

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 13 AUGUST 2014**

Members

**Ms M.M. Quirk (Chair)
Mr I.M. Britza (Deputy Chair)
Mr C.D. Hatton
Mr M.P. Murray
Dr A.D. Buti**

Hearing commenced at 10.07 am

Ms JENNIFER MATHEWS

Director General, Department of Local Government and Communities, examined:

Dr SUSAN GALLACHER

Acting Director, Strategy, Research and Initiatives, Department of Local Government and Communities, examined:

The CHAIR: Good morning. I suspect, Jennifer, that this is not the first time that you have appeared before a parliamentary committee.

Ms Mathews: I think this is the second or third time!

The CHAIR: Is that all—you have done well!

On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and your 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 specific terms of reference.

This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. 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 witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as 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 could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to the questions that we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. 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: Thank you for your submission to the inquiry. Together with the information you provide today, your submission will form part of the evidence to the inquiry and may be made public. Would you like to make any amendments to the submission?

Ms Mathews: No.

[10.10 am]

The CHAIR: We have a series of questions to ask, but before we do that, do you wish to provide the committee with any additional information or make an opening statement to the committee?

Ms Mathews: By way of an opening statement, we certainly welcome the opportunity to address the committee today and to respond to any questions in relation to our submission. I think the submission does provide a reasonably fulsome outline of the department's work in this area. Another point I would make is that, particularly as the new Department of Local Government and Communities, seniors is certainly a priority area for the department, as is how we meet the changing needs of seniors going into the future. Certainly the strategic framework has been an important document in terms of helping us frame that work and frame those priorities.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will start with a general question. How well prepared is the Western Australian government at this stage to meet the complex needs of an ageing community?

Ms Mathews: That is a challenging question in itself. Obviously a lot of work has been done in terms of understanding what the demographic is in terms of seniors within our community. A lot of work has been done in looking at the relevant statistics and what they mean in terms of the population in Western Australia—I will mention a few—particularly the projected growth of seniors as part of our demographic. I will refer to some of the stats with which we are familiar. At 30 June 2011, there were 410 000 seniors aged 60 years and over, which was 17.6 per cent of the population. By 2021 that number is expected to grow to 595 000 seniors aged 60 years and over, which will represent 21 per cent of the population. A lot of work and analysis has been done on those projected changes and some work done, including as part of the framework, on what the needs of seniors might be into the future. I think some of the work that the department has done in developing up this strategic framework has been important in preparing the state for those changes; in particular, the work that went into developing the framework was quite extensive in terms of consulting with other state agencies and consulting with local governments. A lot of research has been done on the work of local governments in engaging with seniors to find out what their needs are and to feed them up to the framework. I think the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has been doing quite a bit of work in this space as well in terms of looking forward and determining how to respond from a policy perspective.

The CHAIR: What area of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

Ms Mathews: It is the whole of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I think the division that looks at the human services policy area has been doing quite a bit of work. It is, in fact, a member of our senior officers group. Certainly it has been led at the senior level in terms of looking at an ageing population in Western Australia and what that means from a policy perspective.

The CHAIR: Is it the Department of Local Government and Communities or the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that is enforcing the framework or making sure that each department is doing what it was allocated to do in the framework?

Ms Mathews: It is a part of the picture. It is doing some work in this area. A number of state agencies are doing work in this area. As the department responsible for developing the framework, we have taken on a role in terms of gauging what other agencies are doing, but the framework itself was always intended as a guide to other agencies, both state and local, in terms of informing their policies and programs, and that is why we have convened the senior officers group, which meets to share information about what each agency is doing. DPC is part of that senior officers group.

The CHAIR: I do not think you answered my question. You have given other evidence, which I will ask about. Who does the buck stop with? Who has overall responsibility to make sure that the framework progresses—your department or DPC?

Ms Mathews: In terms of the framework, our department is the responsible department because it actually did the work in developing up the framework. We have played a role in bringing together the relevant state agencies to discuss what they have been doing in their respective agencies that

lines up with the framework. It is not so much about enforcing the framework—that was not the intent. The framework was designed to be a guide that sets out key planning principles and key priority areas for seniors into the future. Its intent was to guide and inform state agencies and local government agencies in how they might plan and develop particular initiatives in their respective portfolios.

The CHAIR: All right. That leads me back to my initial question. You are on the senior officers group; I take it that those meetings are chaired by someone from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

Ms Mathews: We chair that particular meeting

The CHAIR: Are you able to say how prepared we are and which agencies still have work to do? If everyone is reporting back to a meeting that your agency chairs, you should be able to say who is letting the side down and who is doing exceptional work.

Ms Mathews: In terms of the work that is being reported to us as part of that senior officers group, I can report that there is good work going on in other state agencies. The framework has been a very useful tool in guiding and informing that work. I can share some examples of state agency initiatives that have been reported back to the senior officers group. The Department of Planning and the WA Planning Commission have developed an age-friendly WA state seniors strategic framework, which recognises that the needs of seniors need to be incorporated into the state's specific planning strategies, including "Directions 2031 and beyond" and so on. The Department of Regional Development has undertaken a project called Ageing in the Bush, which focuses on ageing in the community, particularly from the perspective of aged care and what that means in terms of meeting needs into the future. It has done some good work on that. The Department of Housing has used the framework to inform its affordable housing strategy and, in particular, to ensure that the strategies it has developed, including the affordable housing strategy, reflect the needs of seniors. Clearly, the detail of these needs to be directed at relevant agencies. The Department of Housing is doing a lot of work looking at the needs of seniors into the future in housing and how they can be best accommodated, whether that is through providing ancillary housing or flexible housing options. We have been working closely with the Department of Commerce on some of its initiatives, including the seniors housing information service, which provides advice to seniors about housing and retirement options to make sure that they get the best possible advice. We are co-funding that particular initiative with the Department of Commerce and we are looking to co-locate with it. At a strategic level, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has initiated the "Positive Ageing in WA—supporting an ageing population" project. That project looks at how the state needs to partner and engage with not-for-profit organisations. It has been carried out under the auspices of the partnership forum, which is independent, but is led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

[10.20 am]

The CHAIR: From what you have told us, various agencies are at the stage of identifying policy challenges, but have not yet necessarily translated that into service delivery. Is that a correct assumption?

Ms Mathews: I think some of that question might be better directed to the agencies —

The CHAIR: You chair the meeting; they report back to you. You have talked about some of the initiatives of various agencies and you have evidence, personal knowledge, of some of the initiatives. As a general proposition, are we not still at the stage of identifying the challenges in various areas?

Ms Mathews: I think as a general proposition, at this stage a range of state agencies have done some really good work in identifying what the future needs —

The CHAIR: So that is a "yes".

Ms Mathews: In short.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: We are talking about what is coming up in the framework from the bottom. Does your agency have a sales pitch that goes down and says, “This is what we should be doing to sell the framework.”?

Ms Mathews: Yes; I will talk about what we are doing at two levels. I have talked a little bit about what we are doing at the state level in terms of bringing together relevant state agencies and talking about the framework and, as I said, encouraging agencies to use the framework as a guide to inform the development of their policies and programs. The other area that we are really focusing on is how to promote this at the local level through local government. That is a real focus for us going forward. State agencies work at the state level, obviously, and a lot of the programs filter down to the local level, but we think that local governments have an important role in adapting this framework and implementing it at the local level through the age-friendly communities approach to planning. That is a priority for us going forward. We have in the past provided funding to a number of local governments to support them in adopting age-friendly communities, which is basically an approach to planning. It is an approach to engaging in a really rigorous way with seniors in the community in eight key areas. It is quite disciplined and quite definitive in what it asks local government to talk to seniors about and to engage them on. They are reflected in this framework. This framework is a concept that has been endorsed by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. It reflects international best practice and, to date, 27 local governments in WA have been specifically funded to adopt it. Indeed, we are one of the leading states in terms of local governments’ adoption of age-friendly communities in their planning. It basically means they go out and engage with seniors and listen to their concerns and factor those concerns into their strategic community planning and corporate business plan before resourcing it. They listen and then use the planning process to translate that into better outcomes for seniors in whatever area that might be in.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: There are differences between local governments because some have embraced it and others have not. Can you identify why that is the case because, if you do not, we will see one community up here and one community down there. When aged people are moved from the community that has been their whole life into another, strange community, quite honestly they do not last long. Has any work been done to identify whether a particular local government is dragging its tail and how it will get up to the levels across the state?

Ms Mathews: Yes, there is. Over the last three years we have rolled out a new and integrated planning and reporting framework for local governments across the state, which basically requires them to put in place a long-term strategic community plan and a corporate business plan that activates that plan, as well as asset management and financial planning to resource what they do. Community engagement is a key part of that. As part of the whole integrated planning and reporting framework, we have built in age-friendly communities as what we call an “informing strategy”. We have asked all local governments to look at this as part of their integrated planning and reporting framework at a systemic level. What we want to do now is to take that to the next level, which is to start building capacity in local government to adopt it more rigorously, bearing in mind that the local government sector is quite diverse. It needs to be adapted to suit different circumstances. We are working closely with the Local Government Managers Association and WALGA to establish what we are calling an age-friendly community network of local governments. It is in its early stages, but the department has provided LGMA with funding to develop this network. One of the initiatives will be a major forum, held close to Seniors Week in November, that will bring together all local governments to talk about this topic and how to take it up and, in particular, to showcase what is working well. We will choose some of the 27 local governments that have adopted it to showcase and demonstrate best practice in terms of adopting age-friendly

communities. In terms of priorities, we are looking to scale it up so that it is adopted in a more consistent way across local government, particularly in regional WA.

The CHAIR: How much funding have you provided?

Ms Mathews: We have provided \$50 000 to LGMA. We have done that because it has a whole network of community development officers sitting within local governments across the state. They are a good strategic partner in rolling this out to local governments.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Until the committee undertook this inquiry, I had not heard the term “age-friendly communities”. It has been a bit of a shock. When you talk about the governments that are involved and that not everyone is pulling their weight, what factors hinder the department’s ability to coordinate and implement this framework?

[10.30 am]

Ms Mathews: Coming back to it, it was meant as a guide; that was the point of it. I think we have done a good job in terms of bringing those agencies together to adopt this and use it as a guide.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: What effect will resources and staff have on the ability to implement the framework?

Ms Mathews: At this stage we see our role essentially as a facilitator. I do not think the intent was to try to coordinate every single state activity in this area. We have used it more to bring state agencies together. I have talked about the work that we are doing with local governments; there is a good body of work to bring state agencies together, to sit around the table and use the framework as an umbrella to inform and share what they are doing and to share some of the initiatives they are doing in their respective agencies. They are best placed in their disciplines to work out how to best help seniors, whether it is in transport, housing or health. We can then talk about linking in. That is how we have approached it to date. A good example is with us now linking the seniors housing information service with the Department of Commerce. We are now looking at co-locating that seniors housing centre with the Seniors Card Centre on Level 2, 140 William Street.

The CHAIR: It is incredibly hard for seniors to find. It is located in the most ridiculous place. I could not find it, but I am getting on, I must admit.

I think what my colleague on my left is actually asking is what level of resources your department commits to this particular framework—that is, bums on seats, if you like. We have heard about the \$50 000 grant to WALGA. What disturbs me about that is that complicit in that is what you said about it having a whole network of community development officers to work on this; and, complicit in that is that your department does not have the same number of people to prosecute the framework.

Ms Mathews: In terms of resourcing, as you know we have been through a pretty major restructure with the merger of the two departments into one department. We have spent time over the past few months firming up our strategic plan and finalising operational plans to support that. This is firmly embedded in our operational plan as a priority and it will be resourced accordingly from across the department. Various areas will be involved in this; the area that Susan heads up will have resources allocated to it. We will be calling on the resources of the grants team and calling on the resources of the executive director. I am involved. We will be calling together and pulling together the relevant resources to support this in the most appropriate way. In terms of giving an actual number, I am a bit reluctant to give a specific 0.1 here or 0.3 there and to try to add it up because we are doing a range of projects—and this is just one of them. This is a priority project.

The CHAIR: Conspicuously absent in the department’s submission was the amount of resources it has allocated to the strategy. Certainly at the time of the framework, there was no budget allocation to progress the framework. We really would like some figures. It is not my way of criticising you; we understand that local government work has been all consuming for the past 18 months. We want

to get a handle on it. I do not know whether you are in a position to provide that to the committee later on. Can you undertake to provide some figures about all those bits and pieces that you talked about and how much that adds up to in the number of whole people or the bunch of allocations?

Ms Mathews: I am happy to provide what will be an estimate of resourcing shifts and changes. If it needs more, we will put more towards it. On the funding side, I mentioned the \$50 000 to LGMA. Further funding is proposed for local governments. We have not determined a definite figure, but we are looking at \$200 000 to be allocated to local governments to support the uptake by local governments of the age-friendly communities framework.

The CHAIR: That is the carrot, if you like, for local governments to take this on board.

Ms Mathews: Yes, it is a carrot. It is about providing across-the-sector support and a resource, particularly in the country areas, to undertake some really good planning in the area of seniors. They might decide to do it on a more subregional basis in terms of exactly how the \$200 000 is allocated. We need to work through that. We will work with WALGA, LGMA and the age-friendly community network that we are setting up with other key stakeholders. COTA is also involved in that network. We will be seeking its input on how best to use that funding.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Are you using those people to help you monitor the age-friendly practices in local government? The monitoring of the process is where I am feeling that there is a little not insecurity, but uncertainty —

The CHAIR: There is a vacuum.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Yes, that could be right. I just want that clarified, because this is where the resource and the staffing is important because if you are the major player, how do you monitor this? As far as I understand it, Melville must be the shining light —

Ms Mathews: It is the shining light!

Mr I.M. BRITZA: — and we are about to go and see it. But I am not really aware of anybody else. If that is the case, how do you monitor that?

Ms Mathews: I think that is something that we need to look at. In terms of local governments' take-up, the 27 local governments that have been provided funding have certainly reported back to us. They were each given \$10 000 to implement the age-friendly community framework within their district. The City of Melville was one of the very first to receive that.

The CHAIR: Was that prior to the strategic framework? Yes, it was.

Ms Mathews: Yes, it was prior to it. In a sense this actually started at the local government level. It started that way because it was basically following international best practice. Initially it was adopted at the local level and in fact it was the collective research of the 23 local governments that had taken part in this that also informed the framework. So you could say it has been a bit of a bottom-up process. Certainly we have a good idea of where those 27 local governments are up to. In terms of others, that is something that we do want to monitor, and that is why I am hoping that through this AFC network, in terms of local government involvement, we will be able to get a better sense of just what is happening out there in this space.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Sometimes the community groups do not talk to local government because personalities get in the road. Is there any monitoring of the Capel aged-care group, for example? Whatever you would like to say, do you see the difference I am talking about? One is about the community groups that are going forward. Generally there are some very good leaders in there, but not necessarily with a local government. Is there any monitoring of that?

[10.40 am]

Ms Mathews: Certainly as part of the age-friendly community framework and as part of their engagement with seniors, local governments are required to bring in, engage with and involve not-

for-profits in that discussion. That is part of the discussion. The 27 local governments that have gone out and done their community engagement are supposed to bring in relevant not-for-profits in that discussion. But I think it is a very good question and one that we are exploring; that is, how do we, particularly as we roll out age-friendly communities in the local government sector, ensure that not-for-profits are engaged in this discussion, because there is obviously an opportunity for local governments to partner with not-for-profits in the delivery and meeting the needs of seniors into the future; so, that is something that we will certainly explore as we go forward. One of the key initiatives that we have developed as a department is a “community development round table”. The community development round table is a round table that I chair, that brings together the CEOs of WALGA, LGMA and WACOSS. The WA Council of Social Service sits around the table with WALGA and LGMA, representing the local government sector, and we are talking about how we get better connections particularly between local government and the not-for-profit sector. Here is a project that warrants that closer engagement.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Can I just go back to monitoring and facilitating, as opposed to implementing, adopting and assessing and all of those sorts of terminologies? I refer to the City of Melville in 2006–07, and it has been moving forward since then; then we go to 2012–17 with this document on age-friendly communities. You are aware of what Melville has been doing as best practice—it is very isolated as a best-practice model. We are halfway through the cycle of the document on age-friendly communities by 2012–17 and I am not seeing an urgency from the department and I am not seeing that you will actually be able to assess much in 2017 on whether you are getting the right outcomes. Does the department have a strong urgency towards committing to the age-friendly document by 2017 and getting good outcomes? Does the department have an urgency for the ageing community or feel an urgency among the other things it does, if I may say, for seniors, youth, carers, women, volunteers, children and families, parenting the early years? Do you feel you are really monitoring this document properly in its time frame, and do you feel you are really monitoring the councils in their adoption of it?

Ms Mathews: I guess the best way to respond to that is to reiterate and highlight that within the context of the work we do around seniors, this is a key priority. Yes, there are other priorities, but this is a key priority in terms of the weight we have given it within the strategic plan and our operational planning. If it is not on that, it does not get done. So it is in there. It has certainly been built into our planning in terms of making sure that it is appropriately resourced and carried forward.

The CHAIR: Can I just stop you there? What is “appropriately resourced”? That is what I think we have been asking for the last little while.

Ms Mathews: The resourcing is appropriate in terms of making sure that we achieve what we set out to achieve —

The CHAIR: All right. Has anyone done the exercise of working out what that is?

Ms Mathews: In terms of?

The CHAIR: Appropriate resources that need to be allocated to this area.

Ms Mathews: That has been done as part of our operational plan.

The CHAIR: All right, and what are they?

Ms Mathews: I would need to go and give you —

The CHAIR: Would you feel less constrained in answering this question if the policy officer from the minister’s office was not here?

Ms Mathews: No. Look, at the end of the day we have a series of priorities that are set out in the operational plan. This is one of them. I have essentially an agency of 300 people and there will be

an appropriate number of people allocated to this. I am happy to get back to you with a figure, but the figure may shift a bit, depending on how it is proceeding.

The CHAIR: How do you go to Treasury and ask for money if you do not know what you need? This is why I am having trouble with all of this. And this framework was announced 18 or so months ago. Again, what has been happening in the meantime in terms of saying that you need to allocate this money?

Ms Mathews: I have not given you a specific figure, I know, but I can say that in terms of appropriate resourcing, it is a priority for me so my time is allocated to it—the executive director of the new community building and services division. As part of our restructure in the new department, we have a division called community building and services with three branches headed-up by an executive director. To a varying extent that division will have this as a key priority as part of its operational plan. There will be resources allocated from both the community building and services division, the corporate communications team, the policy area, and including, as I said, as part of other initiatives such as the community development round table. It has been progressed at a number of levels.

The CHAIR: All right. You did just give evidence of allocations of grants to 27 local governments. I understand that was at least two years ago. I want to know what has happened since then.

Ms Mathews: Since then we have been collecting and seeing how they have spent the money. So we have been monitoring the acquittals of that money and we have been really working to take it to the next level, which is trying to embed the age-friendly community as part of the integrated planning and reporting. That is the first thing. That is important because it is really about a bit of a cultural shift here and I think it needs to be tackled at a couple of levels. At the systemic level, that is pretty important. A lot of work goes into supporting the integrated planning and reporting framework for local governments of which age-friendly communities is a part. They are all required to comply with integrated planning and reporting, and we do monitor and basically assess how they are complying with those integrated planning and reporting requirements. I think that is important, and there is scope going forward to even build on the age-friendly community component of that.

The CHAIR: Can I just act as the devil's advocate? We have major challenges ahead in terms of an ageing population. I would have thought there needed to be some level of commitment at all levels of government—federal, state and local government. I know that local government is in many cases a service deliverer, but it appears to me that there is a level of abdication of state government responsibility to local government and I do not understand why that is happening.

Ms Mathews: If I could just reiterate some of the early points. In terms of my department and working with local governments and building capacity, increasing the uptake and adoption of AFC at the local government level is a priority. That is why we have provided the funding to LGMA. WALGA is involved. We have set up this age-friendly community network and are progressing that. We are looking at holding a major forum later in the year. We are looking at providing further funding to local governments and really supporting particularly those that have not taken it up, especially in the country, to do this so that they are best placed at a local level, which is really where this happens in a sense; that is where it is most important. Most seniors want to age within their community, so that is why local government is a really critical tier and I think the department has an important role to progress it.

The CHAIR: At the other end of the scale, for example, there is known to be a shortage in nursing home beds. What is the state doing to kick down the commonwealth's door and saying that there are some particular local issues here that put constraints on private providers and asking what we are doing to ameliorate the situation? I do not see that happening, for example. Do you say that is a Department of Health consideration? How is this all coordinated?

[10.50 am]

Ms Mathews: I mentioned that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has done quite a bit of work at looking at needs into the future and policy responses to that. I mentioned the major work that is done around ageing in WA and the policy responses and there is also bringing together state agencies and the major not-for-profits to talk about those issues, but that is probably best directed to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR: We have a number of submissions here from various interested groups—I will get Chris to ask his question—and they do raise a number of issues with the framework, and I want to put some of them to you.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Just getting back to the monitoring, I would like a little more information on getting to 2017, the end of this document and assessing it and the monitoring. Are you saying that basically there is no compliance by local governments to you in implementing the strategies of age-friendly in the document; that there is no real compliance?

Ms Mathews: In terms of local government?

Mr C.D. HATTON: Yes.

Ms Mathews: No, not as such, not in terms of compliance. As I mentioned, components of the integrated planning and reporting framework, which is compulsory and which is regulated, are regulated and they are required to complete those and report to us, and we do monitor that. That is the integrated planning and reporting. The components of that that we monitor relate to those plans I have mentioned—strategic community plan, corporate business plan, asset management, financing—and that is all underpinned by good community engagement. We are monitoring those elements and they need to be reported. What we are trying to do as part of that is to encourage and adopt an age-friendly communities approach as a specific strategy. We monitor the implementation and compliance with the overall integrated planning and reporting framework, but not specifically the age-friendly community part. That is just part of the bigger picture.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Yes, it is part of the bigger picture, right.

Ms Mathews: It is an example of good engagement. When they come back to us with their strategic community plan, they are required to demonstrate that they have undertaken meaningful community engagement, and we vet their plans, and we monitor that, and we assess whether they have done that—whether they have ticked the box. We go back to them and say, “Yes, you’ve met this but you haven’t met this.”

Mr C.D. HATTON: Community engagement is a bit fluffy, is it not? It is not infrastructure or the ability for people to stay at home with special purpose-built appliances. It is a bit fluffy, in just engagement, is it not?

Ms Mathews: Well, we ask them to engage with the whole community, including seniors, in order to come up with a strategic community plan, which is a 10-year plan that covers social, economic and environmental issues impacting on the community over the next 10 years. That is the aspirational plan. What is it your community wants you to do over the next 10 years? And then we get them to basically support that with a business plan, which is four years, and with asset management and financing underneath that, so basically it is supported. The age-friendly communities framework provides a framework for much more rigorous engagement with seniors, and that is what we are going to be promoting going forward. At the moment we know that 27 local governments have adopted the age-friendly community framework, which is a more rigorous methodology for engaging specifically with seniors around eight areas. It is quite specific, and that is what Melville has done and a number of other local governments. That is what we are looking at actually rolling out in a more systematic way to other local governments who have not done that yet, for a range of reasons. For some of them, it is simply a question of capacity. We need think about how that is addressed. For others it is just a cultural shift.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Is it a success indicator, that 27 councils have taken up the age-friendly policy? Is that an indicator of where we are today? Is that an indicator of success?

Ms Mathews: I think it is an indicator of success to the extent that, as far as I am aware, it is the only state in Australia that has had that take-up at the local government level. In terms of adopting age-friendly communities at the local level, WA is leading the country.

The CHAIR: That is a worry; an absolute worry. Are you finished?

Mr C.D. HATTON: No; it is good, thanks. I just need to know about the area of success and that indicator.

The CHAIR: The framework really does not identify specific needs of seniors. It really just talks about strategies and ways you go about engaging or what have you. When you talk about this rigorous consultation, that is where you have seen the particular needs identified. Your colleague is nodding, so I gather that is a yes.

Dr Gallacher: What I can add is that there are three stages to the process, so there is the asking process, which is the consultation process. Then there is analysis of what has come out of that consultation, followed by an implementation process, so what has come out of the consultation process and analysis then the local governments might look at implementing something to address what has actually been revealed through that process. That may be an infrastructure issue, or it may be a social or community inclusion issue. So it does go through those steps.

The CHAIR: Since the local government seems to be where the interface is going to be most strong, I suppose, do you envisage that will mean training council staff, for example, in dealing with older people?

Ms Mathews: I think what we are hearing—this is one of the things I wanted to really use the AFC network, of which WALGA is a member, to explore—is raising awareness, particularly amongst elected members, about the need to engage rigorously with seniors so that their planning reflects the needs of seniors and incorporates strategies for dealing with those. That is why I think it is important to have WALGA involved in this process, because I think that there is some work to be done to raise awareness and support in terms of capacity building. If you talk to local governments, they are aware that they have all got changing demographics, whether you talk about metropolitan local governments or country local governments. In all of them, they are looking at a changing demographic and a growing and ageing population. One of their major concerns is how they keep them—how they retain that. This is about helping them to do that and about engaging and then working out what are the strategies then and at aged care, which is obviously critical, and that is where that work is looking at linking in with the work of Regional Development around that.

The CHAIR: I will give you a very concrete example that occurred in my electorate. An elderly lady was walking on the footpath, which of course is something we encourage them to do. We also talk to planners and everything else about making the capacity to walk much more accessible for seniors. This lady was walking under some fig trees that had dropped a lot of litter on the footpath. She slipped on one of those berries and sustained a fairly serious injury. She rang up the council to complain about those trees being there and not being adequately cleaned et cetera, and she was told by the person she talked to at the end of the phone at the council that she should have looked where she was going. This is the fundamental problem that we have—that lack of respect, that lack of appreciation of what is an issue that we are actually encouraging all the local government authorities to be more active in. The framework, for example, does not make any specific mention of Indigenous communities. Is there any reason for that?

[11.00 am]

Ms Mathews: It does in fact reference some programs and policies that relate to Aboriginal communities, not in terms of the headline issues, but in the body of the document there are references to some of the particular needs there.

The CHAIR: Is that within the subset of the regional —

Dr Gallacher: It links into some of the projects that are already in place that link to the framework, including the national partnership agreement, Closing the Gap.

The CHAIR: Okay. That is certainly a criticism that COTA has made.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I think there is a very important issue to identify, especially as a country person, but more out into the remotes and regionals, where you start to identify for a particular group—others may have a different view on this—and a particular group then excludes another group. It is something that has got to be really, really well managed in this, because we are seeing that, say, with the Marble Bar identities, the time comes where someone has got to look after them or they have got to go into an age-friendly complex. That is not happening because when the funding model is looked at, no, there has been X amount for an Aboriginal group, and it is counted in the whole picture. Marble Bar has had \$2 million, but it is all over there, where it is not accessible to the six or seven people who could probably stay in their community along the way. I think it is something that we should be mindful of how that is set up.

The CHAIR: Do you expect to access any funding from royalties for regions in relation to, for example, regional issues and Indigenous people?

Ms Mathews: I think that is certainly an area that needs to be looked at. I am particularly looking at opportunities to link into Regional Development around their Ageing in the Bush. They have been doing some quite good work as a pilot in the wheatbelt and looking at the needs of ageing communities within the wheatbelt as a region and just what that means in terms of facilities and service providers. Whether that is something that might be able to be replicated in other regions where the funding could be certainly explored, that is an area worth looking at.

The CHAIR: I think my colleague Mr Hatton alluded to this, but this strategic framework is really a planning document. It does not have any measurement indicators in there, but you have talked about the 27 local governments. What other sorts of things do you think would be a useful measurement as to the success or otherwise of the framework?

Dr Gallacher: One of the things that is worth mentioning, and I think it was included in our submission, is that the World Health Organization are in the process of developing benchmark indicators for the effectiveness of age-friendly communities. Once those are delivered to us, we will be looking at how they can then be applied to local governments in Western Australia so that we can do exactly that kind of work.

The CHAIR: There is also of course the private sector. It is things as simple as the size of fonts on products through to various other things, and I think there is not enough care or understanding within the private sector of the challenges of an ageing population. What engagement is there with private sector bodies like the CCI, for example, as to catering for the delivery of services to elderly people? Is there any engagement there? Whose responsibility is that?

Ms Mathews: It is a very good question. Again, as part of our strategic plan, we have been looking at how we do engage with industry more in social issues more broadly, not just with seniors. Obviously, there are a lot of large corporates in WA with quite active corporate social responsibility programs. Woodside has just announced funding for an early years' development fund. So it is an interesting area. It is one that is certainly worth pursuing in terms of how they might be better engaged in this space.

The CHAIR: Is there room within, say, the Seniors Awards context to maybe acknowledge the work of a private sector organisation who is going out of their way to assess the needs of seniors and to deliver services appropriately?

Ms Mathews: I think we have just actually revised the categories and there is a category that basically talks about a lead organisation. That could encompass industry. We have also got a new

category this year which relates to local government. So, for the first time we have actually included an award for local governments in the age-friendly community space, which I think is a good one.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Going back to success indicators, given that you are saying that 27 local governments have engaged, and you were saying they had adopted it, how do you measure the adoption and how do you actually say they really have adopted these practices?

Ms Mathews: Again, those particular 27, because they received a grant, had to report back and demonstrate that they had done that through documentation.

Mr C.D. HATTON: But that was the \$10 000 grant. What year was that grant? Do you remember?

Dr Gallacher: It was over a range of years. I think the first grants were given in 2006 through to 2011.

Mr C.D. HATTON: That is some time ago, so that has not been monitored for some time. I mean, that is a low base, is it not, \$10 000, successively, maybe, but back to 2011 from 2006? But what has been happening since 2011 until now in ensuring that good practices are being adopted rather than just knowing about it and engaging? Do you have a plan?

Ms Mathews: In terms of a formal monitoring process subsequent to that grants acquittal, it has been more about continuing to engage with them, and particularly, as part of this AFC network, what we are hoping to do—there is a challenge with local government in terms of planning to what extent you, I guess, encourage best practice and promote it versus turning it into a compliance requirement. There is a balance in terms of how they respond to that. We have found that although integrated planning and reporting is mandated, and that was necessary to effect a cultural shift, there is a balance in terms of to what extent you keep mandating the sector to comply. You will always hear, “We’ve got too much to comply with already; why are you making us comply with something else?” So we have to think through, I guess, through consultation with WALGA, LGMA and local governments: what is the best way of actually making this happen? If we are looking at achieving a cultural shift where they actually do want to engage with seniors in a more meaningful way to make sure that the services that they deliver meet the needs of seniors, we need to just balance out how we achieve that. Our experience has been that often that is done best by showcasing best practice and having local governments like the City of Melville, which is just a stand-out in terms of its age-friendly community plan—Age-Friendly Melville—having them get up and actually showcase what they have done and what it has meant for their community. What it has meant is that their customer survey satisfaction is one of the highest, so it comes back in the form of really strong customer satisfaction, and that is what Melville points to. That is probably the more strategic approach in terms of building this message.

Mr C.D. HATTON: And hence you having the forum that showcases that as well?

Ms Mathews: Absolutely, that is what that is about; we are hoping to use City of Melville, and they are very keen to be involved. There is a range of others and what we would like to do is showcase best practice and what it has meant in terms of their community and the seniors in that community, and the feedback from seniors saying, “We really like living in Melville; it’s a great place. We feel listened to.” You can actually see how they have adapted the services to meet them. It might be simple things like making sure the footpaths are always looked after or longer traffic lights. There are just little things that actually make a difference to seniors and, obviously, introducing specific services to seniors, or programs within the community. We are keen to showcase a couple of country local governments. We want to show the diversity of how it can be done.

[11.10 am]

Mr C.D. HATTON: Given that the health department spends a lot of money on seniors and there are a lot of hospitalisations and other services surrounding seniors, do you have much interaction with the health department?

Ms Mathews: Again, through the senior officers group, they are a member of the senior officers group. Through that they have shared with us and others what they are doing in that area.

The CHAIR: Now, you do mention the framework for elder abuse and one of the major issues, I think, in stopping financial elder abuse is a reform of enduring powers of attorney. The Attorney General said he is going to review that and that review, I think, should have been concluded by June. Do you know where that is at?

Dr Gallacher: No, we do not.

Ms Mathews: We do not I am afraid, no; not that particular one.

The CHAIR: So within the framework you have got elder abuse prevention and intervention. Is the Attorney General's department part of your human services group?

Dr Gallacher: I do not believe so. I do not believe that they are.

The CHAIR: All right, we might write to the Attorney and find out where that is at. The other challenge that has been highlighted in public debate recently is the difficulty for older Western Australians to get employment, and again, I just want to know where the framework is at with that and what you see as being appropriate policy responses to change a situation.

Ms Mathews: One area that we have been working on for a time now, and it continues to be an important focus, is the area of volunteering, and certainly we have released a number of, I guess, guidelines, and worked closely with Volunteering WA to ensure there are appropriate opportunities for seniors in the volunteering —

The CHAIR: I am actually talking about paid employment.

Ms Mathews: In terms of paid employment, as I understand it, the Department of Training and Workforce Development has that as an area and we have contributed some information to that department in terms of —

The CHAIR: Are they on your senior officers group?

Ms Mathews: I do not think they are, but I think that they probably should be, so that is a very good point.

Mr C.D. HATTON: When was the senior officers group established and when was the first meeting? Can you recall or give me a guideline?

Dr Gallacher: The first meeting, I believe, occurred late last year, in approximately November, I think.

Mr C.D. HATTON: November 2013?

Ms Mathews: Then it met again in March this year. We will look at reconvening that, in a sense, as required, really, but we want to continue to have regular meetings.

Mr C.D. HATTON: So it is a bit of a think tank, is it? Do those senior officers go away and actually work on anything from those that then are reported back or is it more like a think tank? Do they go away with something to work on and report back?

Dr Gallacher: The goal of the group is primarily about information sharing. The actual senior officers group is something that has come out of the framework and is a way to help better understand and get a picture of the work happening across government in the ageing space, so they will report back on what kinds of activities, framework strategies or processes.

Mr C.D. HATTON: Do you think the two meetings so far have been successful in getting information that is helpful to the seniors of Western Australia in moving forward to the framework or other?

Ms Mathews: I mentioned some of the particular initiatives that have been reported back and I think that they are all very strategic and focussed in terms of what they are looking at delivering. I think there is an advantage in literally bringing people together and sharing in getting visibility around key programs and where possible, obviously, linking in. So certainly out of that there is an opportunity to form partnerships. I mentioned, for example, that we are looking at linking in with regional development and what it is doing in terms of ageing in the bush.

Mr C.D. HATTON: That sounds good, you know, strategic and focused, and I am sure it is establishing some very professional things that are going on, but is it grabbing good ideas and progressing them across the departments? You know, the bright light shines, “Wow, Melville; we should be using that model as an example.”

Ms Mathews: Certainly one of the purposes is to look at who is doing things that are innovative and how that can be taken forward, so again, the forum provides those opportunities.

Mr C.D. HATTON: It sounds like good forum, but I just maybe think it might actually progress something into the future may be differently.

Ms Mathews: I am certainly happy to take improvements on board; there is always scope to build on the work that is being done.

The CHAIR: Thanks for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors and 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 will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense 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. You will of course provide us with that additional information that we requested. Thanks very much for coming.

Hearing concluded at 11.17 am
