

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Wagga Wagga City Council

Date received: 7/03/2014

7 March 2014

The Hon.Sophie Cotsis MLC
Shadow Minister for Local Government
Shadow Minister for Housing
Shadow Minister for the Status of Women

Dear Minister

**SUBMISSION – NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC
AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Please find attached Wagga Wagga City Council Community Services staff submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Social, Public and Affordable Housing, as requested in your letter to our Mayor, dated 9 December 2013.

Wagga Wagga City Council is committed to working with all tiers of Government to support strategies that contribute to the resolution of the challenges faced in this domain.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide a response and hope this assists the NSW Legislative Council's Select Committee with the information required and provides a regional context for consideration. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of this Inquiry.

If you have any further questions in relation to this submission please do not hesitate to contact myself or our

Yours Sincerely

Janice Summerhayes
Director Environment and Community Services

The Hon.Sophie Cotsis MLC
Shadow Minister for Local Government
Shadow Minister for Housing
Shadow Minister for the Status of Women

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees.

Dear Minister,

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Wagga Wagga City Council community services staff provide the following comment in regards to the Inquiry into Social, public and affordable housing. It is appreciated to have the opportunity to make comment. In preparing this submission it was noted the areas of focus provided and comment has been made on that basis rather than on an overall position paper that may have assisted Council to provide a more strategic response to the inquiry.

Projections of future social, public and affordable housing supply and demand to 2020

Council works closely and collaboratively with NSW Family and Community Services, Housing and Communities. We note the value for all community of reducing the percentage of public housing and private housing in the Tolland and Ashmont estates of Wagga Wagga. We supported the "Estates Strategy which included the selling off of properties in these areas. It is however worth highlighting that without any additional purchases this has contributed to a decline in available public housing and higher waiting lists (anecdotal data from Housing and Communities) and a 31% increase in homelessness from 2006 – 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

The current context is that there has been limited expansion of social housing in Wagga Wagga to compensate and limited reinvestment in Wagga Wagga by Social Housing providers. We would encourage further consultation with key stakeholders such as Argyle Housing as part of the inquiry to understand this impact on communities.

Housing NSW website identifies that local government needs to plan and protect existing sources of affordable housing, promote new affordable housing and use planning systems to generate new sources of housing, in addition to a number of other actions. Whilst there are a number of areas that Council can deliver against, many of these actions are not suitable to a regional context and whilst we are willing to work with state government to develop such initiatives, consideration needs to be given to available resources and planning tools.

Housing Design approaches and social service integration necessary to support tenant livelihoods and wellbeing

Wagga Wagga has maintained a clear understanding of the directions of housing through previous NSW Housing Projects and Plans, including the Regeneration Plan and the Building Stronger Communities Initiatives. These programs have ceased now and there is limited information available to council about the strategic direction of public housing at a local level. Whilst there is an ongoing commitment to work cooperatively, further clarity around policy and funding from a statewide level would benefit both locally based state agency representatives and local government.

Wagga Wagga City Council worked in partnership with Housing NSW and the NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice to “Design out crime” in the estate of Tolland. One initiative was the review of laneways and subsequent closure of laneways to increase community safety. This project was well received and is still in final stages at present. More initiatives between Housing and Communities, Attorney General and Justice, or relevant state agencies and local government would be welcomed to improve the livability of social housing areas and well being of tenants.

The division of the assets component of public housing to Land and Housing Corporation and the tenant management component of housing to Housing and Communities is also causing concern for council in regard to the operationalisation of local community centres. A positive initiative has been that the Land and Housing Corporation have recently rebuilt the Tolland Community Centre and the Koorinal Community Centre in Wagga Wagga. There is an important issue now on how these centres will be operational to ensure access and equity of service support to these areas. We understand that Land and Housing are seeking market rents prior to opening these valuable community assets. The complexities of attracting tenants required to pay a market rent in social housing estates is flagged as a potential issue due to the limited likelihood of a Non Government Organisation (NGO) being able to pay market rental and the need for services and supports from the NGO sector to be readily available in social housing estates.

Maintenance and capital improvement costs and delivery requirements

In local community forums and interagencies the state of the existing housing estates, predominantly in Tolland and Ashmont, are being identified as increasing risks for local tenants. This includes significant amounts of rubbish on vacant lots, parklands and in people’s back yards. Whilst council offers four annual free tip days tenants in public housing without access to vehicles are unable to access this for large and bulky items. A strategic approach to reduce this occurring, address the issues arising and improve the liveability of these estates would be recommended and supported by council.

A “Design out Crime: community consultation report” completed by Wagga Wagga City Council in January 2013 included a survey of 100 people mostly

residing in social housing estates. The report noted a 44% of residents in Tolland and 36% in Ashmont reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe in their neighbourhoods, with only 12% of respondents identifying they felt safe or very safe in their neighbourhoods. The majority (70-75%) identified children and youth as being responsible for their perception of lack of safety. Whilst State government funds a number of initiatives in Wagga Wagga to assist and support children and youth at risk there are few recurrently funded programs which locate services in accessible locations to persons living in these estates.

Criteria for selecting and prioritising residential areas for affordable and social housing

Council is committed to working more closely with Land and Housing and social housing providers to ensure any new acquisitions are located in suitable locations that include but are not limited to having:

- access to public transport,
- proximity to parks and recreation,
- Distance from businesses that could further compound issues for tenants.

An agreed checklist or information sheet to advise council of selection criteria in determining new acquisitions would be of benefit to local government.

Planning law changes and reform

In a Council forum held with housing providers and councillors in September 2013 it was noted that there are limited incentives for developers for affordable housing provision. Council indicated in this meeting that we are interested to explore further partnerships for affordable housing where there are no costs to council.

Currently, there are two mechanisms which the NSW planning system provides for affordable housing. Whilst there is a State Environmental Planning Policy (Affordable rental housing) 2008 that aims to deliver affordable housing through local and state government initiatives, these are predominantly only available in metropolitan areas and do not cater for regional areas. We also note that several councils have been granted the ability to receive additional section 94 development contributions for affordable housing and seek for this option to be available to all councils. However, in relation to section 94 development contributions, the costs of developer contributions contribute to the resistance from developers. For instance, if a developer was to subdivide, they will pay per lot and by providing larger lots, there are fewer lots to pay contributions on. If they subdivide into smaller lots to provide affordable housing, there are more lots to pay contributions on.

This indicates that developers will not be able to provide affordable housing through the general housing market and direction from the State Government is required on this issue.

We note the review of the NSW planning system provides opportunities for local government to have an increased role in affordable housing. A strategy or policy which is inclusive and relevant to regional NSW would be recommended, that also provides incentives to developers to provide affordable housing.

It is appreciated to have the opportunity to make comment on the focus areas and in particular how this relates to our local context for social housing in Wagga Wagga. If required we welcome any further contact and we look forward to hearing on the outcomes of this Inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Lisa Saffery
Social Planning Coordinator
Wagga Wagga City Council