

**Division 35: Communities — Services 7 to 9, Housing; Homelessness, \$1 151 511 000 —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Housing; Homelessness.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr L. McIvor, Deputy Director General, Housing and Assets.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms R. Green, Deputy Director General, Community Services.

Ms L. Kalasopatan, Assistant Director, Management Accounting.

Ms E. Colombera, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

Mr P. Isaachsen, Assistant Director General, Governance, Performance and Insights.

Ms J. Herring, Executive Director, Office of Homelessness.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business on Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I call the member for North West Central.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Thank you, minister. I refer to page 522, “Social Housing and Homelessness”, under the seventh point, which states —

In September 2021, the Government boosted social housing investment by a record \$875 million to deliver a range of outcomes, including funding the delivery of 3,300 homes and stemming the attrition of dwellings from social housing pool by carrying out refurbishment and maintenance work to many thousands more.

How many houses out of the 3 300 are being built in Carnarvon and in the Gascoyne in general? How many houses are being refurbished as well in towns like Carnarvon?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** What year is the member talking about, sorry?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Out of those 3 300 homes, which were built because of a record investment of \$875 million into housing, how many new houses are being built in Carnarvon and the Gascoyne in general—that is, Exmouth; Carnarvon, obviously; Shark Bay, Denham; and Gascoyne Junction? How many houses are being refurbished, under that seventh point, in Carnarvon?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not have a breakdown of the 3 300 homes by town or region. I can provide it by way of supplementary information, but this will be a forecast because it will depend on a number of different factors, in particular —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** It is out of that 3 300, so if it is a forecast, it is a forecast.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes. It is a forecast of how many new social housing homes will be provided as part of the 3 300 new social housing stock over the next four years.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** And how many are going to be refurbished in Carnarvon as well.

**The CHAIR:** Can the minister repeat all of that, please, for clarity?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will provide by way of supplementary information how many of the 3 300 forecast new homes will be in the Gascoyne, in particular Carnarvon, and how many existing social housing stock will be refurbished.

[*Supplementary Information No B6.*]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My question is along a similar line. I refer to page 520 and halfway down there is “Social Housing Economic Recovery Package—New Builds”. There is \$15.9 million to 2022–23 and \$11 million in the 2023–24 out years. How many homes does the minister intend to construct in this period out of that \$27 million, or is that part of the 3 300 homes?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It is all part of the 3 300, as I understand.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** So we will receive that in that supplementary information. Minister, how many homes were delivered under the scheme in 2021–22 from the \$6 million that was spent?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Is that of SHERP?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** On the same line, there was \$6 million estimated actual in 2021–22. How many homes were built with that money?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is my understanding of what I have in front of me. As the member can expect, there are a number of different subprograms and other programs, and I do not want to mislead the Parliament. What I can say is that of the 3 300 homes that have been committed to, 400 new homes have been either purchased or completed so far. In relation to SHERP, I can provide that answer by way of supplementary information, because there are different categories and I cannot hand on heart explain those categories. I would say that there has been 400 completed new properties as of 30 April 2022. There were a number under contract as well, but we can provide on the SHERP project more details of how many SHERP projects are completed or under contract for this financial year by way of supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No B7.*]

[6.40 pm]

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 528, under “Expiration of Significant Movements”, paragraph 3, which states —

The 2021–22 Estimated Actual result —

And line four —

A recent increase to income eligibility will also likely add to the public housing waitlist, as more people will be deemed eligible.

When was this change made to the eligibility criteria?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The income changes occurred in March.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** What is the income eligibility currently?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There is quite a detailed fact sheet, which I can read out, but it will take a bit of time.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Can the minister table it?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not think I can table documents in estimates.

**The CHAIR:** No, the minister cannot.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** But I can refer the member to the website.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Yes, do that; that is fine.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It is online, so if the member looks up Department of Communities income limits, it goes through it. It is just that there is metro, country, single, double, people with disability and it will take me the next 10 minutes to read it out.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** What was it prior to the change? Does that have that information?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not have this with me. Sorry; the difference is between \$20 and \$25 a week, depending on whether it was single or double.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Why was it changed? What is the reasoning?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It was changed because there could be a situation in which people on disability pensions or on other pensions could become ineligible. As a result, we had to lift the income limit to ensure that people who already have access to public housing do not fall off or become ineligible.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** I refer the minister back to page 520 and the McGowan government’s commitment to regional Western Australia—the regional renewal program. Can the minister outline how that program is helping to improve social housing stock in our regions as well as growing our regional centres?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, there are a number of projects that I know Minister Carey is very excited about delivering. They look at some older areas in Spalding in Geraldton, Spencer Park in Albany and Withers in Bunbury. I have

visited Withers in Bunbury and Spalding in Geraldton, where we brought in a new roundabout. Those areas are where we have very old housing stock. Basically, some revitalisation and some renewal will make it much more attractive for people to live there, and people will want to move into those areas. A lot of work is underway. In Spalding 14 refurbishments have commenced and a number of refurbishments just completed. In Spencer Park, two refurbishments commenced, with eight new units in the design phase, and in Withers, two properties were awarded a contract for refurbishment. I acknowledge that some of the community amenity also needs to be improved, plus road accesses and so forth. It really is about making the existing suburb more attractive and refurbishing the existing homes to make it far more attractive and for people to live.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Right down the bottom on page 539, the second last item is “Safe Night Spaces”. I note that the funding after this budget year, going forward, seems to have disappeared and there is no surety of funding beyond this coming year. Why has this service, which was designed to protect women, been cut?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I recall this one. This funding was approved in December 2020. There was \$4.3 million to be invested over two years to support the city of Perth’s homelessness program. The program funded some safe night spaces. It was then meant to contribute funding to Common Ground, and some of the increases in Common Ground, and we took over that funding for Common Ground plus the increase in funding. Therefore, there has been a lot of different flows of funding for homelessness. But we are looking at that \$4.3 million and are redirecting it towards other homelessness initiatives. That work is underway. As I said, there are myriad different programs. There are the safe night spaces, which the city helped fund, and as a result we contributed another \$8 million to Common Ground. We fully funded Common Ground with the federal government, as I recall. We also did the homeless Boorloo Bidee Mia in the city. We did other projects and we are also retaining this money for other initiatives.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Further to the Boorloo Bidee Mia, which also almost seems to fall into the same category three or four lines above, why has this service also failed to obtain funding for the out years of 2024–25 et cetera?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sorry. This is not the full funding. There is continued funding for Boorloo Bidee Mia. It is ongoing and fully funded. This is in relation to a specific grant and subsidy, which we will try and find what that relates to, but there is ongoing funding for that project.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It finishes in 2023–24, minister.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are two sets of funding; we are just trying to clarify. There is the ongoing operational funding, but I am just seeking clarification about why that does not exist in the forward estimates. There is ongoing baseline funding. This funding was for specific initiatives, specific programs, targeting particular cohorts of people—an additional investment to get the programs up and running. But I suspect, if there is further targeting, there will be other funding available. But there is ongoing funding for it; it is just that this is for specific initiatives. I might ask the director general to mention that specific initiative that this line item refers to.

[6.50 pm]

**Mr M. Rowe:** Thank you very much. As the minister has indicated, there is underlying funding for Boorloo Bidee Mia going forward. The grants that are mentioned there are additional funding to allow Boorloo Bidee Mia to secure some more staff so that it can take in a particular cohort of people. This is a low-barrier entry service for homelessness and that means that the people who come into that service often present with a variety of complex needs. We have worked very closely with the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation to determine how best to maximise that facility and make sure that we can safely get the right and correct number of people in there, given their requirements, so that additional funding allows them to employ additional staff to do that. Going forward, we also have a major commissioning program for all of our homelessness services across Western Australia. That will happen over the course of the next two years, and that provides another opportunity to look at funding beyond this period for services like Boorloo Bidee Mia into the future—noting, as the minister said, that into the future we will have two new Common Ground facilities that will have been constructed in both Perth and Mandurah. We will be looking at the future of Boorloo Bidee Mia in the context of the future commissioning of homelessness services for the whole of the state.

**Ms M.J. HAMMAT:** I refer to page 522, paragraph 9 in the McGowan government’s modular build program. Can the minister outline how funding in this area has helped to speed up delivery despite challenging market conditions?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Minister Carey is very passionate about alternative forms of building. We see modular build, particularly in parts of regional WA, as a much quicker way of delivering homes and supporting WA businesses. We aim to deliver 150 social homes to regional areas across WA, and some are already being delivered six months after being contracted. Importantly, as we said, the build time can reduce significantly. The minister has contracted for 36 module homes, worth \$16.5 million, of which we have seen delivered to Tom Price and the Kimberley, with others contracted to the Pilbara, great southern, south west, wheatbelt and midwest regions. We see this as an increased market and an increased opportunity to deliver social housing, particularly in regional WA, in a much quicker time frame, whilst supporting WA businesses.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 522, under “Social Housing and Homelessness”. The seventh paragraph states that there are 3 300 homes out of a record investment of \$875 million. How many social houses does the state have, and will have, in the 2022–23 period? What is the total number of homes that the minister anticipates will be put on the register over a period of four years? How many houses will be sold over the course of the next 12 months or the financial year of 2022–23?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** In relation to the social housing program, there is the direct social public housing, which the minister will be delivering together with grants to community organisations. One area that we have increased more recently is a specific grants program to create more community housing. The housing diversity pipeline is another way of trying to deliver more social housing. The target is 3 300 homes, but we also expect to deliver other affordable and social housing. In relation to the specific question, which was how many houses we currently have and also the sale, Minister Carey has outlined a number of times that we are looking at not selling as aggressively as in previous times, to try to hold on to stock and refurbish where possible—noting, that in some instances, refurbishment is just not possible. But I might refer to Mr McIvor to provide some more comments.

**Mr L. McIvor:** Thank you, minister. Yes, specifically in regard to sales, there has been a significant reduction in sales. There have been only 15 sales in the year to date of which a small number of those are provided for, and sold to, social housing tenants to enable them to enter home ownership. As far as the 3 300 homes and the total asset, there will be some level of attrition from time to time through the program, as in any large-scale program. There are approximately 42 980 properties in the social housing stock at present, with 35 000 of those being public housing and about 7 400 of those forming part of the community housing component.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Out of the 3 300 homes that the minister anticipates to build, can the minister provide a breakdown of not where those houses are going, but a global figure of metropolitan Perth and regional Western Australia?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The 3 300 homes will be delivered through a variety of methods; for example, spot purchasing is being undertaken and will continue to be undertaken, so we will strive to deliver as many as possible. I do not think that we have a target breakdown. The way I would describe the spot purchasing is some of that will be the opportunistic purchasing of more social housing in a particular town at any given point. The waitlist demand is currently about 70 per cent metro and 30 per cent regional, and the level of building activity will be targeted at that. I note, though, that in some instances in regional WA there are some opportunities to purchase on the market; however, we do not want to crowd out private sector investment, too, so we have to be careful about all these factors. If we can source a diversity of housing supply—for example, smaller units—the department may go and undertake some spot purchasing in the appropriate areas, and that may also affect the numbers, ultimately.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** I have a question on Keystart, which I have been eager to ask. I refer to page 544. Can the minister outline how the Keystart changes and the range of reforms will help improve housing affordability, increase social housing supply and help Western Australians get in their first home?

**The CHAIR:** No, sorry, member. That is under Keystart. That is not under this division, so you cannot ask that question. We can slowly move through this and I shall put the question.

**The appropriation was recommended.**