

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4
2004 BUDGET ESTIMATES**

HOUSING PORTFOLIO

QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE DURING HEARING ON 10 FEBRUARY 2005

QUESTION No. 1a and 1b

The Chair asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

- (a) What are the most recent available figures in relation to unoccupied public housing?
- (b) A breakdown of that figure across the central Sydney region, the Hunter region, the northern region, the south-eastern region, the south-western region, the western region and the Western Sydney region

ANSWER:

(a) & (b)

The number of properties that are unoccupied varies considerably from day to day. This is because properties have been identified for either sale or redevelopment into more appropriate accommodation, and properties are in the process of being prepared for reletting to applicants on the Public Housing waiting lists.



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QUESTION No. 2a and 2b

The Chair asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

- (a) How many tenants in New South Wales public housing are paying market rent?
- (b) A breakdown of that figure by region.

ANSWER:

- (a) At 30 June 2004 there were 12,844 public housing tenants paying market rent.
- (b)
 - (1) At 30 June 2004 there were 1,047 public housing tenants paying market rent in the Central Sydney region.
 - (2) At 30 June 2004 there were 1,738 public housing tenants paying market rent in Hunter region.
 - (3) At 30 June 2004 there were 897 public housing tenants paying market rent in Northern region.
 - (4) At 30 June 2004 there were 1,862 public housing tenants paying market rent in South Eastern region.
 - (5) At 30 June 2004 there were 2,948 public housing tenants paying market rent in South Western Sydney region.
 - (6) At 30 June 2004 there were 1,404 public housing tenants paying market rent in Western Region region.
 - (7) At 30 June 2004 there were 2,948 public housing tenants paying market rent in Western Sydney region.



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QUESTION No. 3

The Chair asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

- (a) Can you advise the committee how many tenants were evicted from public housing during the last calendar year?
- (b) Can you tell how that relates to the previous year? Is that an improvement? Does that indicate a better performance by the tenants, or what is the trend line?

ANSWER:

- (a) & (b) The Department's reporting systems for tenant evictions is limited to reporting statistics by financial year. During the 2003/04 financial year there were 232 tenants evicted by the Department. The level of evictions has experienced a small decline over the last 3 financial years.



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QUESTION No. 4

Ms Hale asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing-

But you would well be aware that, for example, in the Fairfield area there is a very real prospect of up to 600 people there finding themselves without homes, similarly at Gosford in Tasker's caravan park there is a possibility of several hundred people finding themselves without homes. Do you think it is appropriate that the department should develop a policy addressing the specific situation and needs of these people?

ANSWER:

In the event of the closure of a residential park, the Department of Housing works closely with other agencies and services to provide coordinated assistance to affected residents. Where appropriate, residents may be offered assistance such as Rentstart, Special Assistance Subsidies and tenancy guarantees to assist them to secure housing in the private rental market. They may also be assisted to apply for Commonwealth Rental Assistance, and may have access to rental accommodation in the community housing sector.



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QUESTION No. 5a

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Allen, Deputy-Director General, Department of Housing –

What would be the income eligibility for a family of five - three children, husband, wife, two of the people working - to get into public housing?

ANSWER:

\$720 per week



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QUESTION No 5b

The Hon David Oldfield: What is the criterion regarding property?

ANSWER:

The Department's policy Eligibility for Public Housing states that applicants who own, or part own, residential property in Australia are not eligible for public housing if they are:

- Able to live in the property
- Able to sell their equity in the property.

This rule may be waived in special cases.



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QUESTION No. 6

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Allen, Deputy-Director General, Department of Housing –

What is the general breakdown of time for a person to be able to gain housing? Can you give me something on notice that is quite particular in those areas with regard to times, access, single dwelling, multistorey, whatever?

ANSWER:

The waiting time for a person to gain housing is influenced by a number of factors including: the housing needs of the particular applicant; the area they have requested housing; the amount, type, location and relative availability of housing appropriate for their needs; and the relative priority of the applicant's needs as compared with those of other applicants waiting for the same type of housing.



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QUESTION No. 7

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing –

Can I get on notice the value of properties in the portfolio in excess of \$600,000?

ANSWER:

The Department of Housing does not individually value each Departmental property. Each year the Department uses professional valuers to establish the values of a sample of properties that are considered representative of its total property portfolio. As a guide, the value of properties in the Department's portfolio in excess of \$600,000 is \$1.4 billion, or 5% of the Department's property portfolio totalling \$28.9 billion.



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QUESTION No. 8

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing -

- (a) What is the total of the amount paid in strata fees and the amount paid in council rates?
- (b) What is the total value of the portfolio?

ANSWER:

- (a) Strata fees in 2003/04 were \$0.293 million, while council rates were \$85.567 million.
- (b) This information is contained in the Department of Housing's 2003/04 Annual Report.



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QUESTION No. 9

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing -

Could I also get on notice the total gross rent income?

ANSWER:

The Department's gross rental income on residential properties in 2003/04 is shown in its 2003/04 Annual Report.



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QUESTION No. 10

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

Could I get a breakdown, percentage wise, of the type of welfare this 91 per cent of people who are on a benefit of some kind in public housing, for example, unemployment, disability, age pension? Could I get a percentage breakdown of that?

ANSWER:

The breakdown of 2003/04 is shown in the Department's Annual Report.



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QUESTION No. 11

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

In questions I asked previously you let us know that there are 15 properties that are worth in excess of \$1million. In fact, one is worth \$2.1million. Could I get, please an understanding, on notice of course, of how long those properties have been occupied by current tenants? We are talking one year, five years, 10 years? Have people been in them a long time? Can I get an understanding of those 15 properties and the length of time the current tenants have been there?

ANSWER:

While there were 15 properties in September 2004, this figure is now 14 public housing properties. Of the 14 Public Housing properties, 13 are let to public housing tenants and the remaining property is let to a community organisation under a community tenancy for which the Department does not have details of individual tenancies. 11 of the 13 properties have been tenanted for more than five years.



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QUESTION No. 12

Mr Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing –

Can I also get a breakdown of how many apartments, how many townhouses and how many units are in the portfolio?

ANSWER:

As at 22 February 2005, the Department's portfolio includes cottages (43%), townhouses (12%), units (40%) and villas (5%).



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QUESTION No. 13

Mr Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing –

Could I also get an understanding of however you would feel best it expressed as to where there are, in the case of units, properties where the whole block is Housing Department as opposed to individual units that are housed, obviously, where you would be paying strata fees? How many are in the blocks as opposed to how many are individuals in apartment buildings that are not owned fully by the Department.

ANSWER:

The Department owns a small number of units that are in blocks not owned by the Department.



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QUESTION No.14

The Hon. Kayee Griffin asked Mr Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing –

Do you know the number of councils involved up to now in supporting an affordable housing strategy?

ANSWER:

There are currently six councils with active affordable housing strategies. These are Newcastle City Council, North Sydney Council, Randwick City Council, City of Sydney, Waverley Council and Willoughby City Council. A number of other Councils are currently developing affordable housing strategies.



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QUESTION No. 15

Ms Sylvia Hale asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

Does the department have any figures on the percentage of public housing tenants or households in which there is an incident of mental illness or psychiatric problems?

ANSWER:

The Department does not have data available on the total percent of its tenants with a mental illness or psychiatric problems.



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QUESTION No. 16

The Hon. Don Harwin asked Mr Allen, Deputy-Director General, Department of Housing –

- (a) In relation to occupied and unoccupied properties on a regional basis, what is the total public housing stock leased and owned?
- (b) What is the available information and how is that information kept? I am asking in relation to quantity, apart from keeping statistics of how many by region, what other ways does the department accumulate that information in terms of keeping that information in forms that would be available? For example, do you keep that information by region, by local government area, by postcode, by locality or by State electorate?

ANSWER:

- (a) The breakdown of public housing stock leased and owned as at December 2004 is as follows:

Region	Owned	Leased	Total
Central Sydney	31,804	501	32,305
Hunter	15,999	363	16,362
Northern	8,590	486	9,076
South Eastern	12,534	251	12,785
Sth Western Sydney	23,366	766	24,132
Western	9,850	10	9,860
Western Sydney	22,614	1,380	23,994

- (b) Information is stored in the corporate information system called the “Integrated Housing System” (IHS). The majority of information on properties is recorded based on the Department’s Administrative units, Local Government Areas and State electorates.



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QUESTION No. 17

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

It was suggested to me in a previous answer you have given that 15 properties are valued at more than \$1million. Could I get the specific rent breakdowns of those 15 properties? Could I also get the rates and strata fees, if any are paid, on those 15 properties? Could I have any general information on the overall ages of tenants across the board? I mean the ages of the primary tenants – husbands, wives – not necessarily children.

ANSWER:

While there were 15 properties in September 2004, this figure is now 14 public housing properties. The market rent for the properties ranges from \$465 to \$770. The ages of the household heads in these properties range from middle aged to elderly. The range of rates paid in connection with these properties is \$448.81 to \$1,633.20.



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QUESTION No. 18

The Hon. David Oldfield asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

- (a) Could I get a breakdown of persons who have been in public housing over five years, 10 years, 15 years and over 20 years—numbers?
- (b) I would like the ages of tenants across the board—primary tenants only; not children.
- (c) Could I have the number of properties between \$500,000 and \$600,000; between \$600,000 and \$700,000; between \$700,000 and \$800,000; between \$800,000 and \$900,000; and between \$900,000 and \$1 million?
- (d) Could I also get the number of properties specifically in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, and then could I get the other properties across the States just by local government area [LGA]?

ANSWER:

- (a) (1) At 30 June 2004, 68,786 public housing tenants had been in their property for more than 5 years.
- (2) At 30 June 2004, 39,714 public housing tenants had been in their property for more than 10 years.
- (3) At 30 June 2004, 21,656 public housing tenants had been in their property for more than 15 years.
- (4) At 30 June 2004, 11,685 public housing tenants had been in their property for more than 20 years.
- (b) This information is available in the Department of Housing's 2003/04 Annual Report.
- (c) At 31 December 2004, less than 5% of the 130,000 Department's properties fell into these categories.
- (d) At 31 December 2004, there were 84,585 public housing properties in the Sydney Statistical Division, 8,815 public housing properties in the Newcastle Statistical Sub-Division and 11,093 public housing properties in the Wollongong Statistical Sub-Division. In terms of the rest of NSW I would be grateful if the Hon David Oldfield could nominate his areas of specific interest.



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QUESTION No. 19

The Chair asked Mr Barnes, Director General, Department of Housing –

Could I have the total value of properties just based on land values, not property values as such?

ANSWER:

The total land value of properties across the State as at June 2004 was \$18.423 billion.



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QUESTION No. 20a

Ms Sylvia Hale asked Mr Terry Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing –

I will now ask you a few questions about a specific property. I understand that you may have to provide the answers on notice. It is in relation to 34 Wentworth Street in Glebe. There are 120 units there and I believe a few years ago approximately half of them were in public ownership and half were in private ownership. Now I understand that only about 10 Department of Housing tenants are left and the Department appears to be selling these units off slowly, one or two at a time. Why is the Department pursuing this policy?

Do you agree that one of the disadvantages facing public housing tenants who are displaced from inner-city locations to out west or the south-west is the consequent increase in transport costs? They are often far from where jobs are available and so on. This is not necessarily a good policy to be pursuing, at least in relation to this block.

ANSWER:

The Department is progressively reducing its holdings in this building as it is in a poor state of repair, and has an inadequate sinking fund to address maintenance problems. In the past this has placed an added burden on the Department's maintenance funds.

I am advised there is no policy of moving tenants from this property. Units are only being sold when a vacancy arises.



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QUESTION No. 20b

Ms Sylvia Hale asked Mr Terry Barnes, Director-General, Department of Housing

When you take that question on notice, could you explain whether there are any specific circumstances that have brought about the department's retreating from ownership of units in that area?

ANSWER:

See the answer to 20a.



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