

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF
AN AGEING COMMUNITY**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2014**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Ms M.M. Quirk (Chair)
Mr M.P. Murray
Dr A.D. Buti**

Hearing commenced at 10.11 am

Ms RICKY BURGES

Chief Executive Officer, Western Australian Local Government Association, examined:

Mayor TROY PICKARD

President, Western Australian Local Government Association, examined:

Ms JODIE HOLBROOK

Policy Manager, Community, Western Australian Local Government Association, examined:

Mr WARREN PEARCE

Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Managers Australia WA, examined:

Ms JANE ELIZABETH ELTON

Manager, Community Capacity Building, City of Rockingham, examined:

Mrs JULIE McDONALD

Coordinator, Community Capacity Building, City of Rockingham, examined:

The CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I have to read a spiel to you. Ricky, you will be familiar with this.

On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I thank you for your interest and appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the policy implications of an ageing community. You have been provided with a copy of the committee's terms of reference. I will begin by introducing myself and the other members of the committee present today. On my left is Mr Mick Murray, the member for Collie–Preston; and, on my right is Dr Tony Buti, the member for Armadale.

We are a committee of the Legislative Assembly. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking you to provide evidence on oath or make an affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you can provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed I have a series of questions to ask you. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIR: We have some questions to ask you today but, before we do that, do any of you wish to make an opening statement to the hearing?

Mayor Pickard: I do.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Before you start, Troy, I just want to let people know that I do know of Warren from a long time ago because he is an old Armadale boy.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: But we will not hold that against him!

Mayor Pickard: Thank you. If I may, I will make a few brief opening comments, Chair. First of all, I appreciate the opportunity I am sure for the sector, but indeed for the Western Australian Local Government Association, to present before the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee in its inquiry into policy implications of an ageing community. The hearing is timely to the extent that the WALGA state council at its meeting last week formally adopted a document “Aged Housing: Understanding the Issues”. There are a number of elements within the document, which I am happy to table, that I am sure will help to stimulate your thought processes in what is a very challenging area for local government and communities broadly. I am happy to provide the sector’s formal position in relation to ageing communities. We have a formal position where we support “The Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012–2017” and, indeed, the development of age-friendly communities. We also formally support the development of the World Health Organization’s age-friendly communities. That particular resolution was in December 2012.

I refer to two interesting points that were drawn out from “Aged Housing: Understanding the Issues”. First was a synopsis of the main areas that local government are actively involved in in supporting ageing communities in the provision of community infrastructure. I think the challenge there for the sector is adapting existing infrastructure so that it is age friendly. The provision of aged care and home and community care services: obviously, there is an increasing demand in communities for aged-care support services and the implication that has on local government. There are the health promotion programs where local governments play an active role in encouraging a healthy community, which is an important message for our ageing community. Of course, there is the provision of community facilities and ensuring that they are adequate for the ageing population and that they cater for their needs.

Twenty-seven local governments were involved in a program that was funded by the state government—indeed, the Department of Communities, which is now the Department of Local Government and Communities—towards an age-friendly Western Australia. That was effectively a pilot program that allowed local governments to develop some strategies. There were a number of key takeout points from that pilot, which I will briefly highlight to you.

There were four key things as a result of the pilot study. The first is transport. The need for greater access to reliable and affordable transport was highlighted in most local government areas. In the metropolitan area the infrequency of buses and the need for more parking were cited as major frustrations. In non-metropolitan areas, the lack of public transport rated as the highest concern. The positive finding was participants’ appreciation for the provision of free public transport and the introduction of the fuel card for regional residents. There is the issue of health services. Older people in metropolitan areas expressed greater concerns about accessing information about what support is available. Non-metropolitan seniors cited concerns about the availability of home community care services in their local community. Those who were in receipt of support services indicated how much they valued and relied on those services. In housing, older people reported that they enjoyed living where they are and they also reported concern that they may not be able to remain in their own home or locality as they age. I will touch on that point in a moment. In the area of communication and information, seniors want better access to technology so that they can access information about local services, events and impending natural disasters.

Local government is very conscious about this element of ageing in place and the increasing demand of the ageing population to live in the locality in which they have invariably spent most of their lives, rather than having to relocate from the metropolitan area to the outer-metropolitan area to suitable housing stock. One of the biggest challenges that local government face is the provision of suitable housing stock. I am not talking about traditional nursing homes; here I am talking about housing stock that is suitably designed and caters for the needs of individuals as they age, particularly over 55.

[10.20 am]

The pilot was well received by the sector. The challenge that it highlighted is that local government does not have the capacity to enshrine the elements that were drawn out of the pilot into their strategic plans. It is great to have funding for pilot programs, but it is the implementation of the programs where it actually counts and, unfortunately, there is no provision of funding for local government to access the execution of those programs or, indeed, further enshrine them beyond the 27 local governments that were involved in that particular program.

There is a handful of key issues that we see moving forward. There is a concern in the sector about the ripple effect that is occurring in local government following decisions of federal and state governments, particularly in relation to funding cuts. That invariably then creates stresses for local government, because being the third sphere of government, if the two other spheres extract from a given space or reduce funding in that space, it falls on the lap of local government to pick up the slack.

We do unfortunately have limited capacity to embed age-friendly approaches into our strategic plans. There is a need for the state government, and indeed federal if they were interested, to provide financial support for local government so we can embed age-friendly practices into local government strategic plans and to build capacity within the sector so that they can be managed appropriately moving forward.

There is definitely a need for better cross-agency collaboration. We are increasingly frustrated at the silo nature in which agencies are dealing with ageing issues. An example is that adopting age-friendly principles compliance when government issues tenders is a great opportunity and, indeed, incorporating universal building design principles into all public and social housing.

When the disability action inclusion plans were legislated, it was a good example of where capacity building was enshrined into the daily operations of local government. There is an opportunity for the Department of Local Government and Communities, particularly following the recent merger of the two agencies, to look at opportunities where the integrated planning framework, which is a new tool the local government is required by legislation to adhere to, can incorporate and address issues in relation to ageing communities and enshrine those practices into the strategies of local government. The Department of Local Government and Communities is the ideal agency to have an overseeing role in relation to that.

There is a need for better public health messaging for seniors and health carers, and an ideal opportunity to create broader awareness, particularly around issues of immunisation. Apparently there is a significant gap in awareness amongst seniors in accessing immunisation programs.

The final comment I will make as an opener is that local government accepts that we play an important role in managing our ageing population. Indeed, there are many tools available to us. The biggest challenge we face is a lack of appropriate funding streams in which we can embed practices into our strategic plans and, indeed, funding opportunities where we can retrospectively improve existing infrastructure and our facilities so that they are truly age-friendly. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. That was a terrific summary. Certainly from the exposure we have had in WA, a number of individual local governments have gone above and beyond what they are required to do and that is in stark contrast, I believe, with the level of resourcing that the state

government has put into the issue. We have certainly had evidence recently that in terms of research capacity and implementation, the state government anticipates that that will need to be done at a local government level. So what you are telling us is that there is not the capacity to do that within existing resources and the added pressures that local government is facing to actually implement that strategic framework without some assistance.

Mayor Pickard: Unfortunately that is the case. We do not have the capacity within the sector at this point in time to enshrine age-friendly practices into our strategy, and to do so requires more than just funding for a pilot program to develop the plan. We need appropriate funding streams so that we can enshrine those plans into the operations of local government.

The CHAIR: You have talked about the WHO principles and that they were adopted. But as I understand it, there are some local governments that are going down a different path. You would be familiar obviously with your neighbours in Stirling and Wanneroo—they seem not to be going down that path. Have you any knowledge of what they are doing in those areas?

Mayor Pickard: I think Jodie Holbrook might be best to answer that question.

Ms Holbrook: A lot of local governments when dealing with older people have taken the approach to adopt through public health planning, for example. There is a new public health plan coming for Western Australia and within that there is a requirement for local governments to develop local health plans. A lot of the local governments in the north have actually used that as the basis, not necessarily the World Health Organization's model. They are using that program for good reasons. A lot of local governments over the years have been provided with funding in order to develop plans, their pilots, whatever you want to call them—pilot plans. Then what will happen to them is that they will all be separate plans, so you will have your alcohol plan, your community-centred crime prevention plan, your age-friendly plan and the local governments want some way to bring it all together. Public health plans are being seen as a means to do that. It is all about community wellbeing and that is across your community. It does not matter if you are four years old or 84 years old, we can use that, so that is very much focusing on how we look after our community from birth until death, really. Within local governments in, say, the south west—in Manjimup, for example—they would then focus on more of an economic development process. They would look at tourism, what attracts people in; they are looking at ways to make themselves the food bowl in the south west. They would then look at what makes living there attractive for older Australians to move in and be part of the economic development and look at—I am going to use cottage industry, but that type of availability. People are working longer now as well, so if you are going to have your tree change you need to make sure that there is an economy there for them to be engaged with. It really depends on where you are as to which model you use.

The CHAIR: So what status does that resolution have if some local government authorities are going in different ways?

Mayor Pickard: WALGA does not have any powers of direction over local government, so we adopt positions as to what we deem as best practice and then encourage the sector to embrace the best practice and then ultimately it is up to them to determine what is appropriate for their individual circumstances.

Ms Holbrook: With the World Health Organization's model, there are eight determinants of health within that. Under public health planning and promotion, you also have eight determinants of social wellbeing. They are very aligned; when you put them next to each other, they are very similar. So, the World Health Organization's eight are very similar to the social determinants for health. It is just a different language but the essence is the same.

The CHAIR: As you said, those plans are vital whether you are four or 94.

[10.30 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: With regard to councils taking a different approach, if state governments have determined that they want you to follow a certain policy, a certain framework, and the local government decides to go another way, does it affect the funding they receive?

Ms Holbrook: Yes, it does. If you were seeking funding through the current strategy, it is aligned to the World Health Organization outcome, so you would need to demonstrate that you align to that. It is the same with most funding. If a local government is going for funding for CCTV cameras, they need to ensure they align with the police standard for CCTV cameras and the collection of data. Local governments are not necessarily focused on securing the funding because often the funding that is available is not enough to deliver what is required on the ground; there are usually pilots. Pilot funding usually is around the \$10 000 mark, and I am sure that other commentary today will show that whilst a local government may go for \$10 000, at the end of the day, the work that is involved and what it will cost on the ground is closer to \$45 000 to \$50 000, so there is always a big investment by local government. I think local governments also do a lot in the space already and sometimes it is not captured. For example, if you are down at a recreation centre, there is a lot of programming that is done to support older people if they want to get engaged in aqua aerobics, or whatever it is. Sometimes they are not picked up by these strategic frameworks, so it is a nice overarching document, but locally we have to use what exists there already.

Dr A.D. BUTI: So is the funding that is provided by the state government to follow the recommended framework not a large enough carrot? If some local governments decide not to go with it, I assume there is not a sufficient amount of funding, as you say.

Ms Holbrook: There is no funding at the moment. That funding was available between 2006 and 2011, so at the moment there is no funding.

The CHAIR: So, effectively the work that you talked about, Mayor Pickard, was pre the strategic framework being released?

Mayor Pickard: Correct.

The CHAIR: What impediments are there in terms of legislation? For example, housing is the obvious one to talk about in terms of local governments perhaps having a more holistic view to aged housing in their areas. Are there any impediments in current legislation or planning frameworks that would find that goal harder to meet?

Mayor Pickard: Universal access is probably the main driver. It is not necessarily an impediment, but there needs to be a balance between the cost of producing housing stock and the benefit that it affords the community. I do not think that that current balance is necessarily being struck, so there are opportunities for greater acceptance of universal access principles in housing stock. I think it is a broader issue rather than just the local government with their schemes and provisions to deliver outcomes. There is very much a focus on affordable housing for first home buyers and a range of schemes and programs to make it easier for them to enter the housing market. There are similar challenges associated with seniors wishing to downsize into suitable stock. One of those barriers is stamp duty. Indeed, our association has a formal position and we encourage the removal of stamp duty. One of the drivers is to create an affordable opportunity for people to downsize without losing a large proportion of their retirement nest egg.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: There is also agitation from some shires or councils about the rateables on some of those “villages”—“castles” might be another term. There are various levels. The push to rate them again puts the pressure back onto aged people. What is WALGA’s position on that?

Mayor Pickard: We absolutely support the overarching principle that true not-for-profits are rate exempt. Unfortunately, in the recent 10 years there has been an increase in organisations that are classifying themselves as not-for-profit, but the reality is that within their entire organisational structure they are using revenue generated from their retirement villages to fund other operations. Unfortunately, the act allows them to achieve rate exemption. That places significant financial

pressure on local government because it reduces their rate pool and the reality is that these people still access roads, footpaths, community centres and libraries, in fact, potentially more so than other members of the community. We have been advocating to successive governments for well over a decade now to change the act so that pure not-for-profit organisations can enjoy the benefits of rate exemption, but not be abused by other organisations, which is currently the case, particularly in the south west where there is a significant problem for local governments having their rate base literally evaporated with no alternative income stream, which is placing a significant financial strain.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Can I also ask about the planning of some of these “villages” where two-bedroom boxes or age-friendly are sometimes forgotten in that—again, I believe, for the profit margin to be there in our non-profit groups. I have seen both sides: the boxes; or the one that is preferred, which is what I always call the circle of wagons, where the people build around the circle and sometimes there is a carer in the middle. The community there are very comfortable security-wise, whereas some of the others are rambling and basic. I have seen that not only in those areas but in some of the caravan park-type aged-care areas, where we have seen problems. Does WALGA have any overarching planning procedure or facility to say, “Don’t go down that road”?

Mayor Pickard: I am not aware of any.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Is it just left to local government?

Mayor Pickard: Individual local governments, I suppose, in accordance with state planning provisions adopt schemes and policies to ensure that any development that was a retirement village or an aged complex was designed appropriately so that people did not feel isolated; they had opportunities for connectivity with the broader community whilst obviously ensuring that their own personal safety and security was maintained.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Just to finish on that line—I call it poaching but I am not sure what the correct term is. Do you have any evidence of competition between the not-for-profits and them saying, “We want that group of people”?

Mayor Pickard: I can draw on only my personal experience in the City of Joondalup, and I am not aware of any poaching occurring amongst service providers. I am aware that it is very costly for future residents to buy into these complexes, which is a barrier in itself. If you compared the price to the broader market and housing stock, it is significantly overinflated.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I just go back to an answer that said the funding stopped in 2011.

Ms Holbrook: For the strategic framework.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thought there was \$200 000 being provided by the state government for councils to roll out the framework.

[10.40 am]

Ms Holbrook: We are not aware of that funding. The only funding that we are aware of at the moment is \$50 000 that is being provided to the LGMA forum on 20 and 21 November. But we are not aware of the \$200 000.

Mr Murray asked if there was an overarching framework that WALGA was involved with in terms of planning. We are rolling out at the moment a program called the Planning Improvement Program—PIP. The PIP is working with the planning teams throughout local government to identify what are some of the critical issues they are facing. At the moment we are looking at alcoholism issues—the impact of alcohol in the community and what type of planning controls are around that. We have all seen Dan Murphy’s and the proliferation of the big barns. That is a mechanism that we do have to work with our planners to say that if we notice an issue, if they bring an issue to us, we are then able to say, “Okay, what is it that you would like us to address with that program?” We have then gone out and sourced funding with, for example, the Drug and Alcohol Office, and we have developed tools and resources for local governments. We are connecting them

to say, “In Belmont, this is what is working well around planning out alcohol.” So we can certainly do that again with the type of aged facilities that are being provided. One of the reasons we wrote this paper on understanding the issues of aged housing, which we will leave with you, is to start identifying those things, and PIP as well. President Pickard is a member of the affordable housing round table. We know it is an issue that will be going up to their next meeting. Councillor Clive Robartson is a member of the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council. We provide them with this type of evidence and then they take it through to the relevant committees. But we can certainly look at aged facilities through PIP.

The CHAIR: There was some evidence given about WALGA consultation with seniors and some of the issues they raised. One of them was the access to technology. I think the digital divide is a huge issue because more and more information is provided in that format. There is an added complication in that the First Click and Second Click programs, which were very successful, seem to have gone by the board. There was some commonwealth funding, but that seems a real area of need. I am sorry; we have all of you around the table and I am picking on poor old Troy! From the perspective of Rockingham, what is happening there with IT training?

Mrs McDonald: Some of the seniors there found the same thing with technology. The city has created a mail database for actual letters, so letters are still getting distributed to the seniors and information is still able to be provided, because there are some seniors who do not want to be involved in technology. Another group of seniors started an iPad user group within the community. The city’s grants program has funded iPads and there is also a special deal with a company to provide good service—because they want good service—and a good price for iPads. Now that is intergenerational and they are getting support from local schools because the schools are using the iPads too.

The CHAIR: But it is all very piecemeal and ad hoc really.

Ms Holbrook: A lot of libraries are taking up digital technology, so that is a fantastic service that local governments have been involved with since the 50s. Many of the 233 public libraries in WA are using iPads and technology as a way of bringing in older people and training them in how to use iPads and also what to be aware of. Christine Young from the City of Melville, who I am sure if you have not met, you would have seen, gave a great example at the LGMA conference last week of how the training that was done at the library on using iPads and email helped an older lady, who was 87, deal with an email. The email requested her to transfer money to the bank details that were given. She paused and thought, “No, I won’t do that”, because it did not seem right that the bank manager would email her direct from wherever it was. So there are really good examples through libraries. The challenge for libraries is to keep up with the technology. The funding that comes to libraries through the Department of Culture and the Arts is about \$10.8 million. Many people who visit libraries still want to use books. If you ask the librarians, most people go to the libraries for books, but the challenge is how we take it to that next level and address digital issues and educate people that way. The federal police have a great program on cyber safety for children, but again it is not being stretched to seniors, and that is probably a real opportunity we can look at.

Mrs McDonald: I also think that we cannot ignore what the seniors are saying to us and that not everybody wants to be involved in technology, and companies need to understand that and work with that.

Mr Pearce: Perhaps I can make some comments around LGMA’s involvement with this issue. Obviously, we are a professional association that represents officers who work in local government. Through that association we have a number of networks and our community development network is one area that is very engaged and looks at the broader range of community development and community service issues through local government. In the middle of this year we were approached by the Department of Local Government and Communities, which had just amalgamated, looking to do something in the age-friendly community space. They have given us a small grant of \$50 000 to

run a forum and to set up an aged care–friendly network, which we are beginning to do at the moment. I guess that is really the role the department sees, and that LGMA has—that is, to promote the work and connect those officers from different local governments who are doing work in this space and to promote those strategies and approaches that are quite advanced in some parts of the sector and help other officers understand what they are and take them back to their local governments. In terms of the department’s brief to us, it is very keen to promote the World Health Organization framework and, indeed, the state’s own age-friendly communities framework, and certainly we will be keen to do that. The two points I would make about my experience with the issue in this short time is that most local governments tend to be doing something that would be more or less in line on the journey towards the WHO framework. There are many innovative and quite creative strategies in place. I think there are only two local governments that have signed up or have become a global member of the World Health Organization, the City of Rockingham being one of them. It tends to be those local governments that have large senior populations that have stepped into that space first.

The other thing that is noticeable in talking to the local governments is that when it comes to engaging with the state government, it is local government that makes that engagement. So there are good examples of local governments working with state government departments, such as the Public Transport Authority, but usually it is the local government that has to identify the issue, plan and deliver their own strategies, and then approach the state government department for its engagement. In many cases that is very well received, but in a lot of ways that is the wrong way around. The Department of Local Government and Communities has a brief to be a facilitator or promoter of the age-friendly communities framework; however, there is not a clear lead agency in terms of planning for this space that glides out across to local governments. There is not a clear funding mechanism for local governments to access, whether it is around community infrastructure or particular programs. A concern is that local governments are being left in this space alone and really the state government needs to better coordinate the way in which we approach this issue. If we are left to ourselves, local government will certainly continue to do what we have the capacity to do, and simply by other organisations having vacated the field we will continue to step into that space. But if we are going to achieve the types of outcomes we want for our communities, we will need some assistance, for our involvement with the DLGC to begin that conversation, and through WALGA as well, to advocate to the state government to provide that support.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In the dialogue with your officers you represent are they claiming that they are finding it very difficult to cope in this area as the population ages?

Mr Pearce: It is becoming a high priority issue. If you went back five years, it probably would have sat in the top five; now it is pushing up to number one and two. The truth is that this is one of those frameworks that actually touches on all these issues in local government and so it is rising to that level. Outside the metro area it is certainly an issue in regional communities that have fewer services, fewer facilities and, as a result, are unable to hold on to seniors living in their communities who tend to make the voyage back to the metropolitan area to access services and facilities. Something like two-thirds of our seniors are now metropolitan based. Some of the services such as aged-care villages and services tend not to exist in many regional communities, particularly in small country communities. These issues come up quite regularly.

They are very local government-focused. They look at their own local government and bring this issue through in a coordinated way through their local government, and that is really where their focus is. There is only so much energy and time to devote to external agencies like state government departments when there is limited capacity with your own local government and a limited time to undertake the things that council is attempting to achieve. At the moment we are internally focused, but needing that support.

[10.50 am]

The CHAIR: If I just give you a hypothetical, and I do not really care who answers it: one of the things obviously is the elderly being able to keep healthy. They like to do that by maybe walking—walking to the shops, for example. In some jurisdictions they have modified the time allocated to cross a main road at traffic lights. If it is an area where there is high seniors traffic, they will alter the time on the pedestrian crossing. If there is a resolution by, say, council to do that, does that then go to Main Roads or can it be done internally?

Mayor Pickard: No, signalisation is the full responsibility of Main Roads Western Australia.

The CHAIR: How receptive is an agency like Main Roads to doing something like that?

Mrs McDonald: Not! At the City of Rockingham, one of the high density areas for seniors, we said to them that someone would be run over or bashed soon and they did put up signs saying “Give way to pedestrians”. That has actually reduced the amount of abuse when waiting for people to get across when the red man starts flashing. The green walk signals are not long enough and I do not know how many times we have approached them to change it.

The CHAIR: And the rationale for not changing it is?

Mrs McDonald: Because it is law, they said.

Ms Elton: It is the prioritisation of traffic flow.

Mrs McDonald: Yes.

Mayor Pickard: Yes, I think that is the issue. Main Roads are an important stakeholder for local government.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure.

Mayor Pickard: And we enjoy our relationship with them, but they are very much focused on the movement of vehicles as opposed to the movement of people not in vehicles. And that focus sometimes creates challenges, particularly when you want to explore opportunities that may sit outside the square, and Main Roads have a very stringent set of rules and anything outside those rules are invariably not welcomed.

The CHAIR: So if our committee were to make some recommendations along those lines, that would be something that you would welcome?

The Witnesses: Yes.

Mayor Pickard: Yes, absolutely. Walkability is a key for all communities, particularly for people as they age, creating connectivity opportunities and the like. Invariably that will involve treatments at a road interface and that requires approval and consideration of Main Roads, whether it is a sign, streetlights or traffic lights. So any recommendation that ensures that Main Roads explores opportunities and potentially enshrines into their own policies age-friendly practices would be welcomed.

The CHAIR: Now a couple of you mentioned this forum. I gather it is the same forum on 20 November; is that right?

Mr Pearce: That is right. So the department has engaged us through a grant agreement to run a two-day forum on 20 and 21 November, which is the week following Seniors Week. We are in the process of establishing a network of people within the local government community and beyond that to express their own wish in being involved, and then through that group we will develop a program and deliver a two-day event. The goal is really to regenerate the issue; to promote the age-friendly communities approach and then to build on that through the network, and hopefully into other programs and initiatives with the state government. But at this stage it is really a calling of people together to discuss the issue, to share their approaches and the things that they are doing, and from that we will have to discern a direction both with the department of local government and our

network about which way we want to take this in terms of how we can best assist those local government officers.

The CHAIR: Ricky, you wanted to say something?

Ms Burges: Yes, thank you. I would just like to reinforce the comments made by Mr Pearce—I am sure you have heard them—to make sure they get through. Through the president we have given a very good overview of what we are doing, but I think that what is so critical here is the piecemeal approach that is taken. There are so many different state government departments who have a responsibility in this area and even within local governments, there are so many aspects, and I have been talking to local governments here about the different pressures and tensions that exist. So I think the two things that support this are, first, funding: there is no funding and if we are going to do anything, we must be able to identify funding. Second, the key out of all of this is leadership in this area. So when there are almost competing issues, who takes leadership? Who is giving the direction for this? Often it sits in that space where we know something has to be done, but do not know who is taking that leadership role, so I very much support what has been said. It is a great opportunity to express it again.

The CHAIR: Without pre-empting our recommendations, that is certainly the impression we are getting from a range of different sources.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: One of the issues about aged care versus age-friendly is: is there a line? If there is, it is very blurry in my view about how we have the aged care over here, but age-friendly shires and cities. Does WALGA have a cut-off point to say, no, that moves over to another section in the age-friendly area?

Mayor Pickard: It is an interesting point, Mr Murray. Obviously in society we need to encourage the provision of high-care facilities, but I think we are seeing an increasing trend in local government where the sectors are cognisant of an age-friendly environment, and from the built form in our communities and how they cater for the needs of an ageing society. Indeed, it extends to our infrastructure, even to the point that the Chair raised about footpaths and ensuring that they are friendly for people who may have mobility issues and use a gopher, or may prefer to walk with a Zimmer frame, and trying to create infrastructure that encourages them to get out of the comforts of their normal surrounds and actively engage the community through walking.

The upside of those initiatives is that it does not just necessarily cater for people as they age; it also then creates an environment that is friendly for mothers with prams or with people with broader disabilities—indeed, even young children who might be on bicycles. So adopting a broader age-friendly approach, which is definitely a strong theme in a contemporary local government world, helps those individuals actively engage the community, particularly those who are ageing.

One of the challenges that we do find is the increasing demand from seniors for housing stock that is above and beyond the traditional retirement village, whether it be low care or high care, and very much a demand towards more independent living abodes that are appropriately designed for their purposes. There is a lack of suitable stock, particularly in the inner and middle metropolitan rings. In the outer metropolitan ring there is an increasing provision of age-friendly stock, but not so in the middle and inner rings of the metropolitan area in particular, and that creates a challenge for people as they age and who wish to age in place.

Again I will draw on my personal experience in the City of Joondalup where we embarked upon a review of our landholdings and deemed that we had significant land parcels that had no future use. We decided to divest them and to put a caveat on the title that they could be used only for aged housing; so effectively for over 55s, independent-style housing stock. I think we have 12 such units that are being completed and there are another 12 parcels of land that are rolling through the system.

The CHAIR: Even though you get a bit of nimby-ism there, as I gather; I am certainly well aware of one instance

Mayor Pickard: Yes, from your former patch of Warwick.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mayor Pickard: Yes. Any change in community is pushed back by some, but local government's role is to look into the future and to show leadership and identify challenges. Particularly the baby boomers coming through the ranks into the seniors presents, if not "the", then the second-most biggest challenge that local governments face over the next decade or two. To respond specifically to your question, Mr Murray, local government very much has age-friendly communities front and centre. The challenge, again, actually comes down to funding and the costs of either modifying existing infrastructure or building new infrastructure that caters for age-friendly communities where we want to encourage people to get out of the comforts of their personal surrounds and actively engage the broader community, particularly for their own personal benefit and mental health as well.

[11.00 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: You mentioned housing to be the greatest challenge to be faced by the baby boomers moving into the senior ranks, but is it the fact that a lot of older people are complaining or are investigations being undertaken about the loneliness of being a senior? Is that a major challenge and how would one address that?

Ms Elton: Obviously, it is highly complex. In Rockingham, we are in a very car-dependent community. We have a massive land area and we have the same traditional issues that are faced by seniors across the metropolitan area, but they are exacerbated by seniors who are not driving, perhaps after a particular age or perhaps because of cultural circumstances and losing partners. So then they become housebound, perhaps. Finding programs—and we did have one program, did we not? Did you want to mention it?

Mrs McDonald: The social connector program.

Ms Elton: Yes, the social connector program.

Mrs McDonald: The state government funded a social connector program and we worked with all the not-for-profit organisations to implement that. When we did the World Health Organization audit, "Respect and Social Inclusion"—Jane mentioned car dependency and when people lose their licence—46 per cent of the respondents actually lived alone. So there is a great need for connection and social connection and getting them there, and if we are car dependent and our footpaths do not connect —

Dr A.D. BUTI: So should we be aiming to have higher density living for seniors?

Ms Elton: Yes, without a doubt.

Mr Pearce: Through the Chair, can I encourage the committee to take five minutes to hear about what the City of Rockingham is actually doing? They are very front and centre in this space; they have done a number of things that are very innovative and off their own bat, and I would really like the opportunity for them to be able to present the work they are doing to the committee.

The CHAIR: Good, fire away.

Ms Elton: Julie has been involved with active ageing, as we have previously called it, over seven years now, so I will let her speak about the issues that were elicited from the World Health Organization's survey the first time that it was conducted in 2008. We will go back and resurvey next year, so it will be seven years apart, and we will have some comparisons, perhaps some metrics that come out of that. We will be able to see where we progressed and where we have not progressed.

Mrs McDonald: As you know, we are trying to work towards an age-friendly city, and as Jane mentioned before, we are really high car dependent and it is low density, and we have limited

suitable affordable housing options for seniors. So the key areas are housing, transportation and health; they are really impacting the community. The community told the City of Rockingham that they needed facilities—accessible facilities, accessible crossways, pathways and seating in Rockingham. Some of the actions that not only the city has taken up, but the community themselves, are maps of connecting pathways—where are the gaps, what needs to happen, and so now the connections of pathways occurs. One of the residents, who could not get through some bollards on her gopher, wrote to us about that, so the city removed them so she did not have to go on the road; it was as simple as that.

The increased seating along the foreshore areas has been great. As Jane mentioned, we are heavily car dependent and if you lose your licence or you have to keep paying for medicals to retain your licence, we are going to have fewer seniors out in the community. The city commenced a community connect bus, which is for the disadvantaged population—so you could be someone who is disadvantaged, who is young and cannot get on a bus. The community lobbied Transperth for more buses and new and changed bus routes and that has been successful, and I congratulate them on listening and doing that, but of course we know that more work needs to be done. Increased patronage—Transperth said that without bums on seats they were not going to increase their routes, so the seniors got together and rallied around and made sure the bums were on the seats. Transperth do come down and hold workshops, and for safety as well.

Another one is with housing. We know we need appropriate affordable housing and for people to be able to age in place. People do not want to move, they want to stay. They could not afford to move anyway, even if they wanted to. We have a Rockingham challenger precinct master plan, but again we need that leader—a leader needs to occur for people to come down and build.

Ms Elton: One of our issues is that we have land available, so we can create the conditions in local government for all sorts of accommodation to occur, and they will probably be service providers, developers who would be prepared. But it is who takes the leadership; is it local government's role to source providers to build aged-care accommodation or retirement villages, so it is that leadership aspect.

The CHAIR: There are some constraints on the Local Government Act, which we identified in a previous inquiry, about local government being too commercially active in that area, but it is certainly something that we recommended take place.

Ms Elton: So at the moment it sits in community development for us to work with our planners to then work with economic development for us to be the leaders to push it through to get them to talk to developers or service providers, because we have identified the need for double the number of beds, perhaps, over the next 20 years.

Mrs McDonald: I will raise two more things, because I know time is getting on. Civic participation and employment for seniors was a very strong need in the community and I am pleased to see that our funding is available to employ seniors over 50. That is a great initiative, although I do not believe that many are taking it up. So I think work needs to be done there. We do not have a volunteer resource centre in Rockingham, which is terrible because then it is hard for us to actually get volunteers. One of the actions is to support the employment opportunities, the incentives for over 50s. The residents want to pursue and re-establish a volunteer resource centre, but as we have spoken about today, that is impossible with no money. And who is responsible? We need something to happen.

The last point is insufficient health services and GPs in the community, and the lack of respite in aged-care facilities, as Jane mentioned. We will be 600–700 beds short. Older people are either going to live with the younger generation or they are going to be on the street because I do not know where they are going to go if they need full-time care. The city in conjunction with the community attracted three organisations to set up, because of the need. One organisation was the

commonwealth carer's respite centre; they have been very proactive in the City of Rockingham providing respite care to families in need.

The CHAIR: When you said 600 beds, is that in the City of Rockingham alone?

Mrs McDonald: Rockingham, yes.

Ms Elton: We currently have 600 beds. We are operating on only 70 per cent occupancy; so if we were predicting 70 per cent occupancy up to the year 2031, we would need to find another 670 beds.

Mrs McDonald: One of the not-for-profits was going to close down a respite home because of funding, and the community was outraged, as well as the city, and we were able to support it in making sure that did not happen, and through that they will be able to secure funding for respite for seven days a week, which is really necessary. Thank you for inviting us and giving us the opportunity to speak here.

The CHAIR: We have heard good things about the City of Rockingham.

Mrs McDonald: Thank you. We have some strategies for you here today, which we are more than happy to leave with you, and the new one will be coming out soon.

[11.10 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am in the same position in my local knowledge about high care being shut down and respite areas not being available. Is there any information that you might be able to give us on how you went about stopping that from happening? Because I think it is this week that they are shutting a wing of the Collie aged-care facility and taking away the only respite facility that we have in town. If you can help me out, I would certainly appreciate that.

Mrs McDonald: Yes, we approached the not-for-profit organisation and asked them why they were shutting down for five days, and only to five days, and they said it was lack of funding. So we asked who funded them. We then went to the funding body at that time—I am not sure if I can mention them—and then the community, so the seniors themselves and some of the nurses. We also approached the city and said, "What are you doing? The statistics within the Active Ageing Strategy shows the absolute need for respite. We cannot believe you're shutting down." Their reason for shutting down was that not enough people were using it, but this place was full, seven days a week. So we showed the proof that there was a need and then we lobbied to make sure the funding bodies stepped up and kept funding. And congratulations to the not-for-profit organisation which had to also put in extra money to keep that going; but the community really led the way. We just backed them up with the statistics.

The CHAIR: Are there any further comments anyone would like to make? Just by way of background, we will be reporting on probably 20 November.

Mr Pearce: We would like to see the committee come to our forum on 20 and 21 November.

The CHAIR: I think we would like to attend, but we will see whether or not we are sitting or whether we have 17 school graduations to go to! This started off as a bit of a paper exercise just to look at how the groundwork was going forward, but then it has kind of gone a little topsy because we were hearing of the good work that was being done, but it was not being done in any sort of coordinated way. We are hoping in our report to highlight some of the areas of work that is being done. For instance, I think the gap in terms of when the licences are no longer held is a real issue. So our report should come out on 20 November and then the government has three months to respond. In a previous report, as I said, we did recommend the abolition of stamp duty for seniors downsizing but that was rejected out of hand, so we plug away.

Thanks very much for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript

returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it is deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you all very much for your time and keep up the good work.

The Witnesses: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.13 am
