

## **HOUSING — AFFORDABILITY**

### *Grievance*

**MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont)** [9.56 am]: My grievance today to the Minister for Housing concerns housing affordability. I begin by acknowledging the enormous body of work that the minister has undertaken to date in an effort to address the housing shortage we face in our state, and I commend him for this.

Like many other parts of the state, people in my community of Belmont are finding it tough to make ends meet due to the rising cost-of-living pressures. I often hear from constituents who tell me about their challenges to find and keep affordable housing, especially in the private rental market. In 2021, the census showed that nearly 42 per cent of my electorate are renters. This is significantly higher than the state average of 27 per cent and the national average of 30 per cent. Such a large proportion of renters living in my electorate and the rapid rise in rents, particularly over the last 12 months, puts into perspective the struggles that my community is facing. When families are forced to spend a significant portion of their income on housing, they often find it incredibly difficult to cover other essential items such as food and fuel. This is certainly the story that is reiterated time and again by the Foodbank CEO. People are making the tough decision between whether they feed themselves and their family or pay the rent. Many families are left with no option but to pay exorbitant rents or potentially face the risk of homelessness if they cannot keep up. That is why reform is needed to alleviate some of the burden that renters are facing.

I believe that investing in social housing goes a really long way to support those who are struggling the most. I know that the minister is committed to providing this safety net because he has already overseen the delivery of an additional 1 700 social housing properties, with another 1 000 under contract or construction. Of course, expanding the availability of housing is crucial to address the challenges of affordability, and we need to keep striving to increase supply.

Having incentives to build more homes to both rent and purchase would go a long way in my electorate to help stabilise prices and provide more options for my constituents. Most importantly, I know that those renting in my community are doing it especially tough. I know that people are struggling and any small bump in the road, like a broken-down car or washing machine, means that they fall into arrears and may face eviction. With few options to find other affordable rentals, they have very little housing security.

I acknowledge the work of the Minister for Housing and all that he has achieved in his portfolio. I ask how the Cook government aims to address the challenge of housing affordability in Western Australia. In particular, what are we doing to support those of my constituents who may be struggling to maintain their rental property? I thank the minister for taking my grievance.

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [9.59 am]: I thank the member for Belmont for her grievance. I thank her for her strong commitment to, and her concern for, her constituents who are renters or who are facing cost-of-living issues. There is no doubt that COVID has radically reshaped our housing market and as a result a number of pressures have come into play. There has been a huge increase in demand for housing, particularly as people leave New South Wales and Victoria and make WA their home. We have obviously been squeezed with massive cost escalations in the building sector, skilled labour shortages and global supply chain issues. It is really about all these issues coming together in the post-pandemic era. Our government and, I know, the member is deeply cognisant of the pressures that people face in the housing and rental markets. It is very evident that our government is taking this matter really seriously, but we do not think there is one magic bullet. That is why we are trying to tackle the issue of cost-of living pressures associated with the housing and rental markets on a range of different fronts. Of course, boosting housing supply is a critical way to tackle it because more supply provides relief to the rental market.

Housing is a continuum. We have social and affordable housing and then a range of different stock through that continuum. In this market, we need everything—and I will take everything. I will take housing across the spectrum and across communities. As the member mentioned, the government has made a record investment in social housing with \$2.6 billion in housing and homelessness measures. Our target is to deliver 4 000 homes and we have delivered more than 1 700. There are all different ways of doing it, such as through timber-frame and modular homes, and different ways of procurement. We are trying to help increase density through our new infrastructure fund, which, as I have said before, is really unprecedented when we think about it, but it is needed. That funds the headworks of projects so that they get across the line.

The other part of the equation is homelessness. We have been thinking outside the box, for those people who are vulnerable, including in the member's electorate. Again, we have to try everything. I am deeply proud of the initiatives that we have already implemented, such as Boorloo Bidee Mia, which is an outstanding success; the Murray Hotel, which we bought and converted to transitional accommodation; and the Djuripiny Mia program, which does not get a lot of attention, but in January in this year we said we would focus on purchasing 100 homes.

To date, we have purchased 70 homes to support around 100 people who were previously rough sleeping. We have moved them to homes with a supported landlord through Housing Choices and with intensive wraparound support.

The initiatives that we have just announced in the last week are really at the core of helping people facing cost-of-living pressures with rentals. We announced a \$24.4 million rent relief program, providing up to \$5 000 via very credible not-for-profit organisations. Effectively, if someone is getting into arrears or could be getting into arrears, we will provide up to \$5 000 via these agencies. A co-payment is required, but it is about the expertise to assist those tenants to negotiate with landlords and lock in 12 months. We know that this will help thousands of Western Australians, including some in the member's electorate, and make sure that people do not end up on the streets. This program has been strongly welcomed by Anglicare, Vinnies, Shelter WA and so forth.

Of course, we also announced reforms to Airbnb short-term rentals, known as STR. There will be stronger regulation in the metropolitan area, but we also announced our \$10 000 incentive scheme. As the Minister for Commerce said, even if 50 homes come across from the short-term market to the long-term market, that is 50 homes more that will be housing Western Australians and providing a sense of security and place. To date, around 100 property owners have registered interest to be part of that, which I think is beyond our original expectations. Our stronger regulations will provide more relief to the rental market in the long term. Of course, we also put through planning reforms, which are about streamlining approval processes and are in line with the view of national cabinet.

The member talked about the cost of living. The government has a range of initiatives about providing cost-of-living relief, including electricity credits, the reintroduction of the seniors security rebate, the cost-of-living rebate, capped public transport fares and all the fee-free TAFE courses.

I assure the member that her concerns are heard and I deeply appreciate her strong advocacy for her constituency. As I said, we have only to look at the last week when we announced the rental relief scheme and an incentive scheme to get people to move their properties to the long-term rental market to see that the government is listening, engaging and responding. We are also trying to think outside the box to deal with the issue. I think housing is the critical issue that is now being faced across Australia as a result of the pandemic. Again, I thank the member for the grievance and assure her that we are doing everything we can.