

SOCIAL HOUSING INITIATIVES

937. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Minister for Housing and Works:

In my electorate of Morley I receive constant feedback about the lack of social housing and about the impact of a handful of tenants who are a bit of a problem for their surrounding communities. I wonder whether the minister can inform the house of the government's innovative approaches to dealing with this situation.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

I thank the member for Morley; it is a very good question. Like a number of members on our side of the house, I receive regular inquiries from the member, some occasionally a little too persistent, about issues around social housing, around both the struggle to keep up with the demand for social housing and also dealing with behavioural issues in and around social housing. So what I thought I would do, in light of the member's question—as unexpected as it is—is provide a bit of background information so that the house is fully apprised of some of the exciting and innovative things that we are doing in and around social housing. The member is right. There is a growing waiting list. There are behavioural issues. These are not problems that emerged last week. These are not problems that have emerged in the past couple of months. These are problems that have emerged over a number of years. When it comes to behavioural matters in our suburbs—which pertain to a very small percentage of social housing tenants; a very small percentage—we had under the former government a regime that turned a blind eye to that sort of behaviour. We are not going to do that, and I will talk about that a bit more in a second before I close.

It is interesting to have a historic look at social housing. As at 30 June 2001, the social housing stock —

Mr P.B. Watson: You are in government now!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We are, and I will tell the member why that is a good thing for people who are waiting for social housing. As at 30 June 2001, the social housing stock was 37 307 units. As at 30 June 2008, the social housing stock was 39 130 units. That is an increase over seven years of 1 823 units. I have done the maths. That is an extra 260 dwellings a year.

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is an extra 260 dwellings a year, Leader of the Opposition. I have done the sums. I know that the Leader of the Opposition was the Treasurer before. I have done the sums. They add up. What have we done? We have embraced the ideas, and we have embraced the private sector.

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get to the member in a moment—laser light!

This is what happened under the former government. Let us look at what we are doing. In terms of construction, in partnership with the commonwealth, we will be building 2063 homes over the next few years. The state's stimulus package is 720 homes. In fact, we currently have 850 homes under way in Western Australia. The rate of construction start-ups at the moment is about 40 a week, and it is climbing rapidly. I hate to bring bad news to members of the opposition, but 40 a week means that we are doing every seven weeks what the former government did in its annual construction! Every seven weeks, we are outperforming what members opposite were able to do each year when they were in power! But it is still a challenge. In the member for Perth's electorate, we have recently given \$20 million to St Barts to build a fantastic facility for 150 homeless people. In Success, in the member for Cockburn's electorate, we have given \$23 million for 80 new units. Soon, we will come down the member for Fremantle's way with a big —

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Midland, I formally call you for the first time.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I do not ever hear the member for Midland! I come from a town with a large seagull population —

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Midland, I formally call you for the second time, but I do not want to hear you interject during this question again.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, I just heard the Treasurer refer to, by implication, a member of this side as being senile —

Mr T.R. Buswell: Seagull!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, the Treasurer obviously needs elocution lessons!

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get on with it. The point I was making was that, like the member for Rockingham, I live in a seaside suburb, with a lot of seagulls. We get used to that sort of noise when we live in that sort of place.

For us, it is not just about building extra units. It is about using our existing stock better. The member for Morley might be interested in this. Under our high-value housing strategy, 10 houses have been sold. They have yielded —

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No—seagull! They are little white birds.

Ten houses have been sold, and \$11 million has been generated. That will build between 30 and 60 extra dwellings. That is a great initiative. We are finding people in social housing who are not senile, and who are not seagulls, but who are earning too much money to be in social housing. We reckon there are about 1 300 of those people, and through a polite process we will be moving them on. We have found some 86 people who may well own their own property. It is funny that we have let a system emerge where people in taxpayer-funded houses are keeping an eye on their investment property up the street. They will be politely moved on. We are working through some difficult issues with what we call over-occupiers. It is challenging to try to get people into appropriate accommodation. There are several hundred of those people.

I will close, member for Morley, by reassuring the house that we will take proactive steps to deal with behavioural problems in social housing. I have a very simple approach to this; that is, when we provide taxpayer-funded houses—I accept that people often face extreme challenges and that is why they need social housing—there is an obligation on them to behave in a way that is reflective of the community in which they live. We will insist that tenants behave in a way that is reflective of the standards of the broader community in which they live. We will help and work with tenants to give them the skills they need to meet those obligations, but when they do not meet those obligations, we will take action. Again, this is a difficult change in tack for the department. It reflects a change in focus of this government on not only increasing the housing stock, but also demanding and expecting better standards of behaviour from people in those houses.