

**HANSARD**  
**18 AUGUST 2011**  
**WILLETTON CHILD CARE CENTRE**

*Grievance*

**DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton)** [9.52 am]: I wish to raise a grievance with Minister Day, who is representing the Minister for Community Services. My grievance is on behalf of the children and parents of the Willetton Child Care Centre, located at 41 Burrendah Boulevard in Willetton, who find themselves in a terrible situation of having secured major funding for a much-needed upgrade to the childcare centre but being stymied by the lack of a lease and by arguments between the Department for Communities and the City of Canning, which is inhibiting upgrade work being undertaken.

The Willetton Child Care Centre started about 25 years ago, with land provided by the City of Canning and the buildings and oversight provided by the Department for Communities, or its equivalent. In the 25 years, it has been run very successfully, generally, by a volunteer team from the local community. A couple of years ago the centre had been run down and was not in a good state financially and administratively in terms of its assets.

A local resident, Lindsay Holland, took over the presidency, established a new committee of local parents, and set out about fixing the centre's problems. Mr Holland and his committee have been successful in turning around the situation. I congratulate them very much for their hard work. Under Mr Holland's leadership, the committee also organised the provision of a new roof, air conditioning, repainting of the building and electrical upgrades to improve the centre. I might add that all the funding for that was provided by either the centre or the state through various mechanisms.

Mr Holland and his committee also set about getting the centre's books in good order administratively, and changing the staff. It is now a very pleasant, well-run centre. However, because of a lack of investment over a number of years, there are still some things to do; in particular the kitchen and wet areas require an upgrade to be undertaken both by the City of Canning and the Department of Health.

Mr Holland and his committee, with the help of other people including local members, tried to get some money for the upgrade of the kitchen and wet areas. They were successful in getting a \$132 000 grant from Lotterywest. However, the Lotterywest grant is subject to a lease; that is, for the moneys to be expended, the childcare centre has to have a lease. When Mr Holland sought to find out if a lease existed, he found that the Department for Communities, which held the lease for the building with the City of Canning, had allowed the lease to expire three years ago.

This should have been quickly rectified, but now, some 12 months down the track, there is still an argument between the City of Canning and the Department for Communities about who owns the lease or who should own the buildings and properties, and who has the lease. Despite Mr Holland and me making repeated comments to the mayor and to the Department for Communities, this has now been allowed to stall for four or five months.

The real problem is that if the lease is not clarified, the \$132 000 grant will not be provided. More importantly, I suppose, even if it is eventually provided, the childcare centre closes for only a short period of the year—during Christmas—and if the upgrade work is not undertaken at that time the childcare centre will have to be closed to undertake repairs during the normal operating period.

That will not only cost the childcare centre \$25 000 a week but also displace kids from care. Given the lack of childcare facilities in the area, the children will have no place to go. This is perplexing, to say the least, and, let us say, completely unnecessary.

I put on the record that it is not the childcare centre's fault that the parties who hold the lease, or held the lease, will not allow the centre to upgrade these facilities. It is actually an unnecessary argument between the City of Canning and the Department for Communities. It should be resolved quickly.

I have a very good relationship with the City of Canning, and with the mayor in particular. I understand one of the issues is that he is undertaking an asset review—that is, a review of all the city's assets—which is fully understandable and appropriate. Everybody should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time; that is, they should be able to undertake a review of their assets and resolve issues of leases when they arise, during the review. For some reason this is not being undertaken.

I might add that the issue at hand is the health standards of the kitchen at the childcare centre. It is not just the Department of Health but also the City of Canning's own health inspector who has told the childcare centre that it must upgrade the kitchen as soon as possible. The City of Canning has come to the childcare centre and said that its kitchen is not up to standard and it should do something urgently.

In fact at one time I understand they were going to condemn the childcare centre and shut it down. The childcare centre and the hardworking committee went out and got the money. Now, for a bureaucratic oversight, they are not allowing that upgrade to be undertaken. This is silly; it is putting kids' health at risk.

We know in this place that what counts in the end is the delivery of essential services. No-one would argue that a community childcare centre is anything but an essential service. Sometimes there are issues of overlap and duplication between cities and state, but we should never allow those to get in the way of, first, the delivery of essential services but also the provision of those services in a healthy manner.

I urge the minister to help me resolve the impasse between the Department for Communities and the City of Canning so we can provide these services to the families of Willetton.

**MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Planning)** [9.59 am]: I respond to this grievance on behalf of the Minister for Community Services. I acknowledge the strong interest that the member for Riverton has taken in this issue in his electorate. I am advised that the Willetton Child Care Centre was purpose built in 1986 on land that is leased from the City of Canning, with funding provided at the time by the state and federal governments.

The centre is on land that has a freehold title vested in the City of Canning, and the state government took a 21-year lease over the site, obviously, in 1986. In October last year, the Department for Communities formally advised the City of Canning of its agreement to the terms of a new lease. However, subsequently, the department was advised that the City of Canning's council did not support the renewal of the lease.

It is understood that the council decided to review all its community facilities, including the Willetton Child Care Centre. As far as the Department for Communities is aware, that review has not yet been concluded; nevertheless, the department has remained in contact with the City of Canning over the past year in an attempt to conclude the matter. No outstanding action is required by the department in relation to the lease; in other words, the City of Canning needs to agree to sign the lease that has been agreed to by the Department for Communities.

Over the past two years, the department has replaced the roof and air conditioning at the centre, as well as repainting the building and upgrading the electrical system, at a cost of \$200 000.

Up to a further \$50 000 is earmarked this financial year to assist the centre with upgrading its kitchen facilities, which, from what the member for Riverton has said, is very much needed. It certainly seems to me that the Department for Communities has acted entirely in good faith and is making sure that public funds are allocated to ensure that the standard of the facilities is adequate.

The Willetton Child Care Centre's management committee is responsible for ensuring that all health and safety matters are addressed, and that includes providing a safe and clean kitchen. I do not think anybody is contesting that. I am advised that although it is intended for improvements to be made to the centre, there is currently no identified danger to the users of the facility. From what the member for Riverton has said, there is clearly an overall need and a strong desire to improve the standard of the kitchen facilities.

In relation to the Lotterywest grant that has been made available, I understand that Lotterywest has advised the Department for Communities that, in view of the current impasse over the lease, it would look favourably on extending the current grant if the centre were to make such a request to Lotterywest.

That is the current situation. Apparently, there is an impasse between the City of Canning and the Department for Communities. The information I have been provided with indicates that the Department for Communities has been seeking to get a resolution to the matter to get a lease signed and agreed to so that there can be certainty for the childcare centre's management committee and it can be assured that it can continue to operate.

As I understand it, it is entirely a not-for-profit organisation. Any surplus funds that would be generated from the operation of the centre would be reinvested in the centre to improve the facilities and to ensure a continuation of what are no doubt much-needed childcare services in the Willetton area.

Therefore, I hope that the City of Canning will soon agree to a renewal of the lease. I hope it will come to the party. From all the information I have been provided with, I think the onus is essentially on the City of Canning. The member for Riverton has presented a fair and balanced case for the lease to be agreed to. A not-for-profit organisation runs the centre. As I have said, there is clearly a need for childcare services in the area.

I hope that common sense prevails and that the lease will soon be signed. I will ensure that the Minister for Community Services is made aware of this debate, and if she can play any additional role, I am sure that she would be happy to do so.