

Deputy Chairman; Hon Ray Halligan; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Murray Criddle; Hon Giz Watson; Hon Jon Ford; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Hon Louise Pratt

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**Division 19: Housing and Works, \$100 452 000 -**

Hon Adele Farina, Chairman.

Hon Tom Stephens, Minister for Housing and Works.

Mr G. Joyce, Director General.

Mr I. Johnston, Executive Director, Commercial Operations.

Mr J. Coles, Executive Director, Financial Services.

Dr J. Phillimore, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister for Housing and Works.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Legislative Council Estimates Committee, I welcome you to today's hearing. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia. The Committee values that assistance.

It will greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the *Budget Statements* volumes or the consolidated fund estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount, and so on in preface to their questions. If supplementary information is to be provided, I ask your cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the Committee's clerk within five working days of receipt of the questions. An example of the required Hansard style for the documents has been provided to your advisers.

The Committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations. For the benefit of members and Hansard, I ask the minister to introduce his advisers to the Committee, and for each adviser to please state their full name, contact address and the capacity in which they appear before the Committee. At this time, I ask each of the witnesses whether they have read, understood and completed the Information for Witnesses form. For the purposes of *Hansard*, all witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Do all witnesses fully understand the meaning and effect of the provisions of that document? For the purposes of *Hansard*, all witnesses have answered in the affirmative.

I table a question asked by Hon Giz Watson and the answer to it that has been provided.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: The mission statement on page 327 of the *Budget Statements* states that the department is responding to the hopes of all Western Australians for their housing and construction needs. I refer also to the vision outlined in the department's annual report of 2001-02, which states that the department will contribute to a supportive, vibrant and sustainable community. I sincerely ask: in the two and half years that Hon Tom Stephens has been the minister, has he been able to come up with a solution to antisocial behaviour; and, if so, is there anything in the budget to contribute to that end?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: There is no utopia on this earth. All that can be done is to take on the challenge. Some good work is available to us through the response to the homelessness report, which delivers an expectation and some resources for interagency collaboration. For instance, our programs are dramatically increased through the supported housing assistance program. A large amount of additional funding has been provided with that program, beginning with a significant sum of an extra \$1 million which will flow from 1 July. That program is best targeted at people who, because of their antisocial behaviour or failure to be adequate tenants of our properties, can voluntarily go onto a program aimed at saving their tenancies. That is done by ensuring that they lift their game as tenants in their dealings with the department as their landlord, with their neighbourhoods, and through their compliance with their tenancy agreements. We have also delivered through the homelessness report opportunities for other agencies to collaborate with our department, such as the provision of financial counselling through the Department for Community Development.

A detailed answer was recently provided to a question asked by Hon Peter Foss, which I commend to all members of the House. It deals with one section of our tenant population - the Aboriginal community - which represents a disproportionate percentage of our tenancies by virtue of the socioeconomic position of many Aboriginal people. It regrettably is a community that often has within its midst high profile, dysfunctional and sometimes difficult tenants. A significant body of policy and programs is being built into the activities of the department which are aimed at trying to turn around these difficult tenants and the circumstances with which they are faced. I do not think that in the end we will have the silver bullet. I do not think we will be able to stand here next year and say that we have conquered all the problems, but we will certainly make some significant inroads through these programs. The Director General may wish to add to that answer.

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Mr JOYCE: The disposition of the department is always to look positively at dysfunctional families and to try to salvage those families, particularly when children are involved. Our tenancies are also managed under the Residential Tenancies Act, and are subject to natural justice. The department evicts at a rate of about 100 tenants a year. As the minister has said, substantial positive programs are in place. About \$3.5 million is spent a year. The minister mentioned the centrepiece of those programs - the supported housing assistance program - and a range of other programs. We try to manage those programs and keep people in their tenancies. Ultimately, it is time to evict tenants when they do not take any notice of us.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I am fully aware that eviction is not necessarily the solution. I refer to the output performance measures on page 330. Under the heading of quality, the item for client satisfaction with the delivery of minor works and maintenance services shows an actual rate of 92 per cent for 2001-02. For the next financial year it is targeted to be 75 per cent. Can you explain that reduction?

Mr JOYCE: That reduction is estimated because an area called western property has been restructured, which is jargon for looking after the maintenance of government buildings. We anticipate that there may be a drop in client satisfaction because of the restructuring that has gone on. We are trying to be realistic. I add that if we could achieve anything over 75 per cent, it would certainly be in the upper end of what major organisations look for in customer satisfaction surveys.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I appreciate you being realistic all the time. I refer to the statement of financial position on page 334. I read the note beneath the table. There have been many changes. Can you explain what the finance leases are, which are listed under the items for current and non-current liabilities, and why there is no budgeted figure for them for 2002-03?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The executive director of financial services can respond to that question.

[5.10 pm]

Mr COLES: The main financial lease for which I have details relates to a building in Royal Street, East Perth. It is owned by the Government Employees Superannuation Board but leased to this department. I am advised that this department will lease it until 2005. It is not in the 2002-03 budget because that was formulated before the 2001-02 actuals were finalised. I think it is an omission. However, the member can see that it is included in the out years.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The last dot point on page 327 states that the department has continued to promote sustainability by assisting government agencies in the delivery of projects that encompass sustainability principles. What sustainability work is the department doing in its operations and across government, and what work is it doing with the private sector? If I remember correctly, the department is involved in some projects with the private sector.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: This department, along with all the arms and agencies of government, is rising to the challenge and expectations of the Government, which is in turn reflecting the expectations within the wider community. The Government wants sustainability to be embraced within our operations. That is done in a variety of different ways, from the smallest to the largest of measures. I am conscious that part of my department's operations include being the operator of government buildings, and as part of that we have focused on energy efficiency in our government offices. Organisations can apply for grants from the Office of Energy. For instance, the facility managers at Dumas House have installed energy-efficiency devices. The lights automatically turn off at various times, which once left me in the dark! I was unaware of the new energy-efficiency arrangements, through which all the lights turn off at seven o'clock, and if people have not left the building, they are pitched into darkness. More comprehensive programs are on offer. For instance, the architectural division of the department is preoccupied with delivering a sustainability agenda. I am driving that agenda hard with my department. I keep drawing to its attention opportunities for more energy-efficient designs. A tender has been called for the new school project at the Harvest Lakes estate at south Atwell. Expressions of interest have been received and we will soon announce the successful tender. The design principles of that school include features that will reduce energy and other costs for the community long into the future, although it will result in increased up-front costs associated with the construction of the building. Homeswest's operations, particularly in the north of the State, will be guided by the results of a study that will flow from a sustainability house constructed in the Broome community. That house will be given to a tenant, whom we are yet to identify, who will collaborate with a pilot project. Not only the operation but also the construction of the house will involve energy-efficiency principles. The design will focus on reducing the amount of building waste that usually emerges from building sites. We are focusing on ways of reducing waste in the design of the building. As the member rightly pointed out, we are collaborating with private industry. We have a range of partnerships, including through the Housing Industry Association's GreenSmart program. That is an example of industry

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responding to the community and finding willing partners within government to display a commitment to the GreenSmart principles when engaging in land development activities. Like other land developers in this State, Landstart has been involved in the massive clearance of land without regard for contours. Vegetation has been knocked over holus-bolus and the landscape reshaped. In collaboration with its joint-venture partners, Landstart is increasingly responding to those landscapes in new and creative ways that deliver upon the community's ambition.

I could say a lot more on that topic, but I appreciate that we have a tight time frame. I hope that gives the member some flavour of what we are doing in this portfolio.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I think the key message is that these days the bureaucrats literally keep the minister in the dark! Page 341 refers to commonwealth grants to the State Housing Commission. I assume that relates to funding through the commonwealth-state housing agreement, which I am aware is due for renewal this year. Has the State signed the new agreement; and if so, what are its key features?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The State has agreed to sign the new commonwealth-state housing agreement. I have not yet signed the agreement, but the Cabinet has granted me the power to sign off on it. The State is reluctant about the agreement because it will provide a cut in commonwealth funding of some \$9.4 million in 2003-04 compared with 2002-03. This is a serious issue for all Western Australians, and especially all sides of politics in the State Parliament. Here again an agency is standing in front of members after it has been stripped of the benefits that have been on offer from the Commonwealth Government since the Second World War. That partnership resulted in substantial funds flowing to the State. Traditionally those funds grew from year to year. Regrettably, in this coming year there will be an effective reduction of \$9.4 million. The cumulative effect of that over the life of the agreement is not attractive, especially as it is a five-year agreement.

However, there are some positive features. At least there is an agreement on offer from the Commonwealth. That was in doubt at some stages. There is also the benefit of having at least five years of certainty. The funding is indexed but regrettably not according to the consumer price index. It is one of those indices that falls immediately beneath the full value of CPI. I have forgotten the precise name of it.

Dr PHILLIMORE: It is connected to the average weekly earnings, but it is not exactly the same as CPI. There is also an efficiency dividend of one per cent, which reduces the value of indexation by one per cent every year.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The full effect is: we was robbed! This State, along with all the other state jurisdictions, has taken up the fight. Some jurisdictions still have not made the decision to sign off on the agreement. We are in a strange federation. As state parliamentarians we have the obligation of trying to get the federation into better shape. The Commonwealth has the whip and cajoles us into signing agreements that are not in the long-term best interests of a State that needs a public housing program and the partnership of the Commonwealth to maintain a public housing program that meets the community's requirements. When parliamentarians go into their communities and find that their constituents are on longer waiting lists or living in houses that are not getting all the attention they need from this agency, they must recognise that that is in part because a substantial amount of money is no longer available to us. I anticipate reluctantly signing the agreement with some of its pluses but also with the considerable minus of a loss of real cash value.

[5.20 pm]

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I refer to the Brownlie Towers project on page 340 of the *Budget Statements*. The precinct of Bentley will receive a \$5 million upgrade over the next two years. I apologise to Hon Kate Doust, who has an interest in this matter. I hope I am not stealing her thunder. However, if I ask a question, I am sure it will give the minister a chance to heap some praise on her for the work she has done. What is the extent of the upgrade, what is meant by the precinct, and when will the works commence?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I am more than happy to heap lavish praise upon the work of the committee chair, Hon Kate Doust, our upper House colleague, who enlisted the impressive support of the local member for Victoria Park, the Premier. He has done a very good job for Victoria Park.

Hon PETER FOSS: He has an advantage, has he not?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: He has, and he has taken full advantage of it, as he should. That community has been provided with some much-needed and long-awaited upgrades for the Brownlie Towers precinct. The precinct is not just the building itself. In partnership with the leadership and officers of the Canning City Council, the Government has an opportunity to respond to the residents in the neighbouring houses and tackle some of the properties adjacent to Brownlie Towers. I have a map of the precinct, which I can hold up and show members. The area is bounded by Manning Road, at least in part, and Walpole, Pollock and Dumond Streets. The map

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indicates the presence of significant amounts of private dwellings. We have an opportunity to work on some of the public housing in the precinct. We must examine the issues of public open space and how best to use the available facilities in the City of Canning. We must provide a project that lifts the amenity of the environment, which, as the media has reported, presents some challenging issues.

The project is modelled on some work I saw when I went to Sydney. Work was done on an inner suburb that had similar high-rise buildings but which faced bigger problems than ours. Architectural and social science students from the University of Sydney collaborated with the NSW housing authority and the local municipality to dramatically change the amenity of that community. I drew Hon Kate Doust's attention to that project, and she willingly embraced those concepts. Architectural and social science students from the Curtin University of Technology are working in collaboration with the committee chaired by Hon Kate Doust to prepare a master plan.

We must work out exactly what composition of housing presence is required in the area. We will decide whether to promote private or other forms of housing on locations and sites that are currently in the Government's possession or that it might otherwise aspire to attain. We will examine how a better social mix can be integrated into that community to lift the amenity and enhance the sense and reality of safety of the residents of the community. Sometimes safety can be designed into a precinct by the use of architecture and by the types of tenants that are positioned in it. Typically, seniors are often present in an environment that can lift the prospects of being -

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: How much does it cost and who will pay for it?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Five million dollars from the consolidated revenue fund will be allocated to Homeswest for this project. The CRF will provide \$500 000 in 2003-04 and \$4.5 million in 2004-05, which will be drawn on to significantly improve this project. When it was constructed in the 1960s, Brownlie Towers served a very useful role. It provided cheap housing for families. However, today it needs renovation. The amenity and the quality of the fabric of the building and the units must be improved. The roof must be replaced and some work will be done on the lifts. These are long sought-after ambitions for the local community. I am delighted to sit in the Chamber with Hon Kate Doust, who in such a short time has worked in partnership with her lower House colleague, Dr Geoffrey Gallop, in conjunction with my own willing officers, who sometimes cannot believe their luck at having been provided with the resources to work on this project, which they have wanted to do for a long time.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: When will the on-the-ground work start?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: In August this year.

Hon GIZ WATSON: How much of the housing works budget is income carried over from the last financial year?

Mr COLES: I cannot provide a detailed breakdown. The budget estimates for this purpose include only capital. Income also includes our operating budget, which is not included in these papers. However, I can provide the member with a detailed breakdown of that.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The member's question will need a more precise answer. Would the member please put it on notice.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That question will be put on notice.

*[Supplementary Information No 40.]*

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The member will need to write down exactly what information she wants.

Hon GIZ WATSON: How many new public housing stock houses or units were constructed last year?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Does the member mean -

Hon GIZ WATSON: I mean for the 2001-02 year.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The member is asking me about my best year.

Hon PETER FOSS: Ask him how badly he did in a bad year.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Effectively, commencements totalled 1 930 in 2002-03. That was the single largest number of commencements since the last great minister for housing, Hon Jim McGinty, in 1991-92. There were 1 866 completions in that year. We would need to provide supplementary information for the number of commencements and the number of housing completions for 2001-02.

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*[Supplementary Information No. 37.]*

[5.30 pm]

Hon GIZ WATSON: My next question flows on from that. How many new public housing units will be constructed this year, not including refurbishments?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The total, including refurbishments, is 1 697. I will deal with the issue of refurbishments. There are 120 mainstream urban refurbishments and 120 community refurbishments listed. There will also be 20 refurbishments in Roebourne in this anticipated budget, three crisis accommodation refurbishments and three community housing refurbishments. The total number of completions anticipated in 2003-04 is 1 897.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Is it possible for the minister to table that information as it seems to be quite constructive?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I will provide the member with the material by way of supplementary information, which will come very quickly. There will not be a delay. It is just that I have been scribbling on this copy, and I want to provide the member with a clean copy.

*[Supplementary Information No 38.]*

Hon JON FORD: I refer to page 342 and the operations of the Country Housing Authority. I understand that the Country Housing Authority traditionally provided housing finance loans to farmers, retired farmers and rural employers in rural and remote areas. Has the CHA offered any other type of assistance or programs to people in regional areas?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Yes. The authority has done some quality work in conjunction with both the previous Government and the current Government. It lends money that is aimed at responding to the needs of people in rural, regional and remote areas. I have had the opportunity to guide the Country Housing Authority in tackling some of the issues in regional and remote areas of Western Australia and to add to the work it has done in the wheatbelt area. That work has included a partnership with the regional investment fund, which has seen the roll-out of a grant program for accommodation to local governments and Aboriginal community organisations, as employers in regional and remote areas. These \$50 000 grants have been useful in ensuring that those employers have been able to provide good employee accommodation. For instance, Derby picked up a grant so that it could provide accommodation for three employees, and a doctor in Mt Magnet was housed as a result of a grant to the shire. A number of Aboriginal organisations, such as the Wunan Foundation and Waringarri in the north east Kimberley, the Kimberley Aboriginal Housing Pty Ltd in Broome and the Bunuba Aboriginal Corporation in Fitzroy Crossing, have also received grants for employee or service provider accommodation. The Shires of Irwin, Kulin, Mingenew, Morawa, Tammin, Carnamah, Kojonup, Westonia and Wickepin have picked up funds through that grant program, which have been extremely well received in those areas. In addition, the officers of the Country Housing Authority have worked closely with the director general of the department to ensure that they respond to the challenges of housing in regional and remote areas in the State.

One of the processes of the machinery of government review is to give to the Minister for Housing and Works the responsibility to take a real role in housing which is not simply public-housing focused, but which looks at the housing agenda for all Western Australians. That requires collaborative work with an organisation such as the Country Housing Authority to ensure that it does its best with the resources available to it, by way of both loans and grant programs, to improve the housing options for employees, farmers, pastoralists and other service providers in remote areas. An amount of \$13.3 million will be lent by the Country Housing Authority next financial year. That will support loans to 244 business enterprises, and there will be a good, wide spread of those loans.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I refer to page 340 and the land acquisition program. I raised the issue this morning when representatives from the Department of Land Administration and LandCorp appeared before the Estimates Committee. I visited Westonia, Cervantes, Badgingarra and Dandaragan. To acquaint the minister with the situation, I understand that Kununurra has the same problem with a lack of land, to the extent that it requires 14 dwellings from the minister's organisation. What process does the minister have in place to ensure that land is available so that houses can be built in these areas, because the lack of land is actually stifling opportunity?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The essential role for us is to work in collaboration with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, who has had primary responsibility for the provision of land for development opportunities across Western Australia. That gives us the opportunity to acquire any additional land we need to carry out our various functions. That can include responses to the public housing needs of a community, or joint venture opportunities in which our land agency needs additional land if it does not buy it on the open market and needs to lease the

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land through LandCorp or the Department for Planning and Infrastructure. We are not the primary tool of land release and land development, but we have a traditional and historic role and connection with some major land developments. However, the previous Government transferred a substantial amount of that function to LandCorp and that is, by and large, the way it has stayed. We must work closely with that organisation to access land for land release strategies when we do not have the land or have not otherwise acquired it. We have major joint ventures in places such as Ellenbrook, Dalyellup and Butler. A large block in Amarillo was purchased by the previous Labor Minister for Housing, Hon Jim McGinty, in about 1991. At an appropriate point we will develop that block. I think it is just north of Mandurah, near Golden Bay. However, it is not our primary responsibility.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: I understand that, but I hope the minister is aware that people feel frustrated with the lack of land available in Western Australia.

On page 340 it states that the Aboriginal housing program for 2003-04 will increase by 43 per cent. What is the comparison with housing in general?

[5.40 pm]

Hon TOM STEPHENS: This is the new partnership that we have with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Effectively, this is the pooling of our own resources, the ATSIC resources and the additional funds that we have secured from the federal Government as well - Senator Vanstone gave us some additional money in this area. We also got some money under the homelessness program for this, through the homelessness task force. The effect of it is that in 2002-03 there was an increase of 43.6 per cent, and in 2003-04 the combined effect is that it will be a 62.5 per cent increase. The major reason was a \$7.1 million increase in ATSIC funding. However, we effectively got an increase of \$4.9 million from the State.

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: What is the general increase in housing as a percentage?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: We would need to get back to the member with a figure. Is the member comfortable with putting that on notice?

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon Murray Criddle will put that on notice. I have been informed that I am still required to give it a number, although I did not on the other two occasions. Therefore, I will correct my error now.

[*Supplementary Information No 39.*]

Hon SUE ELLERY: My question is about Fremantle Prison. Output 1 on page 329 relates to the ongoing management of government properties, and that obviously includes Fremantle Prison. How effective have the department's efforts to market the prison been, and what effect is that having on the conservation and maintenance of the prison?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: This is an area in which we, as a Parliament, have an opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the officers of the Department of Housing and Works who have provided some top-quality responses to the challenges at that prison site by way of marketing strategies that have been very effective indeed in a context in which visitor numbers to the State are lower because of the international situation. Anyone who is familiar with the Fremantle tourism circumstance at the moment will know that visitor numbers are a bit flat overall. However, in the prison itself there has been a dramatic increase in visitor numbers. There has been an increase of more than 16 per cent compared with the identical period in the previous year. There has been an increase of 6.5 per cent in the average number of tours purchased in the 12 years since the prison reopened as a tourist attraction. That increase in numbers guarantees that we have funds available to start tackling many of the issues.

The *Catalpa* Day was a promotion for the Irish community in which the prison was involved. It was a real celebration of the heritage and history of the prison, which was originally constructed, as we know, for that period when the convicts came to Western Australia in 1850. It was originally called the establishment, and in that mode it delivered accommodation in the next 18 years for all the convicts who arrived, including the last lot - the Fenians. For the celebration on *Catalpa* Day, large numbers of people visited the prison. That produced for us an intake of visitors through the gates over two weeks that more than covered the cost of the day itself. For the staff involved in it, that brought a great sense of satisfaction. As well as that, the prison crew there had supported the *Catalpa* players in the presentation of the play every night for two weeks. Some of the staff of the Parliament who have Irish accents performed in that play and were very successful on stage.

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Members will be pleased to know that last Saturday the prison was awarded a prize for its web page. It competed with museums in Australia and New Zealand and picked up a prize for the best web page of an establishment of that size specifically. That will be of enormous benefit in promoting that prison precinct to all and sundry, including the many visitors who go to Fremantle. We will not rest on our laurels. We have an extremely talented person at the prison, Graeme Gammie, who has the strong support of a good team in Fremantle and the support of his senior officers in the department. Graeme Gammie accepted the onerous responsibility to fly to the United States last Sunday on behalf of the people of Western Australia.

Hon PETER FOSS: How did he get it off you?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Were you not available on that day?

Hon PETER FOSS: The jet was not free.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I know all about the regional areas of Western Australia, but I do not know much about the highlights of New Bedford. Graeme Gammie kindly agreed to go across to New Bedford and Alcatraz to look at ways in which we can draw on the Alcatraz experience and the artefacts that are on offer in New Bedford to ascertain whether we can position those artefacts that will come from New Bedford and Boston.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Who has gone?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: None of my team, other than the departmental officers. Sandy - her surname escapes me - who is the curator at the Fremantle Prison has gone over there as well. She will do a good job gathering up the artefacts and ensuring that towards the end of next year we are able to hold a massive exhibition to promote the Fremantle Prison around this State and this nation. People are interested in museums. People at Port Arthur have expressed interest in having that exhibition, if we can stage-manage it. Interest in it has also been expressed in Canberra, as well as by the Australian National Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour. We will stage it first in Fremantle. After it has been staged in Fremantle, we will ascertain whether we can take it to other parts of the globe to promote the reality of the prison.

The Fremantle Prison is the best example anywhere in Australia of the convict heritage. It is the only place in the country where a precinct of that size is by and large intact. However, it will not stay intact unless visitors go to the place, which will help us acquire money that we can spend to maintain it. In the next little while a master plan that was funded out of last year's budget will be released. That will soon be available to the community - in fact, it has probably just been released. That will provide people with an opportunity to comment on the future development of the prison.

One of the projects associated with that will be the opportunity to develop the famous tunnels under the prison. Currently, geotechnical work is being undertaken on those tunnels to ascertain whether they can be secured and made available for an underground adventure tour, which will potentially produce large amounts of additional income. The promotion of that whole precinct for tourists and visitors will greatly assist the income stream necessary to keep that building well maintained in the future.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I thank the minister for his amazing passion for this subject. I draw members' attention to the time. We have only 10 minutes left, and three members have indicated they would like to ask a question. I ask members and officers to keep their questions and answers succinct.

[5.50 pm]

Hon PETER FOSS: Do the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Forest Products Commission have any Government Employees Housing Authority housing in Manjimup; and, if so, how many houses? What has been the effect on the requirements for GEHA housing by CALM and the Forest Products Commission as a result of the implementation of the policy to protect old-growth forest? What has been the effect on Homeswest housing in Manjimup as a result of the implementation of the old-growth policy? If any of the housing utilised by CALM, the Forest Products Commission or Homeswest has become surplus to requirements as a result of the implementation of the policy, what has happened to the housing? The residents of Manjimup are of the opinion that Homeswest is settling unsatisfactory tenants in Manjimup. Is this the case? How many tenants regarded by Homeswest as unsatisfactory have been settled in Manjimup in the past two years?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I thank the member for his questions. In reference to the last question I have had the opportunity of answering it in the House. The answer given in the House has not changed. The member will find the answer on the parliamentary record. If the member wishes to place the rest of the questions on notice, he should feel free to do so.

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Hon PETER FOSS: I would like all the questions answered by the department.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: They can be put on notice.

Hon PETER FOSS: I would prefer answers now.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I am telling the member what I will do with his questions. He will get answers if he chooses to put them on notice. In the meantime, I am not making my officers available to answer the questions.

*[Supplementary Information No 41.]*

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I now have the pleasure to address a question to the finest housing minister since Jim McGinty - self-proclaimed!

I notice the relationship of the department to a number of schemes, including Keystart. Keystart is part of the government's first home owners scheme, which has been running very successfully for a number of years having been started by the previous Government. Is it true that the first home owners scheme benefit is a basic \$7 000 grant? Is the minister aware that the median house price in Perth in March 2001 attracted stamp duty of \$4 450 and that with recent rises in stamp duty the median house price in Perth will attract stamp duty of \$7 403, which represents an increase of 66 per cent? The stamp duty is now more than the grant given under the first home owners scheme. That is without even taking into account stamp duty paid on a higher mortgage that people must take out in order to fund the State Government's stamp duty. What is the point of the Government continuing to take with one hand more than it gives with the other? What is the housing minister going to do about it?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Under the guise of the housing and works budget the member is asking questions about issues that are not within my direct purview; that is, the administration of stamp duty. We could conduct a series of questions and answers or start a debate. I could comment on the impact of the GST, which has been referred to by Hon Ken Travers. The GST has had the most savage impact on the department. It is the tax that the member championed when in government.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is not the question.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: This is the answer.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Let us move on. Let us record that the minister did not want to discuss the impact of stamp duty.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, members! The minister and Hon Simon O'Brien must come to order. As I understand the question, it falls within the purview of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Hon LOUISE PRATT: I refer to page 340 of the *Budget Statements*, particularly the reference to the initiatives taken as a result of the State Homelessness Taskforce. One of the first initiatives was the establishment of a homelessness help line. I would like some feedback about the use of the help line by homeless people and their referral to support organisations.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: It has been a very successful help line. It was accessed directly by a large number of people identified as having an immediate housing crisis or who are sleeping rough. It has also been accessed by a large number of people who were not necessarily homeless but were facing homelessness in the near future. It was a tool that the department was able to use in order to respond to those challenges. Between May 2001 and the end of March 2003, the help line received 3 903 calls. They were either from individuals or agencies. There have been a further 1 609 repeat callers. A total of 1 032 callers were literally without any shelter at the time of the call. A total of 2 871 callers had some form of shelter but not a home of their own. Members must picture a call centre operated by skilled, talented, compassionate staff members of the Department of Housing and Works on Wellington Street. It is a very good team headed by a man many members would know, Robert Heaton, who is the senior officer. I saw his team working on the help line. They deal compassionately with a large number of calls in response to the Government's efforts to meet the needs of community members who identified themselves as homeless. Of the callers, nearly 2 000 have been assisted into accommodation. That figure includes 720 people accommodated in crisis accommodation. More than 680 people have accessed private rental accommodation with the assistance of a Homeswest bond loan. It is a very important scheme. I urge members to remember the private rental market when they respond to the needs of constituents who need accommodation.

The department has a program to link people to the private rental market. A further 54 people were accommodated by the Department of Housing and Works in hotels in response to their immediate housing needs. The work of the help line was complemented by the Department for Community Development, which increased its overnight accommodation for people without shelter. The help line was assisted by working with that



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department as well as the Department of Justice, the Alcohol and Drug Authority and the non-government sector to provide a comprehensive response to homeless people. The Government will maintain the homelessness help line as part of its overall commitment to the State Homelessness Strategy. It is an additional part of the responsibility of the Government and the Department of Housing and Works to meet the needs of this targeted group.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I now close this session. I thank the minister, Mr Joyce, and the officers from the Department of Housing and Works for their attendance.

*Sitting suspended from 5.59 to 7.00 pm*