

The Chairman (mr A.J. Dean); Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Fran Logan;
Chairman; Mr John Hyde

State Housing Commission -

Mr A.J. Dean, Chairman.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan, Minister for Planning and Infrastructure.

Mr G. Joyce, Director General, Department of Housing and Works.

Mr J. Coles, Executive Director, Finance.

Mr G. King, Manager, Financial Technology and Reporting.

Mr D.A. Cox, Principal Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Housing and Works.

Mr J. Thomson, Policy Officer, Office of the Minister for Housing and Works.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr A.J. Dean): This division does not have a number and I will read a set of guidelines. This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow. Members may raise questions about matters relating to the operation of the budget with off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers.

It is the intention of the Chairman to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by 11 June 2004, so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers and, accordingly, I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements. I caution members that if the minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by 11 June 2004.

I will lead off with a question. Can the minister provide me with an update on total government expenditure referred to on page 1098 under the capital works program? What is the condition of public housing in regional areas? What does this Government do to ensure that good affordable housing is provided in regional areas, particularly in my electorate?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I thank the Chairman for that question. It is a question that is often asked. Concern has been expressed about the condition of public housing properties in regional Western Australia. This Government has decided to embark on a very extensive - some \$120 million - regional upgrade program that will see the replacement of 800 units and the refurbishment of a further 200 units over a four-year period. A thousand properties in regional Western Australia will be upgraded. We will deal with a whole raft of towns, but we will focus on some of the smaller towns that have received limited construction work. Figures for these developments show that the member's electorate is one that will receive special attention. The number of properties -

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: A Labor marginal seat! Good thinking.

The CHAIRMAN: Order, members! It is my question.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We are unashamedly focusing on the provision of public housing. It is interesting that Opposition members do not like it when we put public housing into wealthy areas, and they do not like it when we put public housing into poor areas, either.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Is Bunbury a poor area?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We are aiming to replace 45 properties in Bunbury in the following year. In this coming year the member for Bunbury will have 45 houses replaced in his electorate at an average cost per dwelling of approximately \$120 000, which will be an injection of almost \$5.5 million into the Bunbury economy. I notice the member for Eyre is in the Chamber. Fifteen new houses will be provided in Kalgoorlie at an average cost of \$145 000, which will mean a boost of \$2.175 million into the member's electorate. I also see lurking in the shadows the member for Albany, and he will be very pleased to learn that 40 houses will be replaced in his electorate at an average cost of \$130 000, resulting in a financial injection into Albany in excess of \$5 million.

The Chairman (mr A.J. Dean); Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Fran Logan;
Chairman; Mr John Hyde

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Perhaps this information can be provided by way of supplementary information: what was the total stock of Homeswest units for the last five years; what was the waiting list for each year, including the current waiting list; and what has been the average waiting time for people applying? I realise that is quite a bit of information.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I will need to clarify that this information will be available. Does the member want the number of the stock available at the end of each financial year?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: If that is the reference point, yes; also the waiting lists at that time and the average waiting time.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We will provide that by way of supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No A49.*]

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I refer to a property in my electorate called Harla Place. I had some correspondence with the minister about that property and I understand some refurbishment is proposed. Has that refurbishment been budgeted for? I would rather that building be knocked down and rebuilt.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Can the Leader of the Opposition elaborate?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am wondering what is happening with that project. There was talk about refurbishing those premises. It is an old building and I do not think it is up to the modern standards that Homeswest would want. As a local member, I would rather see Homeswest redevelop that site. It is a good site.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: As a Homeswest redevelopment?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes. It is an ideal site, particularly for seniors' accommodation, being close to rail and shops. Essentially, seniors live there now, although there have been some problems with antisocial behaviour because of single men living there. To be honest, some of the seniors are very scared. There are drugs in the building. It would be far better to redevelop the building and I would be interested to hear whether that is proposed. It may not happen this year, but I would be interested to hear whether it is in the program.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I am heartened that there appears to be some sort of support for aged Homeswest accommodation. The member has been reported in the media, hopefully inaccurately, as saying that Homeswest people really do not like living in the western suburbs, they do not feel comfortable or at home there and it is not appropriate for the Government to place them there.

[4.40 pm]

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That has been the experience in some cases.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: In other words, the poor prefer to be in their place.

I can confirm that money has been set aside for the upgrade of Harla Place. The work was sent out to tender. We did not have a successful result because the market is very tough at the moment. However, it will go out to the market again this year. There is \$1 million plus in the budget to upgrade that property.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is a large property. The amount of \$1 million will not go very far. I am interested in what is proposed for that.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: There are about 80 units in the property. That amount would spread out to a little more than \$10 000 a unit, which is not bad. It is a three-storey property. Would the Leader of the Opposition support its redevelopment to a five or six-storey property?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In principle, I would not object to it. There are buildings significantly above that height in the vicinity. Six storeys would be getting high for the clientele but perhaps not if it was properly serviced with lifts and good design. It is a very good site but that might amount to too many units. I would not oppose a structure of that height or even the disposal of some of the site and using some of the money from that disposal on Homeswest projects. The department could do more with that large, well-positioned site than the present building.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I will raise that with the minister and suggest that he have a look at it. I surmise from the minister's position that it is not our intention to reduce the Homeswest presence there. However, there may be another way of approaching it and I will ask the minister whether he is prepared to look at it.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I think I have about 660 Homeswest properties in my electorate.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Will the minister provide by way of supplementary information the number of Homeswest properties greater than three storeys and their heights? I was interested in the minister's comment. Experience overseas, particularly in the United Kingdom, is that the higher those sorts of properties are built the more

The Chairman (mr A.J. Dean); Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Fran Logan;
Chairman; Mr John Hyde

problems emerge. In England they are being pulled down and two-storey homes are being built. People are finding that the opportunities for social activities and their way of life in those properties is much improved. The UK Government is against multiple-storey buildings that unfortunately attract the wrong people who spoil it for everybody. That is the experience abroad.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We will provide the supplementary information of the number of Homeswest buildings of three storeys and above and their location.

[*Supplementary Information No A50.*]

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: A number of stereotypes have been woven into that scenario. Although some of the so-called slum clearances in Britain and in Victoria that led to high-rise development proved to be social disasters, we must be careful about being too simplistic. For example, in Highgate there is a private sector development called Stirling Towers. In the late 1970s, the owner was going broke and his friends in the Liberal Party decided that the Department of Housing and Works, or its predecessor, would acquire that building. Located in that building were almost exclusively persons from the subcontinent who enjoyed living in that environment. It was anything but a social disaster. It was a very successful development for them.

In relation to some of the more notorious blocks of flats in Melbourne, my sister used to work with the Vietnamese community many years ago. Although Australian families would be desperate to get out of those sorts of high-rise units into single-dwelling housing commission homes, many of the migrants, particularly those from Asia, who were used to living at close quarters - I suppose that is part of the reason - and had developed personal protocols and manners that accommodated that sort of close living, preferred that environment.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That is how ghettos are created.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I have often said about the demise of Sunset Hospital and the removal of the indigent gentlemen from there that, unfortunately, places like Dalkeith are becoming the ghettos of the rich. If the member were truly concerned about monocultures he would be concerned about what is increasingly happening in some of our wealthier suburbs. It is an interesting issue and, traditionally, we have thought of high-rise buildings as social disasters. I am trying to point out that it depends somewhat on the culture and community we are dealing with. Of very great interest now is the very high-rise flats in Carlton, of which the member may be aware. When a move was made to look at removing them, it created a lot of protest. They have been around for so long that communities have grown up in them rather than been transported into them. People have learnt to live in them and how to behave in order to get on with their neighbours. Huge protest movements have been held against any suggestion of pulling them down because they enable large numbers of less fortunate people, in an economic sense, to live in an otherwise very highly sought after area.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The minister referred to the high-rise flats in the UK when she referred to the slum flats. I can assure her that it was not just the old slums that were a disaster; the old slums were not high-rise buildings.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I referred to slum clearances.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Many of the high-rise developments in the UK probably occurred as recently as 25 or 30 years ago. They were found to be unsuitable and that is why they were pulled down.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Sure; that was the conventional wisdom. As I am trying to point out, there are some exceptions to that. Interestingly, we are now seeing in Melbourne, to some extent, a new wave of younger people coming through. We took people out of single dwellings and put them into those flats. It was not a happy experience for them. I understand that the people who have been living in them for quite some time now find that they prefer to live there. Although we would have once thought it was terrible to live in high-rise units, very esteemed and wealthy persons, be they trade union leaders or business leaders, are choosing to live in high-rise buildings.

[4.50 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: On page 1096 the second paragraph of the capital works program refers to the New Living program. May I first congratulate the State Housing Commission on the New Living program, particularly on the work that it has done in Coolbellup over the years? A fantastic transformation of Coolbellup has taken place as a result of the New Living program. Private householders and public tenants have seen the area completely transformed and house prices increase dramatically over the past four or five years. I am pleased to see that the New Living program has been extended to Southwell, which is one of the areas facing major social problems. Southwell is a State Housing Commission development in my electorate. It was one of the new 1960s designs and is now 40 years old. When it was built it was state of the art, but it is now another example of developments that did not work.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It was a really good Liberal initiative.

The Chairman (mr A.J. Dean); Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Fran Logan;
Chairman; Mr John Hyde

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am not sure whether the Southwell development was a Liberal initiative, but the Southwell public housing development was laid out on a British model, like the type of housing -

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: At Roundshaw.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there a question there somewhere?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is like the type of housing the member for Hillarys referred to -

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: In Croydon.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is a place that the member for Hillarys and I know very well indeed. The Roundshaw estate -

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: *The Bill* was filmed there. The flats that are shown in the program are on the Roundshaw estate. They cannot be filmed now because they have been pulled down.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: *The Bill* was filmed in that area. I am sure that the member for Hillarys would never go there now because he would never come out again.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I would be mugged.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It has the type of design that was adopted and used for the Southwell housing estate. Although it is included in the figures that we have, could the minister provide the figure for the expenditure on the New Living program in Southwell for the forthcoming financial year and the out years?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I thank the member for the question and his enthusiastic embrace of the program. To answer the mutterings and murmurings from the other side during the question, we should acknowledge that not the Southwell estate project but the New Living program was started under a Liberal Government. We congratulate members opposite on it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We are not all bad.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We take the Chinese view: no-one is 100 per cent good and no-one is 100 per cent bad. Some might get pretty close to being 100 per cent bad. The program was started under the previous Government, and it was very positive. The State Housing Commission has very effectively implemented it. The program to which the member referred is a big one. Approximately 40 per cent of the properties in that area are Homeswest properties. Our aim is to reduce the figure to 15 per cent. It is not really an issue of the funds that are allocated to it, because we have gone through a very extensive and tortuous tender process that has seen the Satterley-McCusker team win the job. The trick will be the management of the tenants into other properties and out of that area. If anything is a constraint, it is that rather than the available funds. It is a very good project, which I believe will have a big impact in the member's area. I appreciate the member's support for it. We recognise it as one of the handful of excellent programs set up under the previous Government.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This may be answered by way of supplementary information, but I would like to know how many living units, if I may put it that way, Homeswest has disposed of over the past 10 years, which I think would be useful, and under which programs. Some properties have been disposed of under the New Living program and some under the former Government's right to buy program, so perhaps the information could be provided for the different programs.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We will provide that information, but we will add to it the properties disposed of under ICEHA.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Under what?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: The Industrial and Commercial Employees Housing Authority. I think someone ended up going to jail over that. Other government properties have been disposed of.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The minister may provide other information if she wishes, but I would like to know specifically about Homeswest living units.

The CHAIRMAN: The supplementary information will be the number of Homeswest living units disposed of over the past 10 years under various programs.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A51.*]

Mr J.N. HYDE: On page 1097 one of the new works is community housing for 2004-05. A number of diverse groups in my electorate are going through the process of trying to be engaged in a community housing project.

The Chairman (mr A.J. Dean); Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Fran Logan;
Chairman; Mr John Hyde

How many new works projects will be funded out of the budget allocation of \$3.5 million? Will the minister give an update on the Norwood Park development?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: That is a good question. I would like the answer to it as well. The community housing stock is currently 825 units. As a result of this activity we are expecting another 46 units to be added to it, which would bring the total number of units to 871. I will ask Mr Joyce to give a full and comprehensive answer on what is happening to Norwood Park.

Mr JOYCE: It is currently at the detailed design and specification stage. It has been a bit tardy but we are now nearly ready to go to tender. We expect to go to tender in about two months.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Wandana flats property in West Perth has been heritage listed. I understand that the property has some social issues. What does Homeswest intend for that property, given that it has now been heritage listed?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: We have no intention of moving the public out, obviously, because of it being heritage listed. It is quite consistent, indeed desirable in the light of its heritage listing, that it continue to be used for the purpose for which it was designed.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I do not think it could be regarded as good quality Homeswest accommodation by today's standards. I am a great fan of Homeswest's more recent developments. They are very good. However, that property is very old and probably not a design one would have today. We now have a large heritage-listed building with a number of tenants.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Quite frankly, I do not see the fact that it has been heritage listed at all problematic. We have recently invested something in the order of \$1 million to upgrade it. The interesting thing is that, just like general members of the public, our public housing clientele have a diversity of taste and predilection. Some people prefer to live in older style accommodation in older suburbs. Others prefer newer or more conventional properties. Homeswest needs to have a real mixture of accommodation, both in style and accommodation, but it must be of an appropriate quality. The \$1 million that has been invested on the upgrade ensures that it does meet those standards.

Committee adjourned at 5.00 pm
