinely interested in why the Shire of Coolgardie had left—so the reasons why; what were the reasons why; how they could improve things; how they could make things better—so certainly the CEO and one of the senior officers. I suppose what I would say is that they were aware, as CEO at the Shire of Coolgardie—and others—I had raised a number of times around perhaps the price of it and the process for it. So they at no time put pressure on. They were humble in wanting to go through a learning experience. What I would say is that I have put it down to being, perhaps, sometimes these things have a very positive outcome and it was a good exercise, I believe, in the end. What we did find, as the president has said, was that the overall package that is offered, particularly around officers working with local governments in the actual understanding of the complexities of what we are dealing with in local government and on the ground, and how quickly procedure claims and when you are doing things sometimes—you know filling in seven or eight, 10, 15 pieces of paper—you do not necessarily get all that time. I would summarise by saying that they were very, very proactive in trying to understand why the Shire of Coolgardie did, and no question, for a small local government like ours, the price of insurance was a significant cost. When

we had that opportunity, the council in their wisdom saw that opportunity. We have come back again and certainly have a strong working relationship, and the feedback that I have been given by my staff is that even LGIS's processes have been made easier and improved as a result of that.

[11.30 am]

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Can you recall back at that time how much the financial saving was by going elsewhere; just out of interest—back at that time?

Mr TRAIL: Thanks, Mr Smith. I suppose, initially, from memory, the saving to the Shire of Coolgardie was probably in the vicinity of \$150 000 to \$180 000. Since we have gone back to LGIS for most of our insurances, it would be fair to say there has been a sharpening of the pen in terms of some of the lessons that were learnt. Our insurance now, in going back with the overall package, is closer to what we were previously paying. Hopefully, Mr Chairman, that helps.

The CHAIR: Looking at the LGIS 2019 annual report, it indicates that the shire is a member of the liability insurance scheme, but what about your work care, property and bushfire insurance; is that outside of LGIS?

Mr TRAIL: From memory, Mr Chairman, I believe it has come back in. Certainly in the renewal of our insurances for this coming year, the intent is to do that, Mr Chairman. I do not have that information in front of me, but, from memory, we certainly are looking at going back in with them come 1 July with all of our new insurances, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIR: Okay. Possibly you might like to just check that out when you review the transcript. Just looking at annual reports, our understanding is that you left the scheme in about 2017, but you maintained the liability insurance in 2017–18 and 2018–19. But now you are saying that the whole lot is being rolled back.

Mr TRAIL: Correct, Mr Chairman—for the reasons I have explained in terms of frank and fruitful discussions, processes and other things as well. The intent is to go back given what has happened. I would finish by saying that as a smaller local government, perhaps you feel that at times you might get forgotten about a little bit. I think that was a good learning experience for both parties as well, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIR: That is interesting.

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: The bushfire insurance—was there any option for this year going forward? I understand that there have been limited people willing to offer the reinsurance necessary. Did you find out, from a bushfire perspective, whether you are able to get another competitive quote?

Councillor CULLEN: I do not believe we have really chased it up in a concerted effort, but I think the staff have been following that up. I could not really give a definitive answer at the moment. I believe it has been an ongoing issue with the recurrence of the fire season, and I guess the increase in what is happening in there is going to impact on insurance.

Mr TRAIL: I think, honourable member, if I can, with the lessons learnt in terms of looking at that insurance and what has happened, certainly, in other regions, but in the goldfields–Esperance region about what we are doing, it is certainly a conversation that we need to have and will have. It is probably a conversation that I will get involved in with LGIS, given what has happened with the bushfires in the goldfields–Esperance region. As yet, we have not had that conversation.

The CHAIR: Gentlemen, I want to move on now, and perhaps you can tell us a little about your involvement in the Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils. Where we are coming from with this is as follows. As reflected in your submission, you have got good practical experience, and we appreciate your matter of fact way of giving it to people straight, basically. We are aware

also that there are many shires with a smaller population and bigger areas all confronting all sorts of sustainability issues, capacity to deliver, and all those sorts of questions. Various prospects are shown up for addressing some of those shortcomings, like forced amalgamations into larger units for economies of scale and all the rest of it. We were just wondering if you could tell us what is going to work for smaller population shires and is the voluntary regional organisation maybe the way forward?

Councillor CULLEN: I will take a stab at that one, Mr Chairman. From a regional perspective, where we sit with goldfields—Esperance, we are all very parochial of our patch. As you said, goldfields—Esperance is the largest single local government region in WA, as you would be aware. Everyone is very protective of their town and their shire. The vast distances do add to the issues that we have with maintaining roads and infrastructure, whether it be swimming pools and rec centres. As a region, we are trying to introduce more regional opportunities through our ROC. It has had some good benefits. Over the years, we have introduced a record storage facility. Not all local governments took the opportunity of being in that because of the tyranny of distance, as you would understand. One of the most important things in our region is the mining activity, and increased mining activity. Hopefully, what is happening with the coronavirus will not impact on what is going on with that. But the mining sector offers each of the local governments, and even Esperance to a certain extent, an active mining industry in our region creates opportunities that the local governments run on the back of. During that time, we have introduced a few things, like the road contributions that most of us engage in with the mining industry. We leverage contributions for infrastructure. We have currently got two mining companies in the Shire of Coolgardie that contribute significantly to infrastructure, whether it be sporting, like swimming pools and rec centres, and roads. Part of that is us as a regional council negotiating some of those outcomes, which will add to the sustainability of the local governments. As you said, we have probably got three of the smaller local governments, whether it be the northern goldfields down to the south, with big areas to maintain with roads. One of the things we really need to pursue with the government is the royalties for regions aspect—it is still there—of the income that the state receives, whether it be Labor or a Liberal government; that has been reduced. The amount of that funding opportunity has been reduced under the Labor government, with it being more spent towards government infrastructure. We are a little bit the other way. It has been spoken publicly that a lot of royalties for regions funding was wasted in those first four or six years, but all those local governments would not have had some of the infrastructure now that they have got if it had not been for royalties for regions—whether it be the singing loos or whatever the publicity was made about. But the Shire of Coolgardie has got two of those and they get extensive use. We have got one on Bailey Street, which is the number one highway going east and west, sitting in a public park. It gets extensive use. It was not a waste of money. It is automatic; it opens and closes. There can be set times of opening and shutting. The amount of people you see pull up there to use that—and we have one in Kambalda.

One of the things I will just touch on talking about Coolgardie and Kambalda is the twin town aspect. We have got two lots of infrastructure. We have got two swimming pools, two town halls, two sets of roads, two sets of footpaths, two sets of local government offices. That is a significant impost and that was a legacy through the mining industry being Western Mining. They set up the town of Kambalda as a private town. The handover in approximately 2002, I think it was, put a big imposition on the Shire of Coolgardie and the town of Coolgardie. At that stage we were always sustainable in our own right. From the time we had to take on a bigger town, more population with more infrastructure, that put a big burden on the town. The transition from the mining town to a public town under the municipality of the Shire of Coolgardie was never negotiated similar to what they have done with, I think, Tom Price and one of the towns up there.

[11.40 am]

They had a reserve fund put aside of \$40 million or \$50 million; Shire of Coolgardie got \$1 million, so that is an ongoing burden for the ratepayers of the shire. But we believe that we are punching above our weight, and we are actually still keeping our nose in front. With the support of the mining industry that we have got there now, and the gold price as it is, we believe that we are making ground and we are going to improve.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I assume that when you said that they have got \$40 million or \$50 million and you have got \$1 million, was that from royalties for regions or from the mines?

Councillor CULLEN: No, that was from the mining company that was set up in the north west.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Okay. So that is my question: How fair is it with your regional council? Do you get more bargaining power with the mining organisations or is it really just whoever seems to be able to negotiate best on the day that gets something out of the mining companies? Is there another way that you could see that that could be funded?

Councillor CULLEN: Could I ask the CEO to answer that one?

The CHAIR: Sure.

Mr TRAIL: Thanks for the question, honourable member. I think, picking up on what the president said, certainly, wearing the CEO's hat and working with a voluntary regional council, the conversations that go on between CEOs around helping each other is excellent, because it is around working together and being voluntary and things. Yes, the president is right: we are all trying to get what is right for our own patch, and that is the lead-in to the question that you have asked about. So, as an example, certainly, given the proximity of Kambalda and Coolgardie to the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the CEO, John Walker, and myself talk about a number of things sharing resources. What is starting to happen now is the conversations with the mining companies, for instance, as you have asked about, are starting to happen from a regional conversation around things, which is going to help. If we take something like Northern Star—they are operating now, within the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the Shire of Coolgardie and up Laverton and Leonora way. What the regional council does do is it does open up opportunities, and certainly at an administration level, around having those conversations to help each other.

So there is no question, in my view, in my mind, that the regional approach and the voluntary approach allows for much more robust conversation, because both elected members and the staff can still run their own areas, but we can lobby and work together on significant issues like this with the mining industry. As an example, two years ago, the Shire of Coolgardie signed an MOU with seven or eight mining companies in terms of working together around providing contributions to community activities and programs. Out of the back of that something that is wonderful in our community is the St John's medical services, which was something that the president in Kambalda and the council fought hard for. So now we have a partnership with St John's, providing medical services into Kambalda for the next five years around telehealth and a doctor that was not there before. So what we have been able to do is because of the work with the mining companies—we had set up that MOU—having conversations with the mining companies, having conversations with things like the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and our other partners, it is creating a conversation that creates a strong partnership, which means that we are all talking to the mining companies around similar issues, and there is no question the mining companies are certainly starting to listen to us.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That is excellent. Just to follow up: it sounds like you are doing really well at that, and that is great to hear. Do you get any support from the department of local government at all to

help you facilitate those conversations or would you expect to get any help from them or any other state government department?

Councillor CULLEN: Well, I will start on that one —

Mr TRAIL: Thanks for the question, honourable member!

Councillor CULLEN: We have had a lot of discussion with the department over the past, probably, eight years, that I have been more involved in. Jenny Mathews and I think the other one that had been there for quite some time—I believe they have struggled for the last few years with the lack of resources in the department. It has been raised at WALGA that they believe that there should be a bit of a shift from the department to more of mentoring and helping and developing local governments, than with the big stick saying, “You’ve got to do this, and if you do something wrong, you’re going to cop it!” Firstly, they need more resources, I believe, from the government to be able to provide that support. Then it would be more beneficial for a lot of the local governments that are struggling, whether it be with councillors, whether it is administration or, I guess, the rapport or the relationships with staff and councillors. I think that is one of the sticking points that has been with the department.

Mr TRAIL: Honourable member, to pick up on that as well, what I would say is that the goldfields–Esperance region has a very proactive, can-do attitude. I think it is because of the distance and things that we are, so what we have decided to do is we will keep working together and helping each other to keep moving forward. Part of the challenge, and you would all know—it is not a criticism or anything—is that quite often for agencies and things everything is running that way, in a strategic approach across the top, whereas perhaps we are able to move more quickly and do those things.

Just coming back to the question that the honourable Chair asked in terms of a regional council, and the president mentioned royalties for regions, I think what is really interesting is that in 2017–18, there was \$11.4 billion that came out of the goldfields–Esperance region towards state GDP. After the Pilbara, it is the second biggest contributor to state GDP. I suppose for that reason, as a regional council, we are all very proud of what is going on, and, as the president said, we are batting above our weight. It is no question that we believe, as a group, that there should be some more funding coming back.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: How much does come back from that \$11 billion?

Mr TRAIL: Look, just through the normal —

Hon CHARLES SMITH: I know it is next to nothing.

Mr TRAIL: Through the normal streams—once again, I do not believe, whether it is the Liberal government in power or the Labor government, I think perhaps there is an opportunity to look at what is being contributed from the region like that or elsewhere, and actually look at what is coming back. I suppose, what we are asking from a regional perspective is whether it is royalties for regions or whatever funding model—we are batting above our weight. The mining companies, and everything, are contributing towards that and paying their taxes and different things as well, and perhaps it is not all fair that the mining companies are having to pay for everything in our communities on top of that, and maybe there is an opportunity from both the state government and federal government to acknowledge the contribution from the region in terms of funding that is coming out and money coming back, and that would certainly help. It is going to go into community programs. It is not going to go into—because we are not looking after our roads and parks and things. It is going to go into community programs, into events to attract and keep people in our regions. Sorry, honourable member, I get passionate about it.

The CHAIR: I think we can then refer to your submission where you refer to non-metropolitan local governments being required to provide essential services that would be delivered by the private sector or not-for-profit or government agencies in metropolitan areas, but they are not active in your space, necessarily. Can you give us some examples where you have had to pick up the slack?

Councillor CULLEN: Could I say that one would be the medical services.

The CHAIR: Yes, tell us about that.

Councillor CULLEN: In Kambalda, six years ago, we had a couple of doctors that operated for a period of 11 years in private practice. Basically, their children were old enough to start going to uni and they made the decision to come to the city. It took us, I think, nine months to find a replacement medical service that would come into town. We had that service operate for three to four years, and, basically, they gave us three months' notice that they were withdrawing. We put out expressions of interest prior to their departure, and the best opportunity that came along was St John, who responded to the EOI. From that period, with significant contribution from the shire, we are looking at between \$200 000 and \$300 000 a year to provide medical services in the town of Kambalda.

The CHAIR: What form does that take? What do you actually use the money for?

Councillor CULLEN: What they are doing is they are providing one and a half GPs per day in the medical centre in Kambalda. The shire leases two of those rooms for the provision of the GP. They have now set up telehealth services, and that is another bone of contention, because Kambalda is not classed in the MMM regional-remote federal sphere for a medical service, so St John cannot claim the rebate back for the GP telehealth service. They also provide a community transport bus, and they are looking at other alternative services that they can ply, like mental health and even as far as a dental surgery in Kambalda.

[11.50 am]

Hon CHARLES SMITH: In your opinion, gents, and from your experience, why do you think there is a continuous issue of attracting professional medical people to the goldfields region—GPs, psychiatrists and so on?

Councillor CULLEN: I will answer that one, Mr Smith. It is not just the goldfields, it is all regional areas—the wheatbelt, the northern goldfields and further out into the Murchison; everywhere is having great difficulty attracting doctors.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Despite quite a large salary package?

Councillor CULLEN: Yes, exactly. We have just recently had a series of discussions with St John. The town of Coolgardie has been left without a doctor for two months. The doctor who has had that service for probably 12 to 15 years is saying that he has basically given up. He is selling his business because he is finding it too hard to attract doctors to the business; and as a small entity on its own he is really struggling. That is one of the reasons that we believe an organisation like St John, which now has four primary medical facilities operating in the city, have a bigger pool of doctors and resources that will be able to provide services into both Coolgardie and will, hopefully, extend to Coolgardie—from Kambalda to Coolgardie. The model that they have actually given to us is that they would be prepared to move into other remote towns in the goldfields, whether it be Norseman, Leonora or Laverton. Can I just add that all those regional towns, like Norseman, Shire of Dundas, Shire of Leonora, Shire of Laverton, Shire of Wiluna and the Shire of Yilgarn, which are not actually in our patch, but they all put in between \$200 000 and \$400 000 to provide just the GP. But at least with St John, for our \$300 000 we are getting a raft of services, which we feel is a benefit.

The CHAIR: In the absence of that, you mentioned a couple of gaps where you are without a GP in town, what would your locals do to access doctor services—go up to Kalgoorlie or somewhere?

Councillor CULLEN: They had to travel into Kalgoorlie, yes. The other part of that: that MM rating that we have is because we are only 40, 50 to 60 kays away from Kalgoorlie, that is why they put us in a higher class. When we have questioned, Kalgoorlie even has trouble providing services to their own population, let alone catering for—firstly, you have got the fly in, fly out population in the goldfields as well as other regional towns that are going in there. We have heard from one of the managers of Plaza Medical that they cannot provide anything further than the capacity they have got. They are struggling. When you look at Town Medical, which actually provide the service into Coolgardie, are folding up, and the doctors have gone to work in Boulder Medical, there is a massive shortage in the goldfields. We have applied to the federal government to have that MM rating reviewed. It comes back to us that the Australian Bureau of Statistics, or whoever it is, set that rating. There are some real anomalies in how that is set. The remote regional communities, or local governments, has so many gaps in it that we cannot fathom how they come to those decisions.

Mr TRAIL: Picking up on that and picking up on the question from Hon Charles Smith, it comes back to a previous question around GVROC and regional councils and a model for local government and it is certainly something that I have been very lucky that my council has bought into the vision that I have shared with the council. If you look at small regional local government, you look at regional local government, it is hard enough for Broome, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and other places to attract skilled staff to do all of the jobs and things that need to be done. One of the models—this picks up on things like St John's and other models coming in—is fee for service and also buying in skill sets. I have been very lucky that the council shared in my vision around how we structure the organisation. Over the last three or four years we have only increased staff needed by two or three FTEs, given we have got a lot of work on. But just like legal services, we buy services in. We contract services in—planning, building, health and other services—on an as-needs basis. The community gets the benefit of real skills coming in but also you are not caught with housing and overheads and a whole lot of other things.

From a regional model perspective, we have engineering services, planning services and others. If we get someone who comes to town with those skill sets, we would rather employ them. However, if we do not, the ability to buy those services in and, I think, from a local government perspective given that a significant number of local governments are in regional WA, that buying services in and working with agencies—not-for-profits, contractors and things—may be a model that may work into the future because we are all talking about skills shortages. At Broome, they were advertising for an executive director of governance for something like nine or 10 months. If Broome cannot get it, the Shire of Coolgardie is not going to be able to get somebody to help it. That is again where the voluntary local government, the voluntary council, because of that and what we have on, everyone is helping each other.

The CHAIR: That, in part, is about creating the economies of scale by working together.

Mr TRAIL: Correct, Mr Chairman. It is about economies of scale and working together. It does work, and it is working.

The CHAIR: Thanks for those examples.

Hon DIANE EVERS: My concern is the cost of that. Say you needed to get in an engineer or a planner or something but you only needed them for maybe a week, you provide the accommodation and the travel costs. To get a professional service like that, what sort of costs are you looking at?

Mr TRAIL: Could I say that once again the council in their wisdom are supporting the model; it was certainly tough for the first year because, rightly so, the community are asking what is going on, but we talk about integrated planning and the key components and meeting objectives and meeting things from the community. We are lucky enough that we went to tender on all of the services. We are paying between \$90 and \$110 an hour.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Plus costs—plus accommodation and travel?

Mr TRAIL: Yes, but accommodation things: we have a house, so the four contractors are sharing the house together and things too. Effectively, the advantage of that is if we need them for one or two months, they come. There is no question there are two things: yes, it might be if you had them all there every month, it would be an extremely expensive exercise but it is not because you bring them in but the output comes through because you are doing that. The added advantage of that as well is they are mentoring and training my staff. You are getting experience coming from people who are past CEOs, who are people experienced in working, and they love coming up and they work with staff. We also have the ability for the staff to be able to ring them. They do not charge for the hours like they are being billed. There really is a real passion about the model because I can see how it has helped and what it has done for the staff. The staff actually have asked for those people, when they come, to help mentor them and to be coaching and things as well. It is certainly a model that we are very proud of and I am lucky the council has done that. It is a significant reason we have been able to train and keep people we have got, build their skill sets with skilled professionals coming in when we need that.

Councillor CULLEN: Chair, could I just add to that: the council copped a bit of flak about not employing local people. We are not the only local government in the region that found that it is really difficult to attract and retain those people in the towns. We also found that by providing housing, all the infrastructure with the house, whether you pay for the utilities and a car and all of that, what we are actually getting is probably a cheaper option than having permanent staff. I know it does not add to the FIFO debate that we all go through, but we found that we get the expertise, we get the experience, plus the mentoring of our staff, as the CEO said, is a bonus to having those people permanently in town. In my time as president over the past 10 or 11 years, our turnover rate of senior staff and the higher paid staff has been very high—I admit that—but the reason being is that we have not been able to find the secret of having the experience and the expertise that has been able to deliver the services and infrastructure that we require. Sometimes we have had to repeat the process or the jobs that have been allocated a couple of times over, so it has actually cost us twice as much.

A couple of other things that you said, Chair, about services that we believe we provide as local government: another one is child support and child care in the region. We have a massive problem with community services in the goldfields, whether it be the department for child protection, the department of housing—communities, as they are called now, because there has been a big amalgamation of those government departments.

[12 noon]

I think sometimes they have actually lost their identity and their ability to provide those services out into the rural and remote regions. We have still got damaged housing—Department of Housing stock—in the town site of Coolgardie. There were 11 of those houses damaged in the December 2018 storm. They are still inoperable, uninhabited. This is another thing of department resourcing and financing. They are only just now starting to get work done on some of those.

Our staff actually do a lot of work with the children in both Coolgardie and Kambalda, providing the rec centre venues, the events et cetera. A couple of our staff in Coolgardie have spent many, many

hours delivering services such as cooking before the kids catch the bus to go to school. They have like a breakfast club at the primary school to encourage kids to come to school and all that sort of stuff. We provide a raft of other services in our communities. I know Leonora and Laverton do exactly the same thing, because there is a lack of coordination between federal and state government services that are provided in the community. One other example—it is a glaring example I can give you—is that the Shire of Laverton has 57 agencies provide services into that town, and they do not communicate with the local government. They will come to Laverton for three days, tick all the boxes that they provide all the services to the community, and then drive back to Kalgoorlie, and they have not even spoken to the staff in the Shire of Laverton.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Is that really the shire's job to feed children?

Councillor CULLEN: No, it is not. We do not believe it is, but where are the government agencies that are providing that support? I can tell you now that our police service in Coolgardie are pulling their hair out trying to find solutions. Sometimes they will round some of these wayward kids up, they will take them back home, they will put them in the front door, and by the time the police get in the door, the kids have gone out the back door, because the parents are not supervising them.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Do you have any government offices in Coolgardie itself like housing or child protection?

Councillor CULLEN: No, they are all in Kalgoorlie.

Mr TRAIL: In saying that, given the regional centre, from Kalgoorlie's perspective, Coolgardie is only just down the road, but as the president has said, they are still not perhaps doing what they should be doing in terms of travelling.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: In my experience, Kalgoorlie also suffers with getting staff into child protection, so it is a real issue for the whole goldfields region.

Councillor CULLEN: Absolutely. The Shire of Leonora has just had a massive new building built with some of our royalties for regions. It is a great facility, but they are really struggling in attracting their services and staff in there. There is an option there that if they could be located in that northern goldfields section, they could provide services to Laverton, Waroona and out into the other remote communities. Attracting the staff is another problem.

The CHAIR: It is the same old problem. The Kimberley has got it as well—trying to attract people to different areas to base themselves. I noticed you mentioned that in December 2018 there was some storm damage to a number of Homeswest places and they are still not fixed.

Councillor CULLEN: They have slowly started moving through them, but there are still a lot of people who are not housed.

The CHAIR: Is that accommodation not being used?

Councillor CULLEN: I think they have relocated people to Kalgoorlie or wherever there was other available housing, as far as I know.

The CHAIR: Right, but is it still needed in Coolgardie?

Councillor CULLEN: Definitely.

The CHAIR: We might follow that up out of session.

One thing that we were very interested in—it is related, so we will move onto this now—is that you made reference to what you described in your submission as “unfunded mandates”, where the state government assists in service delivery and then vacates, leaving local governments to fund the service themselves. I think this is related to what we were just talking about. Can you give us any

examples of where that has happened? You might want to take this on notice too and reflect, research and come back to us. That is okay too.

Councillor CULLEN: I will answer as best I can from what our experience is. I guess part of it could be related to medical services. WA Country Health Service supply a great service. They are probably as good as what you are going to get in the circumstances they have. They do provide and maintain the medical facility both in Coolgardie and Kambalda, and staff, with nursing and, I guess, emergency care. We are both lucky enough to have St John Ambulance that still operate in both the towns with volunteers.

The CHAIR: What is the level of services provided? Are they nursing stations? How would you describe them?

Councillor CULLEN: They operate five days a week, permanently, and then after that it is emergency with the emergency call at both centres. St John provide 24-hour, basically, emergency—any callout, St John will respond. A couple of times when, I think, Kambalda have not been available, when there has been shift work, they will send an ambulance from Kalgoorlie. But on the whole, having the nurses available and admin, they both operate five days a week.

The CHAIR: And that is provided by the state?

Councillor CULLEN: Yes, that is WA state country health.

Mr TRAIL: Mr Chairman, if I could perhaps just finish that in terms of unfunded mandates. I think part of that is to do with the need to keep our infrastructure. Let us just take the road network, and I will give the example of the road network. We have got a massive road network throughout the whole region supporting a massive mining industry needing to do things. The comparison is what is coming out of the region. I talked about nearly \$12 billion in GDP coming out of the region into the government, and also paying fuel tax and excise tax to the federal government. If you look at that compared with the money and contributions coming back in through regional road group funding or other funding and things, I think, if that helps, that is a little bit to do with it, because the local governments are trying to support the mining industry, which is really significant to the state, but yet the funding coming back probably does not reflect what is going on collectively with the mining industry and the local governments in those regions working together.

The CHAIR: Okay, thanks. As I say, if on reviewing the transcript there are any other good examples you might like to give us of unfunded mandates or situations where state and federal governments perhaps have introduced very worthy programs but then walked away from them to leave you to pick them up, we would be interested to hear about that. That is related to the overall question about local governments in yours and a number of other areas having to pick up essential services that the private sector or the not-for-profits or the government will pick up in the metro area in the normal course of business.

We have had a number of submissions talking about the need for the Local Government Act, which is being reviewed as you know, to be flexible and not impose unnecessary regulation or red tape. Are you able to identify any obligations under the act that the shire considers to be excessive or unnecessary?

Councillor CULLEN: I think I will handball that one to the CEO, Chair. I guess from a council perspective, the onus of the extra burden of compliance has added significant costs and resources to all local governments, and I think the CEO is probably in a better position to answer that.

Mr TRAIL: I was previously CEO at Augusta–Margaret River, Kalamunda and now I am here. Certainly, you cannot have a one size fits all in terms of compliance and what needs to be done. I have a strong belief that the integrated planning framework is good and that it helps in terms of

things with our council, but with the bureaucracy and red tape, we physically do not have all the resources to be able to keep up with the returns or make sure everything has been done, or staff members needing to deal with things if we have to review our local laws, our policies, delegations—everything. Yes, those things need to be done, but I think it is about the level to which you need to, and time frames and how burdensome it is. So in most regional local governments it all falls down to the CEO, because if you do not have experienced staff and they are not able to help and do things, it falls down to the CEO. I do not envy the legislation being written around the Local Government Act. I do not believe there needs to be two different acts—I think one act. But I think there does need to be some consideration given for not one size fits all in terms of what you do. Let us take the annual budget, for instance. The capacity to do the annual budget when you have 500 staff and you have a department of 10 in your strategic planning department, to the finance officer and myself being responsible for building the budget and the annual report together and needing to meet all of the same requirements, all of the same legislation—everything—it is time consuming.

It takes away the CEO and other staff from doing the things that need to be delivered in the community for the council. I think there does need to be a review about the compliance and regulation. There certainly is no question that we need to have that. Maybe there is an opportunity in terms of having more standard templates. If you look at things, everybody is using different things. Let us take integrated planning. When that came out, there was no index and no standard template given to everybody. From a small local government to a big local government that has the capacity to do things, anything that comes in—letters, responses to surveys. We are always responding to surveys for committees and different things and regulations and studies. We physically do not have the time, and it takes us away from doing the job of delivering things to the community. It is not an easy one but certainly consideration needs to be given to it not being a one-size-fits-all.

[12.10 pm]

The CHAIR: Do you think it is the case that state government or federal government mandarins sitting in an ivory tower somewhere do not think enough before they impose requirements on local governments to make returns or do certain tasks?

Mr TRAIL: Wearing my CEO hat, I would have to say yes. That is not being disrespectful to anybody. Let them come out and sit in the EA's chair or the CEO's chair in the council. Let them sit in the president's chair. Let them come out into the regions and understand all the issues that come up. The other thing is that a lot of people in the community who have been there for a long time do not understand the difference between Western Power and Telstra. They come to the council office because in regional WA that is what they do. They want to sit down and have a cup of tea with someone in the community they know and understand because they feel comfortable with them. They often do that to help them fill out their forms that have been imposed on them. There is no question that the people who are potentially providing the advice and writing the things do not understand or appreciate the significant impost on regional WA and smaller local governments. We could take an example of WANDRA funding. In terms of what everybody is doing, you have to fill in pages and pages of justification for things. It is not practical. It does not work. We do not have the resources.

Hon DIANE EVERS: WANDRA?

Mr TRAIL: WA disaster funding. Let us take the example of the recent fires in the goldfields—Esperance region and perhaps finish giving this example. Other CEOs and myself and Peter Fitchat from Dundas were on call 24/7 for four weeks while the fires were going on. That is fair enough. The expectation of the community is council because we are the people on the ground. All the forms that came through—DFES wanted us to fill in this form and that form and impact statements and

everything else. To be fair, we do not have time to do that. We are out there helping our community trying to do things and trying to recover.

The CHAIR: What is the DFES impact statement in this space?

Mr TRAIL: The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has introduced a new system. The principle is fine but the impact statement talks about documenting what things impacted on you, how did you go with the resources, what worked and what did not work, and what needed to be done? It was a whole lot of things. Make it one page. Do not make it 15 or 16 pages because it is a one-size-fits-all approach for what is going on. We are still dealing with things in the community. If we have to fill in documentation, statements and returns, make it the key, critical information that an agency wants. We have no problems with that. Make it one or two pages or a tick box, ring us. Arrange a time with us to talk to people, because we can do that, but do not bog us down with doing all that because we do not get time to concentrate on the community and deliver things for our councils in the community.

Councillor CULLEN: The other thing with the WANDRA funding, or whether it is the bushfires, the criteria that basically starts is that the council or local government have to have evidence of the prior condition—say in a flood situation—all the road network has to be mapped, photographed documented and listed as an asset. Then when a disaster hits, they have to get all the new evidence of how much damage has been done and then they have to apply to get that declared a disaster before then they go through the process of applying for the funding to fix the situation. With the bushfires, you have to have incurred \$200 000 worth of infrastructure damage before you even meet the criteria. In the instance of local governments, we have to be the first responders. If there is a bushfire on crown land, which is state-owned land, the local government has to respond to that situation with its own manpower and its own machinery. We do not get reimbursed until it is declared an incident by DFES. After three days, if it is a serious emergency that threatens government infrastructure like Great Eastern Highway or the pipeline, DFES will issue a section 13 form to the CEO to take control of that fire from that time on, but it is the staff that are responsible until that particular circumstance comes into effect.

Going back to WANDRA, the last lot of disaster we had in 2018 was the storms and hailstorms. The staff found it so onerous that we did not even get to the point of being able to collect all the information to make a claim on that damage. It is just a massive burden of compliance and red tape that the staff have to get through to get to that point.

Mr TRAIL: To give one example, Mr Chairman, we are still waiting. So, with the fires, we used one of our loaders that went out on the firegrounds. We have put a claim in for \$16 000 to replace the tyres. The machine has been tied up for five weeks so it cannot do operational work and maintain things. We have had an initial statement to say, "We will not pay you \$16 000 for the tyres, Mr Chairman. You will need to claim it out of insurance." At the end of the day, that has cost us thousands of dollars because we cannot use the machine to work on things. I do not blame the government. It is the system. It is the bureaucratic system. It comes back to the question you asked about compliance and bureaucracy in trying to deal with things when we have to react to things in regional WA. We have to do it there and then and we are spending ratepayers' money to do that, and the ability for us to get reimbursed and get some of those things back in some instances is too bureaucratic and the system is too bogged down and there should be flexibility to get reimbursed when the community is actually paying for it. The community pays for it—nobody else—and we are doing it for fires that have started on crown land. That is a bigger issue, Mr Chairman. Sorry, it is a far greater issue.

In summary to your question on compliance, it comes down to regional WA not having the resources. That is the biggest issue. We do not have the resources, the systems are too complicated and there is too great an expectation. Perhaps anyone sitting in the chair writing that information or legislation should talk to people in regional WA.

The CHAIR: The government will respond to this. If we picked up these remarks holus-bolus, put them in our report, popped it into the Parliament and tabled it—and the government is required to respond—it would say, “Yes, but we do regulatory impact statements; it is a standard thing.” But it seems that that is more box-ticking, in view of what you are saying, rather than properly evaluating what the impacts will be when the red tape is introduced.

[12.20 pm]

Councillor CULLEN: I think you are right in that regard, Chair. For the last lot of fires 12 months ago, the Shire of Dundas submitted an invoice basically for \$160 000-odd and they were refused in the first instance. I think some sort of political pressure was applied at some stage and the government or DFES made a one-off gratuity payment for that amount of money, but they have incurred that again this year and it is going on and on and on. Whereas if it was regulated within the Bush Fires Act or however these changes can be reviewed or made, then it would be like a natural occurrence that if a local government incurred those costs in engaging, as being the first responder, that would resolve itself.

Mr TRAIL: Just in a final response, Mr Chairman, if you look at it, from memory—I have a note in front of me—I think that as a CEO of a local government, I am responsible for 200 federal and state acts. It is somewhere in that vicinity. In regional WA, that is quite a challenging task. For a local government and the council to expect to employ a CEO to have oversight of in excess of 200 federal and state acts, that is quite a difficult task. I think if we bring it back quite simply to that—the amount of legislation that we are responsible to in terms of delivering the service in local government.

The CHAIR: Okay, let us say you have just got a Powerball and you have decided to take three months of well-earned leave and I am going to come in and look after your job—you might want to make it six months’ leave!

Mr TRAIL: Thanks, Mr Chairman!

The CHAIR: Okay, I am going into your chair, so the first thing I had better do is work out what I am responsible for. Where do I find a list of 250 pieces of legislation so I can just start to tackle it? Is there such a thing?

Mr TRAIL: It is quite difficult, Mr Chairman, and keeping track of all the changes in regulations and amendments to it. I mean, clearly, the first document is obviously the Local Government Act and regulations and things, but then there are the different delegations under the Bush Fires Act that do not relate to the Local Government Act, the Dog Act and a whole lot of things. Perhaps if what was done was that that was all identified, and perhaps what a CEO’s responsibility is under all of that legislation, so that I had, for lack of a word, a cheat sheet in front of me so that if you came in, you knew what the responsibilities were to those pieces of legislation but also what is my responsibility, as CEO, under that legislation, and, perhaps, secondly, which are the critical ones, because there are obviously a whole lot of ones. If you spoke to any CEO, we are not saying that we should not be responsible for critical things that you need to do to run your local government. It is about what is really, really important; what is critical, with just like a ranking scale of perhaps 5 to 1 or whatever it is; what it is; and what stuff could you potentially park that is not going to create major and significant risk to your local government if it is not got to for a certain period of time.

The CHAIR: It is a complex area.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Just on that, can give your impressions on how the department helps with that and how WALGA would help a CEO in those situations?

Mr TRAIL: Thanks, honourable member. For both, certainly—I will take the department. There have been massive changes at the department. Previously, there were people with experience who were there that you could go to. The challenge for the department now is that there are more experienced people working outside of the department in local governments—other CEOs—who we would go to. If I am looking for advice, I go to my mentor and I go to other CEOs who have experience in things for that. What I would say is that certainly from my experience, I have openly said before that I have at times perhaps shared some criticism of WALGA in the past for different reasons, which creates some interest given my presence on state council. What I would say is that there has certainly been a massive shift. There is a new CEO there. In terms of the staff doing things, there has been a significant shift around wanting to engage and work more with us, and lines are certainly open for a CEO and other senior officers to make those calls. But certainly from the department's perspective, the experienced resources are not in there.

The CHAIR: Is there a network? That is probably the wrong word. You mentioned that you can go to other perhaps more experienced CEOs—ones that you have perhaps worked under at an earlier stage in your local government career—for advice about things. Is there generally a supportive mechanism across local government that CEOs and others can do that?

Mr TRAIL: Mr Chairman, I will make this observation as a CEO. I have been privileged enough to be a CEO for 17 years in local government, and hopefully I have a few more years to go, provided I keep working for the Shire of Coolgardie. There is no question in my mind that when I was a CEO in metropolitan local government, the answer was no; everybody was competing with each other. I do not care what anybody says. I went through some difficult times. There were two people who rang me up—nobody else. In regional WA, in other small local governments, everybody is helping each other. Everybody is genuinely interested in your health, what is going on, what is happening with your family. The metro area is completely different than it is in regional WA, to a point where, as a CEO, I would seriously think about going back into metropolitan local government because the support from each other is not as significant as in regional WA. I have experienced that absolutely personally myself, Mr Chairman, and I am not saying anything I have not said elsewhere in other forums.

The CHAIR: No, that is a valuable insight; thank you for that. I am noticing that time is probably going to defeat us in what is a very interesting hearing, but Laurie did you have some questions?

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: I had a couple of questions earlier in relation to the situation with St Johns. Are their doctors resident doctors or are they fly in, fly out—type doctors? Are they regular? Are they the same doctor month in and month out? Have they managed to recruit doctors who are happy to go to Coolgardie?

Councillor CULLEN: Yes. St Johns actually engaged the lady doctor that was actually living in Kambalda. Originally, she was contracted to go with the service provider and they were going to relocate her to Bunbury, but that all went a bit pear-shaped. She actually resided in Kambalda, and the shire supported her with a house until the time St John took her on. From that time, she has maintained that position there. What St Johns do is that they bring in doctors for training, and they also bring in a registered doctor that has been with St John for quite some time. He has been in the medical industry as a GP for 32 years. He comes in there on a regular basis, like once a fortnight, for three or four days, and gives the doctor time off, as well as training, and they bring in some of the other trainee doctors like on a two-week, three-week or monthly basis and they swap them out.

Mr TRAIL: And they reside in the town site, honourable member, and we provide support to them.

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: In relation to your WALGA zone as opposed to GVROC, are they both the same as far as membership is concerned?

Councillor CULLEN: Yes, exactly the same. Myself as a state councillor represent the GVROC and state council.

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: I was just wondering whether you will find that some councils are out and some are in, and some would have ROCs that are not part of the total councils.

Mr TRAIL: No, they are together and that works well.

Councillor CULLEN: There are 10 local governments in our ROC.

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: So you are all in the one. Would there be an objection to where the ROC could provide services to have a more formal structure, so that perhaps you could host a ROC service and councils would have to lock in?

Councillor CULLEN: We have tried a couple of times and we also looked at the beneficiary model that the local government minister is promoting. What we do find is the tyranny of distance—we have got from Ravensthorpe to Ngaanyatjaraku, and it is about 1 500 kilometres. We have looked at that as a model. The only one that was successful so far was the record storage, but we still found that four of those local governments just could not use it.

Mr TRAIL: Honourable member, could I say that what it does advantage us to, because we have potentially different needs because we are voluntary, is that we still have two or three other local governments working together on some things. So as part of that, even though it is not subsidiary or legislated, we still work together on other things. At the moment, the Shire of Coolgardie, for instance, and the City of Kalgoorlie are working on initiatives as well.

Councillor CULLEN: We had five local governments in all banded together. There were seven in the first instance but five actually managed to get it across the line. That was the introduction of the cashless debit card in all of our local governments, which was the Centrelink thing as well.

Hon LAURIE GRAHAM: As far as those local governments are concerned, is the larger one, Kalgoorlie, as supportive of the ROC situation as the rest of the councils? I notice that elsewhere in the state, that is not always the case—some larger bodies do not participate.

[12.30 pm]

Councillor CULLEN: Very much so. Esperance and Kalgoorlie, as you know, would be the bigger centres, but they are very supportive of the ROC as a central part. When I started 10 years ago, both the Mayor of Kalgoorlie and the CEO of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder were actively involved in that, and they are both still actively involved in the region. Being a regional centre, all the other ROC's membership supports the regional centre as well.

Mr TRAIL: Honourable members, we get significant leadership and support from the two CEOs, certainly John Walker at the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. When we have meetings, he is proactive; he comes to all of those and actually helps us from a mentoring perspective as well in helping us and has always supported us in offering us support as well.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: In your submission, you have mentioned beneficial enterprises and you say you favour the Shire of Coolgardie to explore that. I think that is going to be a hot potato in its review. Can you explain why you think beneficial enterprise will be a good thing for the Shire of Coolgardie?

Mr TRAIL: Thanks, honourable member, for the question. I bring it back to what is really interesting is the state have set the ratios that we need to meet. If you look at most local governments, the

reason we do not meet the financial health indicator is because of the operating surplus ratio—so, revenue simply divided by expenditure. If you have got sewerage, airports, massive waste or fees and charges, you can carry a health indicator. The reason I flag that is if we talk about beneficial enterprises, the significance to be able to work together to provide a business opportunity or economic development into regions, I believe, is essential now. If we take the Shire of Coolgardie, we are trying to look at the moment about building a partnership. Perhaps if I give this example, it helps. We have now had a conversation with the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, who have given in-principle support to potentially use our tip site in Coolgardie now. It is going to enable us to take our tip site to a commercial business that will have strong governance and finance around it that enables us to bring in revenue to the community to be able to provide services and things. What that does do now is enables me—I just happen to be off to Turkey on Saturday—to meet with a potential provider in terms of tyres and recycling. It opens up the opportunity to create economic development in a region and work together so that it brings jobs and it brings opportunities for people. In terms of beneficial enterprises, yes, there have to be some key governance components around that, but, once again, I think what is forgotten is that, as a local government CEO and councillors, we are doing that well anyway. The council have good governance oversight, the council have good policies, and the council have good local laws and delegations with responsibilities to the CEO. I believe we are able to push and drive something like beneficial enterprises where we can show, and the council is making those decisions with the information, that it is beneficial to the community and bringing community development and economic development into the region and into our local government.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Do you see any risks with beneficial enterprises?

Mr TRAIL: I suppose, honourable member, there is always a risk with that. From that perspective, I think if you have the governance framework and the council—I am a great believer that, as a CEO, my job in terms of beneficial enterprise is to make sure that I am getting expertise in from legal advice and from risk and other things so that that study is done to package up and information is provided. I believe from a beneficial enterprise perspective, if the CEO is playing a significant role in advocating and facilitating and working to make that happen, if you keep the separation from the decision-making around statutory requirements internally and you have other agencies looking at things and you have somebody else providing the study, and I am facilitating and advocating that, I believe it helps minimise the risk, because then you are getting legal advice, you are getting other agreements and things being looked at and perhaps not the CEO writing the MOUs and looking at the legal agreement. If you keep the separation and you have a governance framework around that, I believe it works and that that minimises the risk.

The CHAIR: There is one more issue I just want to touch on very quickly if we can and that relates to the Local Government Standards Panel and its operations and people's experience with it. In some quarters, we have found that this is a source of major distress and contention and controversy; in other areas of local government, we get blank looks: "What's the problem? We don't have any." Have you got any observations to make about the Local Government Standards Panel from your point of view, Mr President?

Councillor CULLEN: Mr Chairman, I have had personal experience with the standards panel, so I can speak from experience, but a very minor complaint was put against me. I think there is a purpose and a place for it. I guess, from my experience in my time since 2008 in local government, we have had a fairly good relationship on council and it is just a few minor issues that come up at times where these complaints have been made. I guess the problem arises when you have a difficult councillor or councils that are clashing and clashing with staff, and I think the city had some issues with a couple of councillors in recent times. It is probably much like the judicial system that we have

outside of how you arrive at an appropriate way of dealing with the complaint and the appropriate penalties and how they are implemented. I think both those systems lack the appropriate penalty at different times when they should be administered. That is probably as far as I would go with it. I do believe there is a place for it. It has operated reasonably well for our shire in my experience. I think it is just a matter of how, going forward, they can resolve how the appropriate penalty is issued or how it could be administered in a way that there is some sort of a mentoring mechanism coming out of that that would improve the performance of the people who may end up in front of the standards panel.

Mr TRAIL: Perhaps I could make a quick observation as a CEO. The key component of local government is about you have got a council, and the relationship between the CEO and the shire president or mayor is essential and being on both sides of it and things too. I think working together, and around the process of those relationships working together, and then still some education around from council and the CEO's perspective—about this is your role and this is our role—and if people keep working on what their roles are, I have found, in working in local governments, very few issues. There might be differences of opinions. I think it is a structure and it does come down to relationships. I think you can put lots of different rules in place, but it does come down to the relationships. If there is a strong relationship between the CEO and the president and mayor, I believe that goes a long way to helping that process.

The CHAIR: That is probably a very good positive note to finish on, because time has well and truly beaten us. Just before I call on the broadcast to end, I want to publicly again thank you, Mr President and Mr Trail, for attending today and giving us the benefit of your experience. In turn, my colleagues and I on this select committee hope that we can add some value back into the sector that you obviously care for very much indeed, and we will certainly do our best to do that. Thanks again for coming all the way down to see us. With that, I will ask for the broadcast to be finished.

Mr TRAIL: Thanks, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIR: Just to wrap up, a transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction. If you believe any correction should be made because of typographical or transcription errors, you can indicate those on the transcript please and get it back to us. Errors of fact or substance, of course, would have to be corrected in a formal letter to the committee. As I indicated during our hearing, if you want to provide some additional information or elaborate on particular points that we have touched on, we would be delighted to receive supplementary information from you, so please feel free to do that. With that, I think that brings us to a conclusion now, so I thank you once again and wish you all a good day.

Councillor CULLEN: Thank you so much.

Mr TRAIL: Thanks, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to come down and present to the committee.

Councillor CULLEN: Perhaps some positives will come out of the inquiry. As you said when you came along to WALGA to address the membership, you were open to having frank conversations. Certainly, we want to promote the positives of local government as well. Thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: We appreciate it very much.

Hearing concluded at 12.39 pm
