

ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Monday, 27 July 2009

Minister for Local Government; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests

Question No. C1: Hon Ken Travers asked "you are talking about ministerial responsibility but the member's question was about the development of the formula and whether or not it was done by the Department".

Answer:

A number of officers of the then Department of Local Government and Regional Development, in consultation with the Ministers for Regional Development and Local Government, were involved in developing the formula for the Country Local Government Fund.

Specifically, the officers involved in developing the detail of the formula were:

- The Director, Strategies and Legislation of Department of Local Government and Regional Development, now with Department of Regional Development and Lands, and
- The Manager, Regional Policy Unit, now with Department of Local Government

The above Officers also worked with officers of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance in developing the accountability framework.

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Question No. C2: *Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich asked how many of the 139 local governments have completed each of the following stages – stage 2, stage 3 and stage 4 and how many councils did not comply with stage 1, stage 2, stage 3 and stage 4 by the completion date?*

Answer:

The Structural Reform Guidelines issued by the Local Government Reform Steering Committee outlined a range of suggested tasks and timelines for local governments when developing a Reform Submission that is to be sent to me. The Guidelines grouped these tasks into five time based stages and were generally presented as a guide only. Two key tasks were presented as requirements: the completed checklist and the reform submission.

Most stages of the Structural Reform Guidelines were for local governments to consider while developing their reform submissions. The detail on various issues including number of local governments considering amalgamation will not be known until all reform submissions have been received and analysed. Advice can be provided as follows:

- all local governments completed and forwarded the checklists as requested;
- 107 local governments submitted them prior to 30 April, while the remaining 32 were received by 15 May 2009.

The date set for lodgement of the reform submission was 31 August 2009. The Government will not be aware of the total number of local governments that might exist in the future until the reform submissions have been received and been assessed.

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Question No. C3: *Hon Ken Travers asked "in respect of Page 828 of the Budget Papers, are you able to provide us with any more detailed explanation for each of those items, as to what exactly they involved?"*

Answer:

Primary Annual Returns and Gift Register Entry Program

The proposal for the development of a coordinated and consistent response to collecting and analysing local government information across a range of departmental collection points, has been downsized. The original total cost of the project was to have been divided between 1 FTE, specialist IT and academic consultants, and research and development. Part of the project was about the development of a centralised online collection system for primary/annual returns and the gift register.

The scope of the project will remain unchanged, but the approach to be adopted will be altered to allow it to be undertaken within existing departmental resources. As a result of this changed approach, implementation will take a little longer to achieve.

Online Grants Commission Data Collection Program

This project was to review and identify web based (on-line electronic form) methods of collecting data from local government, in consultation with the Local Government Grants Commission and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This project aimed to streamline the present systems for data collection. Existing reporting software and collection methods will continue to be used to generate data and produce reports on various aspects of local government operations.

Leadership Program

The Department had intended to offer a further 12 Local Government Scholarship Program grants, valued at \$11,500 each, for 2009/2010. The number of grants has been reduced by 4 as the Department's experience in recent years is that a total of 8 is a realistic annual take-up rate for these scholarships.

Not Fill Vacant Administrative Position

Several of the main functions assigned to a Level 3 Administrative position were incorporated into existing duties within a vacant Level 4 Administrative position. As a consequence of that action, it was then possible to give up the Level 3 position, thereby achieving efficiencies within the Branch in response to the 3% Efficiency Dividend

General Savings

Operational savings were achieved and applied to costs pertaining to consumables, maintenance and other minor expenditure including equipment purchased under the \$5000 threshold limit for assets.

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Question No. C4: Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich asked what steps has the Department taken to adequately assess grant recipients' ability to meet the funding conditions? Ms Mathews responded by stating that the Department carries out and completes financial checks of each local government etc etc Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich asked can we get a copy of those reports?

Answer:

Health Check Reports conducted for each local government are for internal Departmental use, as part of its financial monitoring processes. The information contained in these reports is only intended for Departmental use. It can and is made available to the Minister for Local Government on request.

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Question No. C5: Hon Liz Behjat I will just follow on from the two points that Philip Gardiner raised. I refer to the pilot program that you spoke about. Do you have a list of the 11 schools that you piloted that program in?

Answer:

It is in fact 12 schools who volunteered for the program. All public schools in WA were invited to participate in the project. The voluntary nature of the trial emphasised that participation was in no way a judgment on the school's performance. An information kit was provided to all schools who expressed an interest in the project and a set of key selection strata were utilised to assist in the identification of schools to participate in the Project. The successful schools were:

Balga Primary School
Balga Senior High School
Cassia Primary School
Cecil Andrews Senior High School
Derby District High School
Dryandra Primary School
Katanning Primary School
Kensington Secondary School
Merredin Senior High School
North Lake Senior Campus
Sutherland Dianella Primary School
Tapping Primary School

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Question No. C6: *Hon Ken Travers asked "failing to properly disclose election funds and their source would also be a matter that deals with annual returns and primary returns. They would have to be, surely, because if you have received a gift, even if it is an electoral gift, it needs to be reported on the annual return or primary return".*

Answer:

Any declarable gift, received during the election period (electoral gifts), by a candidate in a local government election is required to be declared on a Form 9a. This form is required to be submitted to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the relevant local government within 3 days of the receipt or promise of the election gift.

The relevant election period commences 6 months before the scheduled election date and concludes 3 days after the election for unsuccessful candidates or on the date of the submission of a 'Primary Return' for successful candidates.

A 'Primary Return' is required to be submitted by successful candidates within 3 months of the date of taking office. This return effectively gives a snapshot of relevant financial interests of the member at the time of their taking office.

An 'Annual Return' is required to be submitted by 31 August each year. This Return details changes to the previous Return, whether Primary or Annual, and also includes details of declarable gifts received during that period.

Allegations of relevant persons failing to declare gifts on their Form 9a can be investigated by either the Department of Local Government, where the election in question is conducted by the local government, or the Electoral Commissioner, where the election was conducted by the Electoral Commission.

The *Local Government Act 1995*, prohibits the Department of Local Government from using its investigative powers to deal with matters of this nature, where they fall under the jurisdiction of the Electoral Commissioner.

The majority of complaints received by the Department in respect of gifts, whether electoral or otherwise, relate to the non declaration of financial interests at Council Meetings - receipt of a declared gift.

In the course of the last financial year the Department has dealt with two complaints relating to the alleged non declaration of electoral gifts. Both of these matters were referred to the Electoral Commissioner as they fell within his jurisdiction.