

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT — BACKFILLING**

*Statement by Minister for Local Government*

**MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Minister for Local Government)** [9.08 am]: I rise to update the house on the success of the backfilling provisions of our government’s landmark local government reforms. The introduction of optional preferential voting for local government elections has enabled new reforms to backfill vacancies on councils that arise within one year of an election. Under the old system, local governments were forced to hold extraordinary elections if a vacancy arose within a year of a council member being elected, and in a wide range of other situations. With our reforms, the need for extraordinary elections has been greatly reduced, meaning significant savings for ratepayers and avoiding disruption for the administration of local government. As members would know, preferential voting systems provide clear results of the order of candidates favoured by the voting public. Under our reforms, the next two highest polling candidates are identified on the declaration of the election results at each ordinary election. Then, if a vacancy arises, the local government CEO contacts the next highest polling candidate to offer them that place on the council.

Last October, the next preferred candidates in line to backfill vacancies were identified on the results of ordinary elections held across WA. I am advised that, to date, five vacancies have been backfilled at four local governments—the City of Gosnells, the Shire of Ravensthorpe, the City of Busselton and the Shire of Cranbrook. The cost savings under these reforms are substantial. For example, the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries estimated that the cost of holding an extraordinary election at the City of Gosnells would have been in the vicinity of \$250 000. Elections in more rural parts of the state can be even more costly. I am advised that the estimated costs for elections in other districts can be as high as \$18 per elector. It can also take months to conduct an extraordinary election. Our backfilling reforms are also complemented by reforms to allow vacancies to be filled at an upcoming ordinary election with the approval of the Electoral Commissioner. Other provisions of the Local Government Amendment Act 2023 have also streamlined how vacancies are filled on election night if a council member is directly elected as mayor without the need for an extraordinary election.

This real reform takes many people to deliver. I take this opportunity to recognise the dedication of people who worked on these reforms, including people within the department and, in particular Mr Richard Marlin, Deputy Parliamentary Counsel, for his substantial work drafting these landmark changes. Our backfilling reforms are one of the many important improvements introduced as part of the most significant reforms to local government in more than 25 years—with more to come.