



Hon Tjorn Sibma MLC
Member for North Metropolitan Region

22 September 2017

Hon. Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office, Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace WEST PERTH WA 6005

By Email: lcco@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Hon Matthew Swinbourn,

Re: Petition No. 017 – Community and Neighbourhood Service Funding Arrangements

Thank you for your letter of 22 August 2017, inviting me to make a submission regarding the issues raised by the aforementioned matter. This correspondence is provided in reply to that invitation.

Thank you also for your recent letter of 6 September 2017, replying to my advice of a non-conforming submission of 8,048 signatures in respect of the same matter. The very number of petitioners is cause for the Committee to reflect upon this matter.

I have received numerous representations from community, family and neighbourhood centres across Western Australia in regards to the Government's proposed changes to the community and neighbourhood service funding arrangements. Many have expressed anxiety as to their future and some are convinced – perhaps with good reason – that their local neighbourhood or community centre will close as a consequence of the Department of Communities seeking to streamline and professionalise community services administration.

This concern is focused on the decision of the State Government to proceed with the transition to an open tender model for community services delivery across the state rather than the present local grants based system. Most centres are operated by a few staff and volunteers whose principle personal motivations are to aid their local communities by providing a 'place-based' model of support tailored to the needs of local people. Their core competency rests in a civic minded care for the welfare of their fellow community members. It does not reside in drafting replies to requests for tender or in navigating the complexities of Government procurement processes. Despite this, many are still savvy enough to recognise that they are likely to 'lose out' to those organisations with these skills and who can afford to operate at scale.

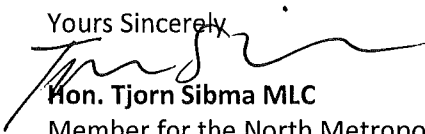
The Minister has been kind enough to provide me with a departmental briefing on the matter, and I do recognise that policy work commenced under the previous Liberal National Government. My concern does not lie with the policy intent *per se* and; and I think a review of the effectiveness of the current funding model is overdue.

Furthermore, a thorough community services needs analysis should be conducted to ensure that both over-servicing and under-servicing are detected and avoided. It is essential that tax payer funds are used effectively and that performance metrics (even qualitative ones) are appropriate and transparent.

My concern is however that the implementation of the policy has been rushed and that the consultation process has been deficient. For all the talk about meeting needs and improved accountability, there is no evidence that the current model of community service provision is failing, and no clarity has been provided by the Department of Communities regarding which objectives (other than departmental operating efficiencies) are to be accomplished as a result of the changed model.

Most alarmingly, scant attention has been paid to the needs of actual users of the centres themselves, who rely on the operation of an easily accessible place where they belong and can connect with fellow members of their community. As a consequence, needless anxiety has been stoked among a sector whose work is valuable but sadly unheralded.

Yours Sincerely,



Hon. Tjorn Sibma MLC

Member for the North Metropolitan Region

Shadow Minister for Government Accountability; Community Services; Youth; Seniors & Ageing;
Volunteers; Veterans Issues