

East could get boost

BY ANNA WHITELAW

MANNINGHAM'S community service groups could be in for a cash boost after the state government announced a review into funding.

The Baillieu government is preparing to begin a review of community services in the eastern region this year.

Last Friday, Community Services Minister and Doncaster MLA Mary Wooldridge was expected to meet Doncare and Manningham Community Health Services to discuss the review.

Ms Wooldridge said the \$100,000 review would canvass a range of issues, including the lack of services in the municipality, but could not confirm whether the review would be conducted by the Department of Human Services or by independent consultants.

"We're in the process of drafting terms of reference. What we want to focus on first is making sure we are reviewing the right things, and then we'll establish who is best placed to undertake the work. We do know that DHS will have information that will be critical, and as the minister responsible, I will obviously be overseeing it," she said.

While in opposition last year, Ms Wooldridge commissioned a report that found just 1.4 per cent – or \$3.7 million – of the total \$270 million in DHS funding for the eastern metropolitan region was allocated to services in Manningham. Local residents have to travel to access dental, legal, unemployment, family violence, mental health and housing services, she said. However, she said the review would not look at policy issues, but would rather be "a practical assessment".

"This review will be essentially putting the facts on the table, seeing what services aren't provided in Manningham, how to improve access to regional services and where the gaps are," she said.

Given the scope of the review, Ms Wooldridge said it might not be finished this year. "I want to make sure the community organisations are involved, and I want the community to have an opportunity to have input, so it might take a little while," she said.

Doncare chief executive Doreen Stoves said the review was long overdue, but should be independent. "Manningham has been underfunded for a long time. I hope this review will see organisations like Doncare getting equity of funding," she said.