

## SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HOUSING

### *Grievance*

**DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands)** [9.51 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Housing. I thank the minister for taking my grievance about an issue I know that we both share an interest in, that of social and community housing. I appreciate the minister's innovative and responsive approach to addressing of building the number and capacity of social housing options since taking the portfolios of housing and homelessness.

As the minister is aware, I have worked in community services for over two decades. I have seen the impact that social and community housing can have for people in providing stability, safety and security. Social housing can provide people a platform to engage in education, training, employment, treatment services, and build community. It is a basis for health, wellbeing, social inclusion and connection. More fundamentally, it is a human right that affords people dignity and affords them an adequate standard of living.

I will provide just one example of what social housing can do for someone's life, a story shared with permission. A friend and colleague of mine was in a violent relationship for many years, with the instability and lack of safety that brings to all aspects of a life. When her partner passed away, her housing needs changed as she was now a single mother to school-age children. Since securing community housing, her children all successfully engaged in and completed schooling, with the youngest to graduate from their now local high school in a few years. She has gone on to attend university. A single parent, in her 40s, who had not completed high school, will graduate with honours early next year. She attributes much of this to the stability and security of her community housing. It has removed a significant source of worry and concern and allowed her to put down roots and build a community.

From this basis of security and safety, she has engaged in an education that will change her life and given that she has chosen to study in the helping professions, will also change the lives of others. This education will allow her access to greater employment in a stable profession where there are multiple opportunities. It will improve her income and later her superannuation. Not only this, but it will also provide her the rewards of her own commitment, resilience and dedication—a sense of pride, identity and contribution. I know she is watching so I will take this opportunity to say how proud I am to call her my friend. These are the kinds of people who live in social housing and these are the kinds of benefits that social housing provides for individuals, families and communities that social housing provides.

I note the Cook Labor governments investment of \$2.6 billion in social housing and homelessness measures over four years. Thirteen hundred social homes have been added to support Western Australians with a further 1 100 social homes currently under contract or construction. Social housing makes up less than four per cent of homes in WA, and of this approximately 83 per cent is managed by the state government, and 17 per cent by community housing providers. Community housing is owned by, or under the legal control of, a community housing organisation, usually non-profits, that is highly skilled in matching people's needs to accommodation and supporting them to maintain that housing. Social housing works across a range of needs, including crisis, transitional and long-term housing.

I commend the minister's announcement last week that, under new planning reforms new social housing projects will be able to bypass local government to reduce barriers to entry. Community housing providers will be able to go directly to the development assessment panel, noting that local governments need to step up and play a role in cutting red tape to boost housing supply across the state. Unfortunately, the announcements have attracted criticism from some local governments, including mine. However, disturbingly, the criticisms have not been about the policy itself but rather judgement and stereotyping of the types of people who live in social housing. According to one City of Perth councillor, the reason councils say no to social housing is that people are scared of the tenants. They later doubled down on these comments, on this stereotyping and fearmongering, by writing to a local paper to say that social housing brings noise complaints, litter and, apparently, even declining property values.

Let us consider however the range of social housing provided to people in our community. They are people living with a disability. They are carers. They are single parents who are provided the opportunity to have their children complete their schooling in a local community. They are our seniors and elderly community members. They are young care leavers who are given service support to access accommodation and build their independent living skills. They are people on low incomes who cannot access the rental market or purchase a property. They are people worthy of our compassion and understanding. They are people worthy to be our neighbours. They are people worthy of being members of our community. Everybody has the right to housing.

As this councillor represents part of my electorate, it is deeply disappointing, and personally upsetting to see my community and its residents, including me and my family, portrayed as a community who are not empathetic or inclusive, yet my electorate is home to many highly reputable and engaged community housing services including Ruah, Foundation Housing, and the Third Place. In fact, the Third Place recently held a highly successful fundraising event, with many local Subiaco businesses donating to support the event. Demonstrating how local governments can be inclusive and engaging in its role in community housing, the City of Subiaco recently signed a partnership

agreement with the Wandana Community Association to provide a community garden, a fortnightly morning tea for residents, and a native garden project. The Mayor of Subiaco noted in his speech the importance of such partnerships like that with Wandana to the diverse communities that make up the fabric of Subiaco, and facilitate spaces to learn, connect and flourish.

I seek therefore from the minister today: an acknowledgement that social and community housing are a priority of the WA government; a recognition that our government's social housing policies will continue to be inclusive and consider how we can best develop capacity and volume in housing opportunities; an understanding of the positive ways local government can contribute to successful social housing outcomes. Finally, I extend an invitation to the minister to visit my electorate and meet with key community housing stakeholders to witness the excellent and compassionate work that is happening in this space in my community.

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [9.58 am]: I thank the member for Nedlands for her commitment to providing housing for the most vulnerable in Western Australia. I know that the member for Nedlands reflects her community. Although I may not always agree with some members of her community on all aspects—for example, regarding density—I think it is fair to say from my experience that the Nedlands community, in the way that it engages with social and community housing in the electorate, shows a genuine understanding and empathy for ensuring that we have housing for all. As the member said, we are making huge investments worth \$2.6 billion over four years with a target of delivering 4 000 homes, of which we have delivered nearly 1 500 to date, to integrate social housing across Western Australia. As I said in the last grievance, national cabinet this week endorsed a framework and principles to drive more housing via planning reform. That included encouraging and facilitating reforms to support the rapid delivery of social and affordable housing, and to promote medium and high-density housing in well-located areas close to existing public transport connections, amenity and employment. It will also undertake planning, zoning, land release and other reforms such as increased density to meet the share of housing supply targets. There is a huge push in every state to drive planning reform to accelerate the delivery of all housing, but in particular social and community housing.

I am deeply proud that I am building on the planning reforms. We also announced a streamlined approvals process for community housing that the member referred to. The idea is simple. It is a measure for cutting red tape so that regardless of the size or value of the project, community housing providers can opt to go through the development assessment panels system. There is a choice. Community providers can still choose to go to a council, and although the project might be for just four or five dwellings, which does not reach the threshold of the DAP system as it is currently set, the provider can opt to go to the DAP system. This is just another way to provide a streamlined approach and I note that it has been welcomed by the community housing sector.

I think the member referred to some comments in response to that by one councillor in particular. I will name him. It was councillor Brent Fleeton. In summary, he said that, in effect, social housing gets knocked back because people fear the residents. That was disappointing and sad because, ultimately, we need to show compassion and empathy for people who are doing it tough. I have always said that anyone can experience homelessness because of the loss of a job or falling behind in mortgage repayments. It could be for many different circumstances in a person's life that they never imagined they would experience. Social housing and community housing tenants are real people. They are not to be mocked or to be simply put down. I think it is really easy to get on Twitter or social media and make glib remarks that perpetuate stigma about social and community housing. Unfortunately, I note that this is not the first time Councillor Fleeton has done this. He has now deleted it, but he actually posted a picture of a homeless person sleeping in Sydney at 10.30 pm on Sydney's busiest CBD street. I assume he posted it to make some sort of a political or comparative point. Again, I find it very sad that a local councillor would feel compelled to take a photo of someone doing it really tough on a street, regardless of what point he was trying to make, and put that on Twitter. What was the point of it? Ultimately, what was he trying to do? I think we are all better than that. Whatever side of politics we are on, we are better than stigmatising, mocking or whatever else, people who are doing it rough.

I understand that there are complexities with the management of social housing. I have never shied away from that. That is why we are working to integrate social housing across communities. Certainly, as the Minister for Housing, I want to be very clear that we will always champion social housing and public housing. It provides a critical safety net for people in Western Australia and we need to integrate it across all communities. The community in Nedlands has already demonstrated that, contrary to some opinions, community and social housing tenants are embraced by and are part of our community.