

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING TENANTS — THREE-STRIKES POLICY

400. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Housing:

The issue of antisocial behaviour by Homeswest tenants is yet another matter this government is tackling head-on after members opposite shamefully squandered their opportunity to take action during almost eight years of government —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: If anyone else interjects today while a member asks a question, I will formally call them to order. Has the member for Swan Hills finished asking his question?

Mr F.A. Alban: No.

The SPEAKER: Member for Swan Hills.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Can the minister inform the house of the progress being made in this area as a result of the actions being taken by this government?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

That is a very good question, member for Swan Hills. I am glad that he got the full question out so that I can give him a full answer. It would have been terrible if the member for Willagee had put the member for Swan Hills off. It is the member for Willagee whom I saw on television taking his concerned Homeswest tenants to the Department of Housing to stand up for their rights and who came to me in this place with a long list of people he wants kicked out of his suburb for bad behaviour. That is the member for Willagee. He has form. It is just like the ones he kicked out of Port Hedland. I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question.

Let us reflect on the matter. Earlier this year it became apparent that some aspects of the three-strikes procedures were not delivering the outcomes that the government intended and that we needed to do more to restore what I would call the balance between the rights of the tenants in social housing dwellings and those of the communities in which they live. It became obvious that we needed to do more to send a clear message to those tenants that they have a responsibility to the communities in which they are placed to be good neighbours and observe good practices. We therefore made a number of changes. We introduced a central complaint line: 1300 597 076.

Mr J.N. Hyde: That will help!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It may help, member for Perth, and I will explain why in a second. We revised the three-strikes policy so that if someone receives three strikes for minor offences in 12 months, we take steps to evict them; and if someone receives two strikes for serious offences in 12 months, we will also take steps to evict them. If a tenant receives one strike for an indecent —

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I thought that the member for Cannington had misinterpreted the Speaker's comment on one day's expulsion yesterday. I was sad that the member for Cannington was not here. I know that a lot of members opposite were not, but I was. Members on this side of the chamber were genuinely disappointed that the member was not here.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is not something that the member for Cannington has to worry about being perpetrated on him.

What happened in May, which was the first month of the operation of the new procedure? There were 1 000 calls, member for Perth, to that central hotline from people in the suburbs who wanted to make complaints about the behaviour of their neighbours.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Did you act on them within an hour? Was each call acted on? Come on! You are all talk!

The SPEAKER: Member for Perth!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Some of the complaints were frivolous, but a number were serious. In the month of May, 114 first strikes were issued, up from a monthly average of 38, and there were 15 evictions. I should also point out —

Mr E.S. Ripper: Where do those children go?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is a very good question from the Leader of the Opposition. Maybe they will go where the children who will be moving into the houses came from; I do not know. I made it very clear when we introduced this policy that there would be times when we would have to defend unpopular decisions. I also point

out that the police have uncovered 91 clandestine drug labs this year, eight of which have been in social housing dwellings. When they are found we take immediate action to evict the tenants.

I will give members a clear example of how this policy is working well. It is an example of a tenant who was given three strikes. On 25 March an incident of unruly behaviour was reported and a first strike was issued. On 8 April there was loud noise late at night and other unruly behaviour. The police were called and a second strike was issued. On 10 May, after another incident involving unruly behaviour, the police were called and a termination notice was issued. They are the sorts of behaviour that we will stamp out in the suburbs of Western Australia. I make no apologies —

Mr P.C. Tinley: A third notice is not an eviction.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The member for Willagee is right; it is not. I will reflect on another case before I sit down. Amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act will soon pass through this house. I hope they will give us a better capacity to take an eviction notice through the courts and for that to result in an eviction. I am getting further details about a case that has caused me some consternation. When a drug lab was found in a house, we took action to evict the individual and the court determined, on the basis of mitigating circumstances, that the individual should not be evicted because he did not reasonably know that there was a drug lab in the house. There may have been mitigating circumstances; I am not saying that there were not. I am saying that it is not always easy to enforce the sorts of standards that we expect. I can tell the member for Swan Hills that the changes we made and introduced in May are starting to have a positive impact on the quality of lives of the people in the suburbs whom we represent in this place.