

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE  
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

**Organisation:** Upper Hunter Shire Council

**Date Received:** 29 July 2021

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Our Reference: OUT-4146/21



28 July 2021

Legislative Assembly  
Committee on Community Services  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

**Inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage**

The Upper Hunter Shire Council (Council) thanks the Committee on Community Services for the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage.

Council is concerned with the current social housing shortage locally and across NSW and is of the view that more needs to be done by government to address this issue.

We have been a local provider of social housing in the form of low income and emergency housing for many years and we currently operate two (2) low-income units and eight (8) independent living units (ILUs) in Merriwa and nine (9) ILUs in Murrurundi. Recently, Council resolved to renovate one of its buildings in Scone and enter into a lease with a local housing provider to provide emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence and persons experiencing homelessness. Council has found itself operating in this space due to a shortage of emergency accommodation in the area, which is the result of a lack of investment in social housing by the State government.

Council supports the inquiry and considers there are various options available to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage. Our observations and possible options to address the social housing shortage are outlined below.

**1. Social Housing Needs Analysis**

There needs to be a comprehensive assessment of social housing needs across each Local Government Area of NSW to assess the extent of the problem and to determine the level of demand for, and the supply of, suitable accommodation. Once this is completed, local and/or regional strategies could be developed and funding directed into the areas of greatest need.

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## 2. Review and update of planning controls

It is recommended that State Environmental Planning Policy (Affordable Rental Housing) 2009 be updated to include and/or expand provisions enabling social housing providers to provide temporary supportive accommodation within a wide range of residential settings without the need for development consent.

## 3. Resourcing of Local Community Housing Providers

There needs to be greater access to and an increase in the capacity of local community housing providers. The core social housing providers in the Upper Hunter Shire are Upper Hunter Homeless Support and Compass Housing. They are experts in their fields and need to be adequately resourced to deliver housing and support services. This includes provision of a mix of housing types that are safe, secure, accessible and respectful of the needs of vulnerable people. Additional government funding is required to ensure the viability of these providers.

## 4. Developer Contributions

Additional funding for social housing could be sourced from Developer Contributions collected by planning authorities through local development contributions plans, planning agreements and regional infrastructure contributions. A greater proportion of these contributions could be directed into social housing projects in local communities.

## 5. Increase the supply of affordable housing

Increasing the supply of affordable housing is required to provide greater housing choice for low-income households who are more likely to be suffering financial stress and in need of support. An increase in affordable housing stock is likely to lessen the demand for social housing as a greater number of individuals and families will be able to sustain a tenancy before reaching a crisis point, which results in homelessness and the need for support services. Affordable housing is also important for individuals/families post crisis when they become more stable and their need for support services declines. The government could implement a range of measures to make housing more affordable such as lowering stamp duty and increasing the supply of public housing.

## 6. Accommodation models

Council supports the Key Response Worker model that Upper Hunter Homeless Support has trialled for the past 12 months. This model has reduced waiting lists and provided a triage option. The model works well at crisis point.

We would like to see an expansion of the temporary accommodation (TA) model and greater flexibility in rural and isolated areas, acknowledging that there isn't a suitable transport option for a homeless person in an isolated community (eg Merriwa) to access TA if it is only available in the main population centres such as Scone and Muswellbrook.

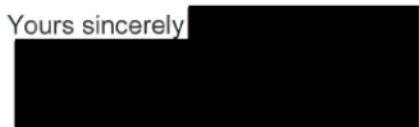
## 7. Increase Community Awareness of Homelessness

There needs to be much greater awareness in the wider community of the impacts of homelessness eg family violence, mental health, financial issues. All levels of government could be doing more to raise awareness and promote community connectedness and social cohesion in local communities.

Council thanks the Committee for considering this submission.

For any further information, or if the Committee has any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Council.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Greg McDonald.

Greg McDonald  
GENERAL MANAGER