

**SMALL BUSINESS CENTRES PROGRAM**

*Statement by Minister for Small Business*

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Small Business)** [2.06 pm]: I would like to update the house on the reform of the small business centres program. The small business centres program comprises a network of third-party providers of business advisory services throughout the state. The SBCs encourage the development and growth of small businesses in their local areas by providing information, resources and contacts to potential and existing small businesses. The SBC network was the subject of an independent review during 2013, the first such review in more than seven years.

The implementation of a series of recommendations began in July 2014. The review found that the current funding model was unsustainable and detracted from the ability of SBCs to attract and retain quality managers and business advisers to support strategic initiatives, including government priorities such as regional investment blueprints and “Directions 2031: Draft Spatial Framework for Perth and Peel”, and to achieve enhanced SBC program outcomes.

Among the recommendations was the case for going to an open-market tender process to identify future service providers to manage the contracts for local service delivery. Among other things, service providers will have to demonstrate how they will provide services throughout the whole of the contract area for which they are responsible. The tender process commenced on 12 January 2015, when a request for tender was released to the public through Tenders WA. The tender process is being managed by the Department of Finance and closed on 18 February 2015.

The new arrangements will come into effect on 1 July 2015, and the program will be renamed Business Local WA to reflect the move away from funding the administrative and infrastructure expenses of contract holders in favour of the procurement of additional advisory hours for small business. The Business Local WA program will continue to provide crucial support and advice to small businesses to ensure they grow, prosper and generate all-important jobs for local people.