

PUBLIC HOUSING — SECURITY

Grievance

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [9.30 am]: I thank the Minister for Housing for taking my grievance. On 7 June this year, some two weeks ago, a report was published in *The West Australian* titled “Retiree’s bloody hell”. The story was about a retired gentleman who was the victim of a vicious beating stemming from an attempted robbery. The gentleman, Mr Christopher Hands, a volunteer with the Salvation Army, lives in a Homeswest complex. Mr Hands was out doing what he regularly does—undertaking a security walk around the complex and surrounding area. Mr Hands does this because his complex is a target for criminals who know that many vulnerable people are there. It is a sad reality that the residents see too many break-ins in their complex and crime in nearby streets. In the weeks prior to being assaulted, his Homeswest complex had experienced repeated criminal incidents, including stealing and damaging of cars and an attempted home invasion. The day before Mr Hands’ assault, yet another home unit had smashed windows being boarded up, waiting for repair. Some residents spoke to the media. June Field said —

It’s open house. And we’re all elderly people here. We’re easy prey.

Another resident, Mr Bob Knight, felt that he was the initial target of the criminals who assaulted Mr Hands. The article states —

“This keeps happening,” Mr Knight said.

“We’re living in fear and we shouldn’t have to.”

I am certain that the minister agrees that Bob is right and that he should not have to live in fear. Mr Hands believes that security for residents would be improved by installing security cameras and possibly a security gate at the complex. As matters stand, there is no deterrent for anyone to wander into the complex and pursue their criminal activities. Although security cameras and gates will not guarantee safety, they would no doubt provide some level of deterrence, at least from opportunistic crimes. This is not an uncommon problem. The minister would note that I have significant social housing and Homeswest housing in my electorate. A few days after reading the article about Mr Hands, I was visited by a retired gentleman who lives in a Homeswest apartment in my electorate. He was very concerned about the constant fear that he and others experience because of the threat of crime and antisocial behaviour in their building. He told me about various highly troubling incidents at the apartments he lives in. He told me about a female neighbour who has a mattress up against the window to act as added security and protect her from broken glass, because she has had windows smashed before, and also as a noise barrier. He told me about brazen drug dealing that goes on in and around the apartments. The car park is a magnet for criminals and cars are regularly broken into and occasionally stolen.

I was informed that police turn up to make arrests for various matters at the apartment, but there is little response when crimes are reported. Most tenants in this gentleman’s complex believe that cameras, gates and a secure car park will assist in reducing antisocial and criminal behaviour. The gentleman who visited my office expressed bewilderment at the routine dismissal of residents’ concerns over crime and security and he has raised the matter with the building manager and Homeswest previously. Residents do not feel that Homeswest is taking their concerns seriously.

I do not know whether funding is available to provide additional security measures in these apartments, but it seems reasonable that minor capital improvements for the safety and security of vulnerable people in Homeswest complexes could be provided with security cameras and, where appropriate, gates. As I have said previously, although security cameras and gates will not guarantee safety, they would no doubt provide some level of deterrence. They will certainly provide some added peace of mind and security for the residents. Therefore, I respectfully request the Minister for Housing to investigate a program of upgrading security at Homeswest apartment complexes. The cost should not be too great, particularly if this reduces property damage and theft at the apartments. This is a major concern for my constituents and other Homeswest residents, particularly in larger apartments. I hope the minister can look favourably on this request for upgraded security at Homeswest apartments and properties.

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing) [9.33 am]: I thank the member for his grievance. I have said previously that both I, as the minister, and the government, but also the Department of Communities, take very seriously any concerns relating to safety. We do not tolerate antisocial behaviour, whether it be Department of Communities tenants or otherwise. I have a genuine and sincere belief that everyone has a right to feel safe in their home. The government implements a number of measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of tenants across its properties. The member for Cottesloe has got to understand that our agency is responsible for the maintenance of nearly 50 000 properties across government, including social housing and community housing. I want to be very clear about the government’s obligations. Firstly, the agency is required to adhere to security provisions set out in the Residential Tenancies Regulations 1989. This includes deadlocks on main entrances, compliant lockable security screens, external lighting at the main door, deadlocks or bolt locks on all other external doors, and lockable windows.

That is what the department is required to do under the regulations. In addition, all designated seniors' accommodation includes barrier screens fitted to front and rear doors and adjustable, accessible windows. The department also provides consent for the installation of security cameras and other security measures for tenants at their own expense, ensuring the privacy of other tenants and no damage to the property, for example, so there are conditions on that installation. It is important to note that the state government introduced the safety and security rebate. That allows Seniors Card holders to claim up to \$400 a household for eligible security equipment, which includes closed-circuit television, home alarm systems and security. That important measure is available and can be accessed.

I want to address the complexities of both CCTV and security around complexes. I understand that it may sound very simple, but the reality is that often issues arise from tenants letting in other tenants, not tenants letting in other guests or family members to that complex. That presents challenges in managing complexes if tenants—I am not blaming them—invite someone in, or have guests coming through the door. It is not as simple as saying that we march in with gates and security cameras. Many public housing complexes house a lot of vulnerable people, particularly those experiencing or escaping family and domestic violence, people with mental health concerns, or people who simply do not want to feel violated or videotaped. There has to be a very clear demonstrated need due to the significant cost involved of CCTV with the cost of monitoring, recording and servicing those devices.

It is important to look at Mosman Park. We have to be driven by the evidence. I say this respectfully to the member: between January and May this year across Mosman Park public housing stock, including complexes, 55 complaints were received by the department, of which 22 could not be substantiated as disruptive behaviour. That could be dogs, everyday noise or neighbour interpersonal disputes. Twenty-nine were related to noise complaints, which was loud music, excessive noise and yelling; four related to domestic arguments within households; one related to threatening behaviour. I appreciate that these matters are relayed to the member for Cottesloe, but the department has to be guided by clear evidence. Based on that, it is fair to say that CCTV could not be justified on the basis of what is provided to the agency and what is reported on.

I also note that we have to look at the crime statistics in the area as well. It did peak in 2015–16, but actually what we have seen is that overall crime or antisocial behaviour has trended downward substantially over the past few years. Non-family assault offences have decreased by 85 per cent, compared with the same quarter in 2015–16.

I want to assure people that we do take this seriously. There are a range of measures already in place, in accordance with regulations, for seniors accommodation. But there does need to be a very demonstrated need, and additional security measures such as security cameras are only considered by communities for complexes with ongoing serious, disruptive and criminal behaviour.