

PUBLIC HOUSING — TENANT BEHAVIOUR — EAST FREMANTLE

Grievance

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle) [9.07 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Housing, and I feel a little frustrated that he is not here to hear my grievance. I understand that the minister did ask for a pair for leave from Parliament but was not given one on the basis that there was a grievance before him that needed to be heard as it is our last day of sitting today, so he has chosen to simply absent himself from the Parliament. That is a really unusual move by the Minister for Housing and, as I said, it is a little frustrating. It is not as though I can come in next week or on the next sitting day to present this grievance. It is very frustrating that he has such disregard for his policy responsibilities and for this particular matter, which I will outline to members, that he has simply decided to absent himself from Parliament. I think it not only characterises that particular minister, the Leader of the National Party, Hon Brendon Grylls, but also shows the sort of arrogance that this government has to the sort of policy issues that come before this Parliament when people are frustrated. I will outline my grievance nevertheless, so that it is on the public record.

The issue goes to the processes adopted by the Department of Housing for dealing with antisocial behaviour in public housing. In short, there is confusion and frustration amongst the public about how to make a complaint about disruptive behaviour in Department of Housing accommodation. I want to know what communication the Housing Authority undertakes with the neighbours in streets surrounding public housing so that residents can be clear about how to make a complaint, what detail is necessary in the complaint, and how to take the matter further if they are not getting their views heard. I have read the authority's disruptive behaviour policy and seen the behaviour management flyer online. On reading the flyer, the steps seem logical, but in practice people who are forced to endure unruly, disorderly and often frightening behaviour are often left feeling frustrated and unheard when they contact the authority and ask for action to be taken. They do not feel safe identifying themselves as complainants.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Too many conversations are occurring in the chamber.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: It is not known that they must get evidence or incident —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle, I was speaking. Can members keep their conversations outside; thank you.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: Madam Deputy Speaker, I understood that you usually stand if you want members to stop. There may have been some inhibiting factors for you not to do that.

I was talking about why neighbours feel frustrated when they make complaints to the Department of Housing. They do not feel safe identifying themselves as complainants. It is not known that they must get evidence or give incident numbers from police to the Housing Authority. The public is not aware of this. Often no effective feedback is received from the authority about complaints, so people get worn down and give up, even though the problem has not gone away. Finally, neighbours cannot at times be categorical about the source of the disruption, even though their suspicions are strong and the disturbances and resultant anxiety are very real.

This frustration has been all too apparent in a street in my electorate, in a suburb that many might be surprised to hear is the location of significant disruption and dysfunction—the suburb of East Fremantle. At a block of flats located at 50 Alexandra Road, a small number of residents are the source of significant disruption and antisocial behaviour that is driving other residents in those flats, as well as neighbours in Alexandra Road and the surrounding streets, to despair.

In 2015, a resident in an adjoining street made a complaint to the local police, as well as to the Minister for Housing, about that flat. That resident had had a particularly aggressive break-in at his residence. He was told, as I was when my office took up the matter with the Housing Authority, that it had received very few complaints about that block of flats in Alexandra Road. However, in that same year, police told that constituent that they had received 41 complaints from those units in 2015 alone. Obviously, there is a disconnect between what police are experiencing and what the Housing Authority is experiencing with complaints. To further illustrate my point about those flats, I want to briefly quote from an email received from a resident in Alexandra Road. She does not want to be identified, but I believe that these experiences are shared amongst many residents in the area. In her email, the resident describes —

- A late night fight directly outside our front door which caused us to call the emergency number as we were fearful for our safety;
- Almost daily noise from verbal arguments. Sometimes the arguments include banging doors and smashing glass ...

- Regular playing of loud music;
- We have had broken glass thrown into out back garden;
- Rubbish and shopping trolleys are regularly dumped in front of our unit;
- We ... had to pay ... to remove a music speaker infested with bees from the front of our unit ...
- Last night an indigenous lady knocked on our door asking for assistance. She looked distressed and said she was being tormented by two young boys. She said she lived next door at No. 50. We reported the situation to the police;
- There is very bad language and shouting constantly ...
- Our elderly neighbours ... have told us they have recently had rocks thrown at their back windows by young boys at No. 50.

We have not reported any of the above to the Housing Authority because we understand that we need to inform the Authority which tenants are causing the problems, and we do not have this information.

I want to make clear that this resident states —

We have no problem living next door to public housing and we feel strongly that public housing should be available in all suburbs. However, we do have a problem when public housing tenants ... regularly keep our ... daughter awake at night because of their constant shouting, swearing and fighting ...

I understand that there is natural justice and that people being complained about have the opportunity to have their story heard. However, at the moment, local residents who are frustrated with disruptive behaviour come up against a faceless, unfeeling and ineffective bureaucracy. There seems to be little or no effective communication with local police, who are often left to pick up the pieces.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Police) [9.15 am]: First of all, I want to put on the record that when I became aware that this grievance would be raised, I immediately contacted the Minister for Housing and told him that I had a lot of information about this address and would be happy to take the grievance for him because I knew that he had a prior engagement. I am very pleased to take this grievance on behalf of the Minister for Housing.

This very serious issue was raised recently at a community forum attended by me; the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Steve Brown; and other police officers. Prior to the forum, in response to a letterbox drop that the member for Bateman, Matt Taylor, had arranged, this issue was brought to Matt Taylor's attention and I was very pleased that he raised it with me.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, please refer to the member's electorate rather than the name. Thank you.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Of course.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Prior to the forum, I was able to seek information from both the Department of Housing and WA Police about the issues at 48–50 Alexandra Road. The Minister for Housing has provided some information in response to the member for Fremantle's grievance today.

Ms S.F. McGurk: But he's too arrogant to come and listen to people's concerns—too arrogant!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am trying to answer the member for Fremantle's grievance. Will she give me the courtesy of being able to answer on behalf of the constituents in that area?

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Fremantle, I call you for the first time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Department of Housing is currently investigating four complaints of disruptive behaviour. Complainants who have identified themselves will be advised of the outcome. Two current tenants have had previous strikes. However, the strikes were issued more than 12 months ago and have now expired. The complex is still capable of meeting social housing outcomes. The Department of Housing is going to provide some intensive support due to the high demand from the clients in that area and some of the challenging clients who have been housed, not only at 48–50 Alexandra Road, but also in other social housing complexes within that vicinity. The Housing Authority has introduced an intensive tenancy management trial at some of those complexes in East Fremantle. As part of the program, the Housing Authority will conduct property inspections

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and has, in fact, been conducting property inspections every three months to ensure that all tenants meet their obligations. Some of the tenants at 48–50 Alexandra Road will be subject to that intensive management program.

All the future tenants being considered for 48–50 Alexandra Road will be offered a six or 12-month introductory fixed lease agreement. This will assist tenants to understand their obligations. Tenants who commit antisocial behaviour during the introductory tenancy agreement period will not have their tenancy renewed. This program will give us an opportunity to manage those tenants and move them out if there are any complaints whatsoever about their behaviour. Their tenancy will be almost like a probationary tenancy, and if they do not comply with the obligations to be good neighbours, their tenancy will not be renewed.

A serious issue regarding policing at that location was raised at the forum. It may be the same issue that has been raised with the member for Fremantle. Police were accused of not attending when a distressed female had been acting in a very aggressive manner towards tenants and neighbours of 48–50 Alexandra Road. However, the police did attend and they picked up the female who was causing the issue and she was conveyed to emergency at Fremantle Hospital where she was taken care of by hospital staff. As I understand it, she was drug affected and had mental health concerns and was conveyed by ambulance to hospital as a result of police attending at the location.

The problem with this particular location is that seven prolific priority offenders have been housed at 48–50 Alexandra Road. For those members who may not know, prolific priority offenders are offenders who commit multiple offences, often within the vicinity of their tenancy. Six of those PPOs are currently behind bars for volume crime offences. That means the neighbourhood can expect a significant improvement in the situation because while those offenders are behind bars, they will not be able to engage in the antisocial and criminal behaviour that the neighbourhood has been subject to over the past four years, which, I understand, is how long this has been an issue. It is great that it has been raised on the last day of Parliament. Two prolific priority offenders are due for release this week.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Fremantle; the minister has the floor.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Those prolific priority offenders will be intensively managed by the police. The police have also started active engagement with the Department of Housing.

Point of Order

Ms S.F. McGURK: Madam Deputy Speaker, you understand that there is limited time in a grievance to raise issues. The specific point of this grievance is to understand what communication the Housing Authority has with residents who surround public housing so that those residents understand how to make an effective complaint about difficult residents in a particular public housing block of flats or units. That is the specific question and that is why I addressed my grievance to the Minister for Housing, not the Minister for Police, the Minister for Women's Interests or the Deputy Premier. I wanted the Minister for Housing to respond to my grievance because this is a Housing Authority question and the Deputy Premier has yet to address it.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Further to the point of order, this grievance was listed as a grievance to the Minister for Housing. I well understand that the Minister for Housing is not here and that the Minister for Police is responding on behalf of the Minister for Housing. However, she is not entitled to respond in her capacity and say that the member is now grieving to the police minister. No, this grievance was listed to the Minister for Housing.

A government member interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please do not interrupt a point of order.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The issue I have is that we were not advised that the Minister for Housing would not be available to take this grievance. We anticipated that the Minister for Housing would be here. Had we known that he was not going to be here, we could have chosen to do another grievance. The Minister for Police is representing the Minister for Housing and she needs to respond to the housing grievance that was listed and not give her own rant as police minister about what the police are doing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under standing order 146, a minister can be deputed to respond to a grievance and it is the minister's prerogative to decide how to respond to that grievance. This is not a point of order. Back to you, minister. Thank you.

Grievance Resumed

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I thought that the member would be interested to know how this property is being managed in the interests of the constituents of East Fremantle and that was what I was endeavouring to reveal. The police obviously have a high interest in some of the tenants and are working proactively with the Housing Authority so that when there are issues and the police are called out for violent or antisocial behaviour at that address, they will communicate directly with the Housing Authority. The issue for the neighbours of those

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particularly disruptive people at 48-50 Alexandra Road is that they are frightened of them. They do not want to contact the Department of Housing because they are scared that in response to making that contact, there will be vigilante action. The police are taking the issue away from the neighbours and will intervene with Housing on their behalf. Information will go out to the people in that vicinity. That information will detail what police are doing, what Housing is doing and what we would like those neighbours to do to assist us to manage that tenancy more effectively.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased that this issue has finally been raised in the chamber by the member for Fremantle. The member for Bateman contacted me about this issue and, as a result of that contact, action was taken immediately.