

RUAH COMMUNITY SERVICES

436. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for Planning:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to ensuring that our planning system supports responsible planning for services and facilities for disadvantaged Western Australians, particularly women and children. Can the minister update the house on the status of the Ruah Community Services' change-of-use application and provide information on what role the state government can have in these matters?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for Thornlie for that question.

As we all know, Ruah Community Services is a dedicated service provider. It has supported Western Australians experiencing homelessness, family and domestic violence and mental health issues for more than 60 years. One of its first services was a homeless drop-in centre on Shenton Street in Northbridge, and it has operated on that site since the 1950s. Earlier this year, Ruah received development approval for a new Ruah centre for women and children on that site. The existing building will be demolished to make way for the purpose-built seven-storey building, specifically designed for the provision of services to women and children escaping domestic violence. In preparation for this change, and to ensure the continuity of homeless services in Northbridge, Ruah purchased an existing building around the corner on James Street and sought approval for a change of use of the building to re-establish its drop-in centre. The proposed centre will provide for people experiencing homelessness in the area. The community centre is proposed to open between 8.30 am and 2.00 pm.

Application for a change of use went forward to the City of Perth. The application was not a development application, but purely one for change of use. The responsible officer report said that the proposed use was not considered incompatible with the existing commercial uses in the immediate locality and could be managed appropriately to minimise any impact on residential properties on the northern side of James Street and within the wider locality. Unfortunately, the City of Perth council resolved to refuse the application, and Ruah subsequently appealed that decision to the State Administrative Tribunal. Ruah has also written to me asking that I, as Minister for Planning, call in the application and that I determine that application for the change of use. I want to report today that I have agreed to determine the change of use application for that centre.

We know that the issues surrounding homelessness are difficult, and they are difficult to manage throughout the community. However, it is important that we stay strong and make decisions that benefit the entire community, and in particular those who are at risk and who need the services. Without this decision, and without this process, not only would the drop-in centre for the homeless be impacted, but also the application and proposal to build a seven-storey new dedicated facility for family and domestic violence. It is important that the overall package from the state government be considered from a strategic point of view.