

GOOMALLING — PUBLIC HOUSING

Statement

HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural) [10.12 pm]: I rise tonight to express my concern about a serious issue facing the community of Goomalling. Goomalling is a small Wheatbelt community about a 90-minute drive from Perth with a population of approximately 1 000. The town has a doctor, a hospital, a school, child care, some good sporting facilities and a police presence in the town—all things that make it an attractive place to live. There are currently four jobs advertised on the Shire of Goomalling's website: one for a plumber and gasfitter with the shire; one for a qualified part-time beautician; one for someone to take care of the caravan park; and one for a refuse site attendant. That is four jobs for a population of approximately 1 000. For a person on the Homeswest housing list, on which we are all aware there are plenty, Goomalling might seem an attractive prospect. However, it has been my experience since becoming a member of Parliament that the Department of Housing has abrogated its basic responsibility, and in some cases left commonsense at the door, when allocating housing in regional communities. Communities such as Goomalling, with the number of services on offer that I have just been through, are fantastic little communities. I do not want to talk down the town, because the shire is doing a lot to make it attractive and to attract people to come and live in the town. That is exactly what we as the government are talking about: supporting these communities to make that happen. When individuals or families from highly dysfunctional backgrounds need to access government services in an ongoing manner, communities such as Goomalling should not be on the public housing list.

There is an acceptance in the community that not every public housing tenant is a bad egg; in fact, I have met many who are wonderful contributors to their communities. But there are some bad eggs in Goomalling; in fact, they are quite rotten. I know this because the community has raised this with me on a number of occasions, both as individuals and through the shire council. Individuals who would probably never have walked through the door of a politician's office before have contacted me to speak of their utter despair about a number of public housing tenants who are currently residing in Goomalling. It is unconscionable that the department has been unable to deal effectively with this, despite the best efforts of some of its officers and despite repeated pleas from the community and its leaders for assistance. It was absolutely heartbreaking to listen to some of my constituents say that the stress of this issue has them considering leaving the town. It was heartbreaking to listen to an elderly resident who has made Goomalling their home for many years talk of the fear that they felt in their own home at night.

People move to towns such as Goomalling because they are small and safe and they have services that they can access. Unfortunately, they do not have the full suite of services. It is a small town. Northam is just up the road. It has a wider range of services, as Hon Max Trenorden would know.

Hon Col Holt: Fifty kilometres.

Hon MIA DAVIES: Yes, it is a fair way up the road. In this case, the individuals are known to the police. The police have been assisting the community through Neighbourhood Watch groups to empower the community to take back some of their safety. They have been proactive in reporting incidents. We are going through all the usual things that the department says we have to go through to try to take action with these particular members of the community. In my mind there needs to be a review of the policy that the department employs when it is allocating housing to people on the lengthy housing list to ensure that families and individuals who are allocated housing in towns such as Goomalling are fully aware of the community they will be joining. For instance, if a family or individual has no car, they will be isolated in a town such as Goomalling and unable to access support services that they may need. It is not on a train line and there is an infrequent bus service. It is far from unique. Goomalling shares this problem with a number of communities throughout my electorate.

The other day Hon Col Holt relayed the tale of a family that had been allocated public housing in Kulin. Kulin is four hours from Perth and one and a half hours from Narrogin, which is the nearest major centre that people go to access government services and support. Hon Col Holt said that the community had welcomed the family to its town by donating some furniture and goods to get them started. One day someone in the community found the mother and her children pushing a pram down the side of the road on her way to Narrogin for a court appointment. That is a one and a half hour drive and she was pushing a pram down the side of the road! Vulnerable people are being left alone. When they are offered a house, clearly, they are in such desperate straits when they need this housing that they feel they have no choice but to take it. It is my view that there is an abrogation of responsibility when we put these people into communities such as Kulin or Goomalling or any number of towns that do not have support services. These people do not have a full understanding of the type of community they are going into. It is very different when a person is sitting in an office in Perth talking to a Homeswest officer about a three-by-one in a beautiful little community and they say, "Do you know that there are no buses and there is no way for you to get around?" All of that seems to be right at the back of a person's

mind when they need a roof over their head for their family. It is a big reality check when they arrive to find that there are not quite the same number of services available in some of these towns.

I have raised these concerns with the minister and his staff already and I look forward to their ongoing assistance in resolving this issue for the community in Goomalling and working with the police, who have been very helpful. As I said, there needs to be a review of the policy to ensure that we are not putting already vulnerable families and individuals at further risk when they find that they are not getting the level of support that they need when they are put into these towns. I also think that in view of the conversation in the other place and the public forum this week about the three-strikes rule, it is timely that that policy be reviewed. I think that due to the high number of people on the housing list at the moment, if people are basically breaking the rules, they should be sent on their way. There will always be exceptions to that rule, but when so many people are waiting to get into good public housing and people are openly flouting the rules in some cases—as is happening in Goomalling—it is unacceptable to have such a long list and not make people face the consequences of their behaviour.

I welcome the news that the Minister for Housing is looking into changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, and in the meantime I implore the department to consider the impact on the tenant and the community—particularly in small communities in the regions—when allocating housing to high-need families and individuals, especially when limited support services are available.

House adjourned at 10.20 pm
