

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING — MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS

Motion

Resumed from 17 June on the following motion moved by Hon Samantha Rowe —

That the Council calls on the government to conduct an independent and transparent inquiry into the Department of Housing with reference to the response time for maintenance and repairs of Homeswest tenants' housing.

HON AMBER-JADE SANDERSON (East Metropolitan) [1.07 pm]: I rise to continue my contribution to the debate on this motion moved by Hon Samantha Rowe. Before the winter recess, we heard the Minister for Housing speak in response to the motion, and the minister indicated that the government would not be supporting this motion, which is a great shame, because it is not a motion condemning anyone; it is not a motion condemning the government—unusually—and it is not a motion that is designed to attack any particular member of the government. It is a motion that seeks to have an independent and open inquiry into the response time for maintenance and repairs. Given the litany of issues around the contracting model that the department has moved to, I think an inquiry would be useful, because I have not seen any genuine response from either of the major inquiries that have been conducted into the contracting model for the housing maintenance issue. The government seems to have skirted that, and I certainly do not believe that the minister addressed the issues with the head contractor model in his response to this motion.

The background to this is that the Department of Housing itself previously undertook maintenance services through various trades under a direct contracting model. The department contracted directly when maintenance was required in houses. This was based on regional branches issuing job orders directly to local contractors in the regions. Those regional branches had direct control over the contractors doing the work. In 2007, there was a review by the department of its maintenance operations and, following the review, a new contract model under which head contracts would be awarded in 10 regions across the state was nominated and due to be implemented by 1 July 2010. This was a shift from the regional offices having direct control over the contractors. The department was moving to what was essentially a subcontracting model, with the provision of a head contractor that subcontracted out the work. As a result of moving to the head contracting model, all the existing maintenance contracts expired on 30 June 2010, and all maintenance requests were processed under the new model. The head contractor maintenance model is now based on three head contractors that manage the maintenance services for the department's 10 regions. The head contractors manage the workload and appoint subcontractors to undertake the work. There are essentially four stages to this contract model: the Department of Housing, the head contractor, the subcontractor and the people who are having the work done on their house. The three contractors operating across the regions are Transfield Services, which operates in south metro, south east metro, north metro, the midwest, the Pilbara and the great southern; Lake Maintenance (Western Australia) Pty Ltd, which operates in the Kimberley, and the wheatbelt and goldfields regions; and Programmed Facility Management Pty Ltd, which operates in the south west region.

In 2012, two inquiries and reports into the head contracting model were conducted, one by KPMG and one by the Auditor General, and I will go into both of them. In general, KPMG conducted an internal audit, which criticised the government for poor decision-making processes. This included failing to have a proper business case and opting for the full implementation of the contract model when only a trial was recommended in the first place. The audit also found that the new model was worse for timeliness and led to a lack of accountability and quality, which is what happens when we move to a contracting model involving a string of subcontractors; there is less accountability and transparency the further we go down the line. In 2012, the Auditor General handed down a scathing report that criticised the head contractor model on the basis that it had been poorly implemented and administered and had led to overcharging and noncompliant work. There is a problem with this model, hence the opposition's support for a motion calling on the government to undertake a transparent and open review of this model. The Auditor General's report was handed down in September 2012, and the headline essentially read, "There is a lack of management oversight, very poor implementation in the first instance and very poor management of risk." The Auditor General's report states —

The problems with the transition to the new model became apparent shortly after the contracts started on 1 July 2010. Complaints increased; tenants and Housing staff advised that maintenance work was not up to standard or not being done at all. There was a backlog of unpaid invoices for completed work, and it was taking longer for vacant properties to become available for rental.

That is unacceptable. Our public housing waiting list has blown out exponentially. Families live with other family members because they have nowhere to live while they wait for public housing, and some people live in cars because this contract model is failing to deliver maintenance on time. Houses are sitting empty while new

tenants wait for the contractors and subcontractors to make the necessary repairs before they can move into those houses. The report continues —

Many of the problems were a direct result of the incompatibility of Housing's and the Head Contractors' information systems, essential for issuing, invoicing and paying for maintenance work.

That is a pretty basic management issue for any department. It continues —

... contractual arrangements and contract management under the HCMM was inadequate from the outset. Although Housing had previously managed contracts, it did not have a comprehensive contract management framework in place to deal with the new model. There was no contract management plan, nor were there Service Level Agreements ... specifying Head Contractor performance levels.

There were no key performance indicators! The department entered into a contract with the head contractor with essentially no KPIs. The report continues —

Further, there was no guidance for either Housing staff or Head Contractors on the processes and procedures to be followed to meet contractual obligations.

The Auditor General also found that the state was overcharged and that work was noncompliant. The report states —

Review of maintenance work between July and December 2010 and between December 2011 and May 2012 has identified both over and under charging, as well as some non-compliant work. At 17 August 2012, \$3.36 million in possible overpayments to Head Contractors or non-compliant job orders had been identified ...

That is over \$3 million in overpayments! We talk about this government's waste and misdirected spending. This is \$3 million in overpayments and we are still waiting for another \$1 million to be recouped. The report continues —

Housing is still negotiating —

I will be interested to see the outcome of this —

with Head Contractors on the other \$2.39 million.

That is taxpayers' money that has gone to the head contractor for essentially not doing anything. A review of job orders issued between January and November was completed, which meant that overpayments and noncompliant job orders were likely to increase and require further review. The report further states —

Housing defines non-compliance ... as:

- over or undercharges ...
- using the wrong SoR item, and or quantity when issuing the job order
- quality of completed work is questioned after payment
- no description for materials claimed ...
- Head Contractor system errors where line items have been cancelled then recreated
- wrongly claiming for after-hours job orders
- variations to SoR items without proper authorisation.

This goes to the heart of contract management and the department's capacity to actually manage these contractors, which is entirely missing, according to this report. Another finding by the Auditor General is that the effectiveness of Housing's corrective action has been mixed. The report states —

... some corrective action was not well thought through and the effects are still being assessed. For example, from mid November 2010 to early November 2011, approximately \$50 million of maintenance work was not inspected prior to authorising payment.

No-one actually went to see whether the work was done and, if it was done, whether it was up to scratch. In one year, works totalling \$50 million were not inspected. A cheque was just handed over to the maintenance contractor! It goes on —

... Housing has identified \$3.36 million in potential overcharges —

As I mentioned —

... a year's worth of job orders is still being reviewed. The full effects of suspending prepayment checks will not be known until all relevant job orders have been reviewed

This report is two to three years old. I will be very interested to see the minister respond to this to see what has been put in place to resolve these issues and whether the state has recouped the \$3.36 million that it gave to the head contractor unnecessarily. Another finding from the Auditor General is that KPIs do not show quality and are still not being met. The report states —

So far the KPIs only monitor timeliness and not the quality of the maintenance work or its cost effectiveness.

The contract says that if a person turns up on time but does not do the work or does a botch job, they still meet the KPI! What kind of contract is that? It is not a contract that I or any of us would enter into for work on our house. Why is it appropriate for people who live in public housing to put up with such a mediocre maintenance service? The report continues —

While the timeliness of maintenance work has improved, targets are still not being met.

It later goes on —

A number of complaints about possible roting or fraud were referred to us. These involved concerns regarding a significant number of reticulation jobs that were not completed ...

...

Housing's resolution of the non-compliant reticulation work took several months and eventually involved some of the work being contracted to another company ... this matter should have been resolved faster ... Housing had not sought legal advice or considered involving the police in this matter.

The work was not done. The Department of Housing paid the contractor and said, "Oh, well, we've moved on", and then paid another contractor to do the same work that did not get done in the first place.

The KPMG internal audit report is no more flattering than the Auditor General's report on this contracting model. In its annual report, the department reported in 2010–11 that it had experienced difficulties following the introduction of the new model. The report continues —

These difficulties were ascribed to process and systems issues impacting on service performance. The Department also noted that a level of stakeholder resistance was experienced.

I am not surprised about that. I think a level of stakeholder resistance was experienced. If a department is including that in its annual report, it is bureaucratic speak for "the people living in these houses hate this new model". Things are not getting fixed. As anyone who works in an electorate office knows, we all receive complaints about Homeswest's housing maintenance. I am sure not only members on this side experience that; every single member will receive those complaints. It continues —

A re-implementation project, commencing approximately August 2010, was established to address these difficulties.

The objective of KPMG's audit was to look at whether there was an appropriate business case; the head contractor model improved current or previous maintenance arrangements; it was cost effective; the head contractor management model provided the department with the means of measuring and driving improved maintenance outcomes; existing contracts and service level agreements provided adequate controls and performance monitoring; and the performance measurement metrics are appropriate.

It was an important review given that hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money has been invested in this contracting model. However, the findings of the KPMG's internal review are not flattering. There was no formal business case for the decision to implement the head contractor model. The report states —

Internal Audit were unable to identify evidence to confirm that different options associated with the implementation had been considered; and that an analysis of each business option had been performed.

Internal Audit were unable to identify evidence to support that the expected benefits and dis-benefits were analysed ... to allow an implementation decision ...

... neither the Procurement Plan nor the briefing note includes actual figures or costs, and only states generalised assumptions of savings.

Another finding is that the decision-making process was not transparent. The report states further —

... the Procurement Plan specifically recommended that a trial of the model be piloted ... to test the validity of the assumptions and expected benefits.

There was no concrete evidence at this point that the contractor model would improve the service, and it was recommended that a trial go ahead to test those assumptions. That would have been a sensible way to proceed. Homeswest did not take that option. The report continues —

... the decision that was made ... for the Head Contractor Model to be implemented in full, and not on a trial basis.

This is a good finding —

... several key documents and files were not able to be provided to Internal Audit, due to misplacement or loss. Several files have been marked as “missing” in ... (the Department’s electronic document management system), and certain key reports do not appear to have been stored electronically, and associated hard copies have been misplaced.

That is extraordinary. With such a litany of, let us call them, “accidents”—I am sure none of those documents were shredded—and a litany of issues and problems and the department going against sensible advice in not implementing these recommendations, we could expect some heads to roll and that there would be some serious ministerial accountability. If that were the case, we would have seen heads roll over this massive misuse and, at times, fraudulent use of taxpayers’ money through this head contractor model, but we have not seen any of that. We have not seen any ministerial accountability around this at all. We have seen this obviously tough portfolio get shuffled from minister to minister so that no-one can probably recall who was in charge when certain decisions were made. It has been handballed.

From a cost perspective the two models are comparable. The report continues —

... the comparisons performed by Internal Audit ... indicate that the costs (applying consistent base) are broadly comparable between the models.

The report makes further findings. From a timeliness perspective, the head contractor model is worse; it takes longer for maintenance to be done. From a quality perspective, the contractors are not accountable for quality work. We have seen that; there are no quality KPIs, only timeliness KPIs. The current head contractor model KPIs do not allow for measurement of the quality of the work performed by the contractors. Wow! It is extraordinary that we have not heard a response from the minister to these two reports, nor have we been given an update of the Department of Housing’s position on their findings. It is all very well to read dry reports or to read the Auditor General’s report but, as demonstrated by my colleagues Hon Samantha Rowe and Hon Stephen Dawson, this litany of mismanagement manifests in people’s homes. It means their homes are not properly secure. People cannot get broken windows fixed, their ovens do not work, they do not have boundary fences and they live with asbestos. I have been dealing with a constituent in Mirrabooka with two small children who has asbestos in her house. The department continues to send contractor after contractor, who say, “It’s okay; we’ll gaffer tape it up.” That is how this mismanagement at the departmental level manifests in people’s homes.

It is not fair. It is a great privilege to live in public housing, but it is also appropriate that the government provide quality social housing. As Hon Samantha Rowe said, “If something is broken in my house I ring someone to get it fixed.” If I am not getting any hot water, I ring a plumber and get it fixed so that my children can have hot showers and we can function as a household. When my oven is not working, I ring someone. Public housing tenants do not have that choice. They have to go to their local manager, who then goes to the head contractor, who then goes to the subcontractor, who then, if they are lucky and on time, goes out to the house to resolve the issue. No-one comes to inspect the work to make sure it has been done appropriately. The subcontractor is paid, but if the work is not done appropriately and the hot water system or the oven is not fixed, the tenant has to start the entire process again.

Before I conclude, I want to touch on some of the issues around housing services. This was highlighted in a recent Auditor General’s report. It is the department’s responsibility to deliver power, water, wastewater repair and maintenance services in a number of Aboriginal communities through the Remote Area Essential Services program. Since 2005, the Department of Housing has used a contracted program manager to supervise regional service providers. The manager then separately contracts out again. The Auditor General identified that housing has engaged in poor contracting practices that have led to the contracted program manager not properly supervising conditions in remote communities. The contracts do not contain any KPIs or penalty clauses. Numerous problems have arisen relating to housing maintenance, and even drinking water in some communities does not meet Australian Standards.

The Auditor General handed down the report “Delivering Essential Services to Remote Aboriginal Communities” on 6 May this year. It too is very unflattering about the Department of Housing. The minister needs to take full responsibility for this. The Auditor General found that there was poor contracting and the department was not getting any value for money. Service providers often dealt directly with the Department of Housing so the contractors responsible for the contracting did not know what issues were faced. Housing has

made cost-based choices that limit what is asked of the project manager. The manager's activities are limited to what is directly specified in the contract, and as a result they will do absolutely nothing outside that contract. The report states that Housing's contracts with service providers are deficient. We have seen evidence of that. KPIs were not finalised and contracts do not contain penalty clauses. Housing was aware of these deficiencies before it signed the contract. Housing signed contracts it knew were completely deficient. The report states that poor oversight means that Housing may have overpaid for some services. Housing does not know whether the right communities are in the program. The program has been running since 2008, and many of the communities have been brought up to a standard at which they do not qualify for the program. That funding should have been redirected to those communities that would qualify to be in the program. The report states that services to communities are not coordinated and have increased in cost. In some communities and regions, Housing was awarded separate contracts for home maintenance and program services, which limit the maintenance issues that tradespeople can address on any one property.

Another finding in relation to the provision of services is that the quality of drinking water often falls short of Australian standards. That is an absolute disgrace. The report states also —

Tests detected either E. coli or Naegleria microbes in at least one community in every month in the two years to June 2014. Both of these can cause serious illness and are ... fatal.

That is a disgrace—not even providing clean, safe drinking water. These communities have come under sustained criticism and attack by the Premier and other parts of this state government, and the federal government, for their so-called inability to be sustainable and functional, and the government cannot even provide clean, safe drinking water.

We have seen a litany of mismanagement in the Department of Housing in the implementation of the contracting model and also in the implementation of the contracting. That has essentially resulted in a litany of complaints, issues and errors for people living in public housing.

There have been a number of media articles over the last year or so, and I will run through some of the headlines. An article in *The West Australian* in 2014 headed “830 Homes Stay Empty” states that more than 830 taxpayer-owned homes are empty, while 20 472 tenants remain on the public housing list. It states also that even applicants who are on the priority list—those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness—have to wait an average of 15 months before they can get into a house.

Hon Samantha Rowe: Not good enough.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: No, it is not good enough. It is not good enough that the government is entering into contracts with contractors who are not turning around those houses quickly enough to make them available to people.

The article states also that at the end of last month—that is, in November of last year—363 public homes were vacant because they were in between tenancies, and 472 were unlettable because they were undergoing major maintenance or required extensive refurbishment. They were waiting for maintenance contractors to come in and do the work.

An article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* headed “Provider fears tenant pain” states that the outgoing manager of remote community housing in the goldfields says that outsourcing contracts to a national provider is another example of management bleed from the region, which could have consequences for public housing tenants. There is also an article in the *Fremantle Herald* headed “Homeswest takes a year just to fix a fence”, and an article in the *Geraldton Guardian* headed “Housing repair schedule blown out by cuts: union”. It goes on and on.

This is a pattern of this government's deep desire to relieve itself of public services. Let us call it that. We will not call it ideology. We will not call it that. It is a deep desire by this government to relieve itself of public services and to privatise those services. However, the government has taken an absolutely inept approach to entering into those contracts. The government has not properly resourced contract management areas in departments. The government does not have the resources and the skills to negotiate the best possible outcomes on behalf of taxpayers—the people who are paying for these contracts. We have seen that with the Fiona Stanley Hospital Serco contract, which has come under enormous criticism from the Department of Health itself in its own internal review. The head contractor model in the Department of Housing is a classic case of privatisation gone horribly wrong. It has cost the state millions and millions of dollars; it is not delivering the outcomes that we want to see; and, frankly, public housing tenants deserve a lot better.

I hope the minister will respond again to some of those issues around this contracting model. I hope also that the government will reconsider its decision not to support this motion and will support having an independent and transparent review of this contracting model.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion be agreed to. Before I call Hon Darren West, can I acknowledge and welcome into the public gallery of the Legislative Council the year 5 and 6 students and staff

from Kalgoorlie Primary School. Welcome to the Legislative Council and the Parliament of Western Australia. You are obviously in Perth for an educational visit, and we appreciate you taking an interest in the Parliament. Enjoy your visit.

Members: Hear, hear!

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural) [1.34 pm]: I also reiterate the welcome to the students and staff from Kalgoorlie Primary School. As a regional member it is great to see people from country areas coming down and having a firsthand look at Parliament.

The issue that we are debating today is a very regional issue as well as a city issue, but from my perspective as a regional member of course I will be focusing more on the regional implications of this motion that has been brought to the house. I acknowledge and thank Hon Samantha Rowe for bringing this very important issue forward. The motion states —

That the Council calls on the government to conduct an independent and transparent inquiry into the Department of Housing with reference to the response time for maintenance and repairs of Homeswest tenants' housing.

I must say that as a country member I am very, very disappointed at the lack of care by the government and by the minister. I would have thought that a motion like this would extract bipartisan support, because of course we should be looking to better manage the housing stock in Western Australia and at better ways to improve the life of those who depend on the housing stock. So, it is very, very disappointing. I never gave it a second thought when the motion was first put before me that there would not be support right across the house for what Hon Samantha Rowe is calling for in this motion, as there is on many other occasions. It is not always that we will disagree. However, certainly on this issue we do, and I think it is a terrible shame that the government's lack of care is here for all to see.

It is also obvious from some of the comments made by my colleagues and by previous speakers that this issue is a fiscal mess. It is becoming more and more apparent why Western Australia is finding itself on the fiscal scrap heap, with this government's loss of credit rating, and record debt. It is because this government cannot manage essential public services. I have a lot of contact with people who use the government housing system. Most of them are good tenants who for various reasons have to rely on the public housing provider. However, many of them feel as though they are regarded as second-class citizens by this government, simply because they rely on the state for housing. The demand for public housing is growing, as we know. Just over 20 000 people are waiting for state housing. That equates in many instances to a 15-month waiting list. The demand is growing. We do not have to be Einstein to work that out. More and more people are requiring these services. As the government continues to cut services to our most vulnerable and our most disadvantaged, more and more people will be forced to depend on the state for housing. This is, therefore, a very real issue. Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson made the very good point about how the mismanagement by this government is having a very real impact on the day-to-day lives of people and the place in which people live and spend most of their time.

The single most common issue on which people come through the door of my electorate office in Geraldton is housing. My amazingly talented electorate officer has a social work background, and my office has built up a very good rapport with many of the service providers and referral agencies in the community, and also with the Department of Housing office in town that services a massive area of the midwest under sometimes difficult and challenging circumstances. I have the utmost respect for the Department of Housing employees who are charged with dealing with many of these problems. They are doing a tremendous job.

As has been pointed out, once again the government in its infinite wisdom and with its deluded notion that it can handle money and do things better than any previous government has gone ahead with this head contractor model. As has been pointed out by many of my colleagues, massive issues have arisen as a result of that head contractor model. I will talk about those in more detail. The maintenance regime is part of a severely flawed model. Everybody can see it except the Liberal–National government. The latest minister to be lumbered with the portfolio, and who is trying to clean up the mess, is relatively new in that capacity. I do not blame him for the shambles that he has inherited. I think he would be filthy on many of his cabinet colleagues who have tried and failed miserably in this area because the government just does not care about what it is like to live in a state-provided house.

This flawed model results in many things, as has been pointed out, that I will touch on later in my contribution. It has resulted in houses being empty for lengthy periods. I think the latest count shows that over 8 000 homes are vacant for various reasons, but the major reason is delays in maintenance. I heard recently—anecdotally—that this government is even using royalties for regions money to maintain and upgrade houses. I do not think it was ever the intent to use the royalties for regions scheme to prop up the maintenance of the state housing supply but that is what I hear anecdotally on the ground in regional communities. I think that is an indictment of the

government; it cannot even maintain its own state housing stock. It relies on external funding that was earmarked for other significant projects. Royalties for regions money, which is used to develop regions, creates economic development in regions, attracts people to the regions and retains people in the regions, and is now used to maintain yet another core government responsibility by upgrading and maintaining the housing stock.

I also wanted to give some anecdotal evidence about people I have worked with extensively. Unlike members of this government, these people are very caring souls and work extensively with people who are having difficulties getting housing and staying in that housing. I talk to, and deal with, such people a lot. They are mostly people from outside the Department of Housing network, such as social workers who work with Aboriginal organisations and referral agencies that are based right around the state. These people see the failure of the state housing model and the failure of the government to maintain and look after people's houses properly first hand. I spoke to one lady who has worked with a referral agency for four years. The number one issue for that client base is the flawed housing model and the maintenance on their homes. I am told that when someone who is living in a state-owned house wants to report a maintenance issue, they must call a hotline number. The common experience of tenants is that there is up to a 40-minute wait to get through on this hotline number. If their hot water system is leaking, an electrical device has malfunctioned, a step is broken or something else is causing danger and they want to get through and report it, they spend 40 minutes on the phone. It is not funny, but the common anecdote is that it is quicker to get through to Centrelink. That gives us a bit of an idea how frustrated people get. If it is quicker to get through to Centrelink than it is to report sometimes dangerous faults or problems in someone's home, there is something wrong with the maintenance model. Of course, there is something wrong with the government's maintenance model but it does not seem to care about that, so getting through to Centrelink is easier than getting through to report maintenance issues.

Many people say that maintenance of the houses is not up to scratch. There are situations in which people are offered a state-owned house and the maintenance has been carried out so appallingly badly or is so far behind and not up to scratch, they do not feel as though they can move their family into that house. Of course, they then have to go back to the bottom of the list. They are discriminated against because the house they were offered when they got to the top of the list had been so poorly maintained that they must decide whether to move into a poorly maintained house with serious issues that will possibly be rectified while they are living in that house or go back to the bottom of the list and wait another several months for another opportunity to come up. If we put ourselves in that position, which I know members opposite will probably have great difficulty doing, of having a choice between moving into a house that has deteriorated and has obviously not been maintained or not taking a house at all, we would understand why those people feel like second-class citizens—vulnerable, compromised and powerless. These are their options—take this house that we have been unable to maintain in a fit state for various reasons or go and find some other housing. That is a very harsh and callous way to treat people who are disadvantaged and vulnerable for whatever reason. I do not think it is right to blame people for requiring state-owned housing. People require assistance and help and a bit of a lift for a range of reasons, many of which are not of their own doing or their own fault. I do not think they should feel that it is their fault that they need to take a house and when they do, they are made to feel powerless, vulnerable and uncared for. It is such a shame that we do not have some bipartisan agreement that we need to review that situation.

I know of one lady with two small children who was allocated a house that was not up to standard. It had gas leaks. She could smell gas in the house. There were sparks coming out of light globes on the back veranda and there was rubbish under the house. Her choice was to take that house or go on the bottom of the list. That is a disgrace. This is one of the most developed, wealthiest countries in the world. We have the highest income per capita in the world, yet we treat people in such a way. Government members really need to look at themselves. Another tenant was allocated a house in which an element was not working. It took six months to get fixed. Not only did she have to wait 40 minutes longer on the phone than she would have to wait to get through to Centrelink, but also it took six months to get that element fixed. She had to rely on the people next door to help her with basic cooking tasks while she waited to get her oven fixed. They all have the same common story. All these problems arose as soon as maintenance services were privatised. Everyone says the same thing—that it used to be better when the problems were rectified directly by the Department of Housing or Homeswest. Once it went to this head contractor model, with its four levels of bureaucracy, that is when the problems and delays started and the care factor became zilch. It is fairly easy for the government to say, "Don't blame us; blame the contractor." That is the whole problem—looking for someone else to blame rather than accepting responsibility for such an important public asset that has such an impact on people's lives. It is easy for government members to blame someone other than themselves and not deal with the problem. We see this from this government all the time. It is easy to blame somebody else. It is always somebody else's fault. Some really unfortunate comments were made about road safety in the past couple of days. It is always someone else's fault, never the responsibility of government. It is wearing thin in the community. I am sure that the community will respond accordingly as the government teeters towards the next election and the end of its term.

I have heard about some other issues from another advocacy agency that also works in this important area. We have a lot of contact through my office. I care about people's lot in life. I believe that people have the basic right of a roof over their head. I think it is appropriate in a very wealthy country—one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world—that we all chip in and support each other. I know it is a foreign concept to members opposite, but I care that people have somewhere to live. It is the basis of their life—somewhere to raise a family and somewhere to call their own, with familiar surroundings, even though they are renting. It is important for bringing up a family in a caring and familiar environment. There are many anecdotes of families forced to move from house to house, couch to couch, or neighbour to neighbour, resulting in significant issues later on in the lives of those children. It certainly has an effect. I do not know why the government would not care about people's right to have good houses, and why it would not care about maintaining those houses accordingly. After all, they are a state-owned asset.

I am quite certain that the Daydawn Advocacy Centre is quite happy for me to point out many of the issues that it has. In summary, a significant part—up to two-thirds—of its caseload is around maintenance on houses. I can understand that, because that is what I am finding through my office. Many appeals have been lodged with the DAC or the Ombudsman, with very little outcome, and they all relate to maintenance—for example, water leaks causing damage to houses, collapsing ceilings and very large water bills, and people being evicted because they cannot pay the water bill. This is all because there was a leak that was not fixed in the house, at the back of the house, near the back tap or along the boundary fence. The water bill is the responsibility of the tenant and because of a lack of maintenance, the tenant is lumbered with a bill. Many times these tenants cannot afford to pay those bills so they are evicted from their houses—care factor, zero from this government. This advocacy service covers clients from all over the metropolitan area, Bunbury, Albany, Katanning and Geraldton. The complaints are uniform across all those areas. I do not think we can blame any particular branch or area of the department—the contractor model is not working anywhere. That is the basic message that I get.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Have you ever come across someone who has actually been evicted?

Hon DARREN WEST: I look forward to the contribution of Hon Simon O'Brien, and I will not interject during it. I look forward to it, and it will be great. I am not taking interjections at the moment.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Let the member on his feet make his speech. I am sure Hon Simon O'Brien is willing to assist, but he does not want that assistance, and he is entitled to be heard.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr President, and I will look forward to some follow-up proof, when the member makes his contribution.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Let us keep it civil.

Hon DARREN WEST: I do not have much more to add, but I am certainly not going to —

Hon Simon O'Brien: You accuse us of not caring about people being put out of their homes.

Hon DARREN WEST: I am looking forward to Hon Simon O'Brien standing up before the house and disproving everything that I have said, but I have a feeling that he will not be able to do that, so I am looking forward to his contribution, when he can stand up and disprove what I say.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I note that there is one hour and 15 minutes in total left in this debate and there are opportunities for other members to speak, but every member in this chamber knows the rules—you can only do it according to the standing orders.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr President, and I will move towards the conclusion of my remarks, because I think I have made my point. Hon Samantha Rowe has brought forward an excellent motion, and I think the government is having a bit of difficulty hearing some of the truths that we are facing every day in our electorates and what some very good people are having to put up with as a consequence of some of the government's very poor decisions. I am looking forward to further comments in the debate, but I reiterate that this has been a continuing, festering shambles that the government is showing no signs of admitting to or even discussing, let alone dealing with. The sooner the government can get this sorted out, the better for everyone, including the taxpayers who own this asset. It is yet another failing of this Liberal–National government that does not really care about people in need or who are vulnerable. Once again, the lack of bipartisan support on this motion just goes to show that.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [1.54 pm]: What a putrid contribution we have just heard from someone who is prepared to throw around accusations that people on this side, as a general group, do not care

about people in difficulties. Not only is that insulting, but the way in which the comments were offered was reckless, and they were deliberately insulting. If the member who has just spoken wants to commend the motion to the house, the first thing he needs to learn is to do so in respectful terms. Otherwise his words are worth nothing, and he betrays what he is all about—being a bag full of hot air with nothing more than base political motivation, and it is probably he who does not give a tinker's cuss about the people he pretends to represent. That is why I get angry and would interject, when my offer to assist—which is what it was—was treated in the way it was. I tried by way of the least unruly interjection I could manage —

Hon Sue Ellery: They are all unruly.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Indeed, they are.

By way of interjection I tried to identify whether the honourable member, having had it brought to his attention by some advocacy or representative group, was able to say, as he has reported to the house, that Homeswest tenants who, as a result of some unresolved maintenance issue had run up huge water bills that they had not been able to pay and therefore had been evicted. That was what he alleged in his remarks, and that is the sort of problem I was going to offer him support with, and I do offer that support. It is a pity I was rebuffed, but I will offer it again. I was going to inquire, through my helpful interjection, whether the member had actually sourced any examples such as that to which he had referred. He can make all the sweeping allegations in the world about how the government does not care, and that government members do not care because they are all awful, and he can make sweeping allegations about how people are being victimised, but all I want to do is get one example of what the member was talking about—just one—and I will show the member, as a responsible, elected member of this house, how to deal with it. Despite the member's objectionable allegations and accusations, I do care, and I do not like to be told that I do not care. I have demonstrated to this house again and again that I care, and if the member can identify to me one client of Homeswest who has just been cast out of their accommodation in the circumstance that he described—that he stands up here and insists is a fact—I am prepared to show him, as a member who has been around a bit and knows how these things work, how to fix that for his constituent, if there is such a constituent.

Hon Darren West: Will you support the motion?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The member is a piece of work!

If the member has a genuine case—from all that I have heard from him, I do not believe he has—let us identify them. It need not be done here in plenary session, if the member does not want to do that. He can come up to me outside, behind the Chair, and say, "Listen, Simon, I've got this constituent here, who has been treated terribly and, whether it is through my own ineptitude, inexperience or shallow ability to politicise above all else, I don't know how to deal with it." I will show him how to deal with it. We will put it right, if the member is dinkum. But I do not think the member is dinkum, yet he has the temerity, in the face of a serious motion such as this one, to accuse us of not caring. That is what he has done—he has accused all of us of not caring.

Mr President, I felt I needed to get to my feet in following your direction that members would have the opportunity to contribute to the debate if they refrained from unruly interjection. I needed to do that, but I needed to do it to explain why I was interjecting. Some real buttons had been pushed and someone needed to get up to say that on the motion before the house, initially moved by Hon Samantha Rowe—I will take it at face value that she is genuinely concerned about addressing something that she perceives as a wrong in a government department. Do members know what? I believe Hon Samantha Rowe when she says that this government could do better—I will bet her that is right—but there is no need for members opposite to resort to wild claims and offensive language towards members on this side of the house if they are not really dinkum about the issue they raise. I think the issue here is: are Homeswest tenants being treated shabbily? If so, let us deal with that. But if all that members on the other side of the house have to offer—again I am referring to the last member who spoke; not as a sweeping generalisation—are general views to politicise and to try to darken the government's political label, then I say to them that they are the people who are letting down the Homeswest tenants who are doing it hard. They are the ones who are forgotten about and it becomes a battle between telling members what I think by interjection and getting shouted down by the President. Where does that leave the people that members opposite purport to support? It leaves them nowhere. That is why I think that is a phony attitude to bring in here.

I am going to sit down now and leave this matter because I am sure there are others who will want to make a contribution, and they would never do it through unruly interjection. But if any member of this house has people in their electorate who are having trouble dealing with Homeswest and they do not have the personal skills or the knowhow to get some action for their constituent, they can give me a hoy. I will not be going around putting out press releases, and I will tell them how to do it. Let us see how dinkum members opposite are.

Mr President, they are the words I want to offer to this debate. I hope that in future when members get up and talk about motions like this, they make sure they have some sort of understanding that they are talking about real people, whether they are the tenants they think are getting duded or are being treated shabbily, or whether they

are the Homeswest officers who are accused of being negligent, or ineffectual in their duty, or whether they are talking about the contractor who is meant to be fixing the tap or stove, or whatever, or whether other members of this house, on either side or on the crossbenches, are sitting here wondering if there is something we can contribute to a legitimate issue that is being raised in the house. I compliment Hon Samantha Rowe, and I hope that does not give her any kiss of death at her next preselection, or however members opposite resolve these things. I think it is legitimate for her to call on the government to attend to matters. Whether or not the government wants to support a call for an independent and transparent inquiry into the Department of Housing with reference to response times, the government can explain for itself whether it thinks that is the right mechanism to address those sorts of problems. But if it has another way of addressing it—we heard from the minister a week ago about that—that does not mean that those who support the government do not care about the fundamental issues. I think I have made the point I needed to make, Mr President, and I hope some people have learnt something about the matter.

Question put and negatived.