

DISABILITY SERVICES COMMISSION — SERVICE PROVISION

555. Hon SUE ELLERY to the Minister for Disability Services:

I refer to the view of the Economic Audit Committee in its “Putting the Public First” report that designing services to meet citizens’ needs identifies the need for the public sector to increasingly act as a facilitator of services rather than a direct service provider.

- (1) With respect to the Disability Services Commission, which is both a direct service provider and a facilitator of services, does the minister accept that many people with disabilities and their families want to continue to purchase services directly from the commission?
- (2) Does the government intend to change the balance between funding other service providers and directly providing services?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

(1)–(2) I thank the honourable member for her question and for her ongoing interest in disability matters. Firstly, the preamble to her question is correct. We do want to make sure we use both government and non-government services in the most efficient way to deliver the best outcomes for consumers of those services. The Disability Services Commission is held up across the nation as a model for a number of things, including as a fine model in relation to the matters that the member is inquiring about. We think the mix is about right at this stage. But that does not mean that the model will not evolve as time goes by. Of particular interest in relation to the observations made by the Economic Audit Committee—incidentally, I met with representatives of the Economic Audit Committee about this very subject as recently as Monday—is that the Disability Services Commission model is being held up as a role model across the Western Australian government sector for other areas of social service delivery.

Hon Sue Ellery: Some people in the community are worried that the balance they have right now will shift.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: One of the things I am always keen to insist upon in all the forums that are available to me—that includes at my recent meeting with representatives from the Economic Audit Committee, and there was no disagreement I might add on this point; none whatsoever—is that the Disability Services Commission remain a key provider of services. To put that into perspective for the benefit of other members observing this matter, there are about 1 485 employees of the Disability Services Commission. Just over 1 000 of them are involved in direct-care service delivery. That is a figure that has been consistent for some years, even though the whole sector has grown. That tells us that we think we have the size of the DSC about right. It is also important to remember that, despite the success of engaging with non-government organisations in disability service delivery, the DSC remains the single biggest service provider.

We think we have got the balance about right as it is. The DSC will always be a major service provider so that people can be confident that there is a provider of last resort and that that service provider is large enough to have the expertise it needs to inform its decisions and its relationships with the sector as a whole, whether it be its own or non-government operations. In direct response to the member’s question, consumers—if we want to refer to them as that—of Disability Services Commission services can be confident that the DSC will remain a key service provider, with all the expertise it currently exhibits, and is capable of providing.