

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION — SMALL BUSINESS CENTRES

**313. Mrs M.H. ROBERTS to the Minister for Small Business:**

I refer to the valuable work of the state small business centres in fostering business opportunities and local jobs.

- (1) Will the minister guarantee that all 25 listed small business centres on the Small Business Development Corporation website will remain open and fully funded over the next financial year?
- (2) If not, which ones will be defunded or closed?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Midland for that question; it is a good question. As the member knows, there were 25 small business centres across Western Australia, six in the metropolitan area and 19 in regional Western Australia, and they are essentially funded by multiple sources, but the Small Business Development Corporation puts in roughly \$110 000 to \$120 000 per small business centre per year out of its budget, and we are committed to continuing that funding to provide services to small business across Western Australia. However, some of those small business centres, for a number of different reasons, have not been successful financially. I know the one in the western wheatbelt, in Northam in the member for Central Wheatbelt's electorate, closed its doors about six months ago, and I know the one in Midland closed its doors. It self-determined to close its own doors about three months ago because of the withdrawal of federal funding, not state government funding. That was another one funded by multiple sources. In the last 12 months we have done a comprehensive review of the ways small business services have been delivered across the entire state of Western Australia. We want to get the best outcome for taxpayers and the best outcome for small businesses who ask for services and advice, whether they are going from conception to starting a small business, all the way through to growing into a big business or changing the direction of their business and, unfortunately, even sometimes if they choose to wind up; in those circumstances, we want to see them do that in the best and most efficient way possible.

Where we are at now is that we will rationalise the service delivery. Delivering small business services is not about having bricks-and-mortar buildings in 25 locations across the state; it is about delivering the service in the most economical way possible and also trying to provide better services for what the taxpayer pays for. The Department of Finance has gone through a proper procurement process independent of the Small Business Development Corporation that will conclude shortly, and we will announce in the very near future who will provide those services across what looks like 12 areas over the entire state of Western Australia.