

T R A N S C R I P T

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE 2026 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BID

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Melbourne – Friday 7 February 2025

MEMBERS

David Limbrick – Chair

Joe McCracken – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

David Davis

Jacinta Ermacora

Michael Galea

Sarah Mansfield

Tom McIntosh

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

WITNESS

Harriet Shing, Minister for Housing and Building.

The CHAIR: I declare open the committee's public hearings for the Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I welcome any members of the public in the gallery or watching via live broadcast, and I remind those in the room to be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and the organisation that you are appearing on behalf of.

Harriet SHING: Harriet Shing, Victorian government, portfolio of housing.

The CHAIR: Welcome, Ms Shing. Good to see you again. We invite you to make your opening comments as you see fit. Thank you.

Harriet SHING: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, members of the committee. It feels like we only just saw each other yesterday, so I am grateful for the opportunity to continue the discussion which has been taking place over at least one report and many hearings.

I just want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands upon which we are meeting today and pay my respects to elders past and present. I also want to acknowledge any and all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander leaders or emerging leaders who are part of the discussion on the Regional Housing Fund delivery, and that includes extensive consultation, discussion and engagement around the partnership approach to delivering the housing fund.

I am going to make a number of remarks further to my last appearance before this committee. I was asked to return for the purpose of continuing discussions on the progress of the delivery of housing. If there is any problem with tech, I am assuming that anyone joining virtually will wave madly so that we can stop and I can repeat things as necessary.

I am very happy to make remarks about the delivery of social and affordable homes as they were announced as part of the regional package and further to a number of public announcements that have been provided by me and by other members of the Allan Labor government, including the Premier. We are really determined to continue the work that we have undertaken through a range of funding envelopes and allocations in delivering social and affordable housing across the entire state.

As people would know, the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build includes a component of at least \$1.25 billion in housing for rural and regional Victoria. Now, that has been added to with a \$1 billion allocation, as you know, from the Regional Housing Fund, and current projections indicate that our population will continue to rise and that there will be an ongoing need for social and affordable housing across the entire state. So we want to make sure that we are continuing to boost the availability of housing, and across regional Victoria we have seen through the Big Housing Build and also the Regional Housing Fund more than 1800 new homes already completed and we have got a further 1680 homes underway, with thousands more to come. That includes the Social Housing Growth Fund, which is delivering a total of 680 homes across 20 LGAs.

So the point that I am making here is the delivery of housing, including across rural and regional Victoria, is not taking place through the Regional Housing Fund alone. It sits alongside allocations, including those under existing funds and including as part of the work we are doing navigating a national approach to addressing housing and also the delivery of services across homelessness and rough sleeping. This includes priority social housing applicants; First Nations Victorians; women and children who are victim-survivors of family violence; young people experiencing risk of or experiencing homelessness, and that includes rough sleeping; key workers – and I will touch on that in relation to another part of the regional package, which included that \$150 million for regional workforce accommodation; and also people who have been displaced in dealing with the ongoing impact of flood and natural disaster, which we know all too well has continued to have a really devastating impact on our communities.

There has been a lot of consultation with local councils and also partnerships to inform the implementation of the fund, and we want to make sure that we are continuing to deliver homes as part of the announcements that the Premier and I made on 25 October last year. That was the announcement of the first 1000 homes to be delivered across rural and regional Victoria under the Regional Housing Fund. That includes homes across the Mallee, Wimmera south-west, Loddon, Central Highlands, Barwon, Goulburn, Ovens–Murray, outer Gippsland and inner Gippsland. I am looking forward to taking people through the numbers there. Work is well underway. We have got at least 180 new and upgraded homes that have already been completed, with planning underway for the vast majority of the balance, 50 transitional housing homes to rapidly house people who are experiencing homelessness and more than 130 upgrades of homes as well. So this is not just about new social and affordable homes; it is also about upgrades to make sure that housing which has not been fit for purpose is able to be occupied as quickly as possible. That includes additional homes for flood-affected areas in Shepparton, Seymour and Rochester. We have got around 70 dwellings allocated there and another 50 social and affordable homes in delivery in Colac, 50 in Wodonga and more projects that we will continue to announce as that work rolls out. So the first 1000 have been announced. The work is being undertaken there around regions.

I am very happy to break that down. It might assist the committee for the purpose of today's conversation, Chair. I cannot see a clock, so I am not sure – oh, there we are – whether there is any timeline that applies to me. But just very quickly, the homes that have confirmed locations: we have got 175 homes in southern Victoria, 110 in inner Gippsland, 65 in outer Gippsland, 250 in eastern Victoria, 110 in Ovens Valley, 140 in the Goulburn areas, 230 in northern Victoria, 162 in Loddon, 68 in the Mallee areas, 370 in western Victoria, 238 in Barwon, 34 in Central Highlands and 98 in Wimmera south-west areas. That also includes the delivery of 128 social and affordable housing homes at former Commonwealth Games village sites. I will take you to some examples, no doubt, in questions that you might have, but again we want to make sure that as we develop and deliver this housing we are doing so in areas where the need and demand exists and as it changes over time. This is done in consultation with communities, and it is also being done – and I was very, very clear about this in my previous portfolio – across rural and regional Victoria. In all of the forums that I had it was made very clear that housing was needed not just in the areas of those large regional centres – for example, where Commonwealth Games villages were intended to be located – but also across those smaller rural areas.

I am very happy to take you through any additional detail, but I am mindful of the limited time that we have. There may well be questions that I am not able to answer here today in the hearing, but I am very happy to see what I can do by way of providing answers to questions on notice. I will leave my remarks there, unless you require any clarification, Chair, and I look forward to questions from the committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Shing. I will pass to Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Thank you, Ms Shing. I have got a copy of your media release here.

Harriet SHING: Which one, sorry, Mr McCracken?

Joe McCracken: It was on 25 October 2024.

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Joe McCracken: Now, it goes through and details the homes. I will just read from the release; I just printed it this morning: 68 homes from Mallee, 98 from Wimmera south-west, 162 from Loddon, 34 from

Central Highlands, 238 from Barwon, 140 from Goulburn, 110 from Ovens–Murray, 65 from Outer Gippsland and 110 – are they the thousand homes?

Harriet SHING: They are the regions where the first 1000 homes will go.

Joe McCRACKEN: Well, that number adds up to 1025 –

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Joe McCRACKEN: not a thousand.

Harriet SHING: This is where, again, we can make more homes with different configurations. We want to make sure that, again, where we can provide more homes than have been announced we do exactly that. So the first 1000 homes will go in those locations and in those regions. Where we can provide more, we will.

Joe McCRACKEN: 1025 homes –

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Joe McCRACKEN: or 1000?

Harriet SHING: The first 1000 will go in those areas; the details are there. If we can do 1025 in that first allocation, we will. But again, the fund was – just for clarification, Mr McCracken, as you will see in the paragraph that precedes that, we will deliver 1300 social and affordable homes right across Victoria. This is, again, where if we can squeeze more out of that than the 1000 – we can add that on top of the 1000 that have been allocated – then that is absolutely what we will be doing.

Joe McCRACKEN: Are you sure it is not just a typo?

Harriet SHING: This is what we are doing, Mr McCracken.

Joe McCRACKEN: So it is not a typo?

Harriet SHING: No.

Joe McCRACKEN: You are announcing 1000 houses even though it is 1025?

Harriet SHING: Because if we can upscale to 1025, then we will.

Joe McCRACKEN: You did not say that in there.

Harriet SHING: There is a limited amount of space in a media release that already goes over two pages, Mr McCracken. If I were to write media releases with all of the details that I would like to have, then they would go to volumes –

Joe McCRACKEN: You would need more trees, I agree.

Harriet SHING: and much like hundreds of pages of business cases that we have been through this week, I suspect no-one would want to read them.

Joe McCRACKEN: Thank you. It is \$1 billion – I am just going to talk about the billion-dollar Regional Housing Fund. For the first tranche, which is 1000 or 1025 houses, the average cost per house is about \$800,000. Now, that seems quite expensive. I had a look online. I have had a look through some housing and land packages which are available. There is one here that is in Ballarat; it is in Winter Valley – \$513,300. It has three bedrooms – a nice property. I will hand that to you, if you want to have a look. Would you like to have a look?

Harriet SHING: I can see what you are holding up.

Joe McCRACKEN: Yes. I have got another one. It is a four-bedroom, two-bathroom in Winter Valley. It is \$588,000. I am happy to provide all of these to you, if you like. Another one I have got, which is in Armstrong

Creek, near Geelong – \$590,000 – again is a four-bedroom, two-bathroom one. Then there is another one in Warrnambool – four-bedroom, two-bathroom – for \$553,000. I am happy to provide them to you, if you like. They are available online, if you want to have a look, as well. Can you pass those over to Ms Shing, if that is all right.

The CHAIR: I am not sure that we can table documents like this.

Joe McCracken: They are just for her to have a look at; that is all.

Michael Galea: Are you seeking leave to table a document, Joe?

Joe McCracken: I am just wondering if the minister would like to have a look at these documents; that is all.

Harriet Shing: I will actually perhaps assist you, Mr McCracken. This is something we share by way of interest in this particular area. Cost per unit is something that I have sought constant advice on, in particular around what value for money looks like. This may well be cost for the purpose of acquiring land. It may be about decontamination, for example – site remediation. There are a range of factors that exist here, and it may well be that the configuration of housing is guiding the way in which costs are delivered. Also, let us just be clear on the distinction between the way in which government processes deliver housing and the way in which private market housing occurs. When we have an allocation of housing across a \$1 billion fund, we have regulatory processes that need to take place. Now, that can often be seen as an encumbrance. But, having said that, government is required to comply with standards that apply across the delivery of essentially a public investment in the way that private investment does not apply.

One of the things that we are doing across, for example, the building space, is trying to provide a better measure of regulation around what occurs in the private sector. But, Mr McCracken, the work that we are doing is also guided as much as anything else by planning, by preconstruction, by site remediation and a range of other factors. So all of that is built in and then it is disaggregated as a price per unit.

Joe McCracken: Okay, which is \$800,000. The market price for three- or four-bedroom houses – depending on where you go, house and land packages are also around \$500,000 to \$550,000, maybe \$600,000 or thereabouts in regional Victoria, which this fund is focused on. Depending on which figure you use, that can be a 25 per cent increase to your unit price. How can you justify that price?

Harriet Shing: Well, often there is trunk infrastructure that needs to be delivered. Again, when you buy the house that is available at that sale price, it is with utilities and essential infrastructure connected. If, for example, we are doing new builds, then that work needs to be done as part of a total price per unit in a home that may well be on a site that is yet to be developed. Again, when we talk about price per unit, that is about everything from access roads through to, often, levelling of a site. When we look to, for example – and this will be a site dear to your heart – the Ballarat saleyards, there is a site remediation process that will be undertaken this year. We have had that pre-planning work being undertaken and being underway for some time now. These are sites which do require intensive work, and the work that government does requires, as much as anything, that preconstruction and trunk service delivery, which adds of course to a cost when you disaggregate as price per unit.

Joe McCracken: Well, the future of that site that you talk about there has not been determined yet, based on what the Member for Wendouree has said publicly, so I do not know if it is going to be housing or not. But you are right, it certainly does need to be decontaminated at least. I do not know if that is the responsibility of your department or not, but I hope it does happen soon.

Harriet Shing: I would hate for you, Mr McCracken, to derive a conclusion that a price per unit is for a home that is an equivalent comparison to the documents that you have just held up, because I have sought assurances around the basis for the cost calculations, and there are many, many more components that go into the delivery of government-funded housing than a private investment, where again those utilities, essential infrastructure, trunk infrastructure, access roads and pre-site construction have been factored in so that we have a nominal cost of each unit on that basis.

Joe McCracken: Fair enough. Are you able to provide that to the committee then?

Harriet SHING: Provide what?

Joe McCracken: Your nominal cost for your cost per unit. For your housing projects that you are talking about –

Harriet SHING: Well, it varies depending on what sorts of homes you are talking about and where you are proposing to locate them. Again, Mr McCracken, if you were to hold up real estate listings from Geelong, they would be very, very different to real estate listings from Wodonga for a house arguably with the same configuration on the same-sized block.

Joe McCracken: You have just told us that you have a number of different factors in consideration. Fair enough; I accept that. Can you provide them to the committee?

Harriet SHING: Are you after them for every single home or location that is being developed?

Joe McCracken: If you want to provide that, that is absolutely fine.

Harriet SHING: Again, this is where, when we have areas, you are then talking about locations within those areas.

Joe McCracken: Just the average for each area. That is fine.

Harriet SHING: No, that then comes down to what configuration and what site you are talking about. Mr McCracken, I am very happy to look to see what I can provide you, but I suspect that what I can disaggregate for you is going to disappoint you simply because we are in the process of developing, as this media release from 25 October outlines very, very clearly, not just the areas but the locations.

Joe McCracken: I just think this is not value for money.

Harriet SHING: It includes, as I said, a range of preconstruction, trunk infrastructure and essential infrastructure that requires completion.

Joe McCracken: Developers have to do the same thing in the private market as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McCracken. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for joining us today, Minister. I think one would certainly hope that any sort of housing investment we would be providing with essential infrastructure in tow as well. But I actually also would like to touch on the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund, which Mr McCracken was referring to. Minister, you did discuss how there are quite a few different areas and different locations within those areas where this fund is underway. Could you provide the committee with an update as to where these projects are at?

Harriet SHING: Sure. Thanks Mr Galea. As you may know, there has been more than \$35 billion invested into rural and regional Victoria, and that includes, again, that broader community development. When we talk about homes, we also need to talk about connection and proximity in the same way that we talk about it in metropolitan Melbourne. People want to be close to schools, public transport, trails, health services et cetera. On top of that \$35 billion we have got, as the media release that Mr McCracken has just referred to says, at least 1300 new and upgraded homes across regional and rural Victoria. They are to be developed and delivered by June 2028, and that sits on top of, as you may recall, the \$150 million worker accommodation fund, which I, in a former role as Minister for Regional Development, was part of the initial stages in delivering. And then Minister Gayle Tierney took that over for the purpose of developing and delivering the first round of those 20 projects. That does also figure into the mix of housing, which was the purpose for which I was asked to attend today.

There are a range of different approaches to delivering these homes. That might be acquiring homes in new developments. It might be new building new homes or partnerships with the community housing sector and refurbishing old stock to bring it back on line for new renters. So we have got a split, and Dr Mansfield, this might actually address some of the things I think by recollection you raised at the last hearing: 900 will be social housing, of which about 70 per cent will be public housing, with 100 of those first thousand being

affordable housing. There is also refurbishing old stock to bring it back on line for new renters. 138 homes have been refurbished and returned to habitable condition and are now available for use. We have got 50 transitional housing units across regional Victoria that have already been acquired. Sourcing is well underway for the homes for First Nations Victorians, and those partnerships have been incredibly important – essential – to the process by which that occurs, and there is an EOI open to registered Aboriginal housing sector organisations for the \$25 million rapid response grant projects. We have established a modern methods of construction builder panel, which is set to deliver over 250 dwellings, with 84 of those dwellings already ready for contracting. Low-density, low-rise development housing has also commenced construction of over 20 homes, and 300 homes are in various stages of design. Planning is well advanced for 50 homes – so that is 30 social and 20 affordable homes – in Pound Road, Colac, and in the housing precinct in Wodonga for 41 homes, and that is 31 social and 10 affordable. That number and that configuration was developed directly as a result of consultation and feedback with the community and with the council.

Procurement is in progress for the Social Housing Growth Fund affordable housing partnership program – and there are a lot of initialisations in housing, but bear with me. That will deliver up to 270 affordable housing homes, and we are partnering with Development Victoria to deliver that new social and affordable home component in Geelong and Bendigo at the former government Commonwealth Games athletes village sites, and those numbers I have already taken you through. So that is the grand total of 1025. The Comm Games village sites I suspect we may also touch on, given Mr McCracken's comments, and the work as part of that announcement.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. That is quite an appropriate name for some new housing in Wodonga at Housing Creek – 41 new homes, I think you said there –

Harriet SHING: Pound Creek.

Michael GALEA: Pound Creek. Apologies; I misheard you.

Melina BATH: That is in old money.

Harriet SHING: 'Shilling Creek' might be a –

Michael GALEA: Maybe it could be due for a rename. But also 900 social housings, of which I believe you said 70 per cent will be public housing – is that right?

Harriet SHING: Yes, that is correct, and it is appropriate that we have a mix. Social housing comprises both public and community housing. This housing is all responsible for addressing the need that we have across the housing register, and community housing, as you know, is delivered by and managed by not-for-profit, for-purpose charitable organisations.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And you did just touch on as well the Commonwealth Games village sites. I am surprised Mr McCracken has not already launched into this. I thought that was going to be your first question, Joe.

Harriet SHING: It is all right. I suspect, Mr McCracken, we will have an opportunity.

Michael GALEA: I am happy to set you up, Joe, by asking about the progress of those sites where there are legacy projects continuing on from those villages.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Galea. Homes Victoria is acquiring 128 new social and affordable dwellings to be delivered by Development Victoria at the Waurin Ponds and Bendigo sites. This has involved meetings with councils and traditional owner groups and ongoing briefings and overviews of draft master plans, and finalisation of the Waurin Ponds and Bendigo master plans and lodgement is anticipated to be completed in the first half of this year. There have been suitable lots identified within those master plans for the purpose of acquisitions from Development Victoria through the Regional Housing Fund. There is work happening with Development Vic to potentially allocate up to 10 additional lots at the Morwell former Commonwealth Games village site, and that is in addition to the numbers I referenced before. You take 10 off that, and we talk about inner Gippsland and outer Gippsland – that is 175 homes as part of that first 1000. We are also working through the opportunity to partner with the community housing sector to deliver those dwellings. So Gippsland and

Ballarat do not miss out, let us just be really, really clear. There are 162 in Loddon, so that includes Bendigo; 34 in Central Highlands, which includes Ballarat; 238 in Barwon, which includes Geelong; and then Gippsland is 175, as I said.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. You touched on those projects. In Ballarat alone I think there is a large amount of funding towards those social housing programs. How many homes in that region are completed and how many are underway?

Harriet SHING: In Ballarat alone – and I did just touch on those figures – there have been 210 homes that have been completed in Ballarat and there are more than 160 that are underway. The allocation of funding for Ballarat has been \$140 million. Under the Big Housing Build – again this gets back to my earlier comments about how there are multiple investments in social and affordable housing that will benefit rural and regional Victoria – in regional Victoria as a whole, we have seen more than 3500 homes commenced under the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund. That includes 1800 newly completed homes, with planning underway to deliver an additional 350. I know that there are a lot of numbers in there, but I suppose the central component of this is making sure that we can deliver as many homes as possible across the funding envelopes that we have – which is the \$1.25 million plus the additional \$1 billion – and then obviously worker accommodation.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mrs Tyrrell.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Thank you, Chair. The flood recovery homes, I want to know a bit more about those. In layman's terms, could you please give me a run-down on what is actually involved there?

Harriet SHING: Yes, of course. Flood recovery – we have addressed this in a number of different contexts around the flood inquiry that has been undertaken and also housing. The flood impact, as we know, has been incredibly difficult for people to recover from. We have had allocations across the first tranche of the Regional Housing Fund, and that includes housing for people affected in Shepparton, Seymour and Rochester. The first of those homes are nearing completion, and we will be announcing more programs and locations as those future programs are finalised.

Now, one of the things that is really important in this, Mrs Tyrrell, particularly as communities continue with that recovery and resilience-building process, is to make sure that homes are delivered not just in locations where they are going to be able to withstand future events, given climate volatility and what we have seen in the past three years with successive La Niña events, but also in ways that enable people to connect as the population grows. We also know that the challenges around building in flood zones have only become more complex as a result of flooding. Everything from flood management plans to modelling is changing the way and the configuration of design of housing, so that is work that we will continue to do. We want the homes that we build in flood-affected areas and flood-vulnerable areas to be able to withstand future events, so that is where that work is going into future programs.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: So we are just building homes, not purchasing homes that people have sold and refurbishing them?

Harriet SHING: There is a combination of opportunities there, as I touched on in my opening remarks. We do want to make sure that we are looking at homes that already exist. They may need to be reconfigured if we do want to make sure that they are compliant with the standards that apply, whether that is for energy efficiency, for access or for, again, amenity. But there are a number of different components.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: What is the budget allocated for the flood recovery?

Harriet SHING: The flood recovery?

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: The flood recovery homes in Shepparton, Seymour and Rochester.

Harriet SHING: I am happy to get that dollar breakdown for you, but that does come within the first 1000 homes allocation of the at least 1300 that were announced in October.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: You might have to take this next one on notice as well.

Harriet SHING: Yes, sure.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: How many people are to be employed, and will they be local, privately owned trades people?

Harriet SHING: That is actually a really important part of the work that we are doing around job creation. Local procurement is a big part of the procurement framework, and we have actually been very clear about the importance of creating jobs at the same time. This is where the construction supply register is one part of the work that we do. This was a key part of the work in the Commonwealth Games legacy process that has continued, and we are working to make sure that local trades and apprentices are able to participate in this work. It is also part of the work that we are doing on local jobs that have been generated. We have a number of priorities around facilitation of local jobs. There is, as I said, the Local Jobs First policy, which enables local employment through that procurement and contracting process, and that is based on set contract thresholds, which are required in these programs.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. So we do not know exactly what number for the workforce we are going to need?

Harriet SHING: That will vary wherever you go. It may well be that you need to bring specialist trades in to a remote rural area simply because they do not exist in the immediate vicinity, but again that is where the Local Jobs First policy is an important part of that procurement process.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay, thank you. Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will now go to Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thanks, Minister, for coming along today. Living in a regional community – in particular, Warrnambool – I see lots of work going on in some of the public housing areas, and it is fascinating to see that some of them are being converted from one dwelling to two to better meet the household size demand. There is an oversupply of four-bedroom homes in Warrnambool, for instance, and not enough two- and one-bedrooms. So you can see that that is happening around and about in our city. I know that in 2019 the women's housing fund – there are houses that have been constructed. Almost all of them are completed, I think, in Portland, Hamilton, Warrnambool and Camperdown, and I am really thrilled that that has actually happened. But specifically my question is just to expand a bit more on which regions will benefit from the Regional Housing Fund and if there is any more detail you would like to go into about any of those things that I have raised.

Harriet SHING: Yes. Thank you, Ms Ermacora, for that. What we have done in the work that we are funding through the Regional Housing Fund – it sits on top of the Big Housing Build with a minimum investment guarantee and then committed investment and homes delivered. So I might be able to perhaps take you through the homes delivered and homes underway piece that has been allocated under the Big Housing Build and other capital programs. That is a total of 3646 homes that have been completed or are underway under the Big Housing Build and other capital projects. This is about making sure that, again, we are making the best use of the resources that we have across a number of budget envelopes, and we will continue to do exactly that. It has to be a really fair and reasonable distribution of housing, though. That will be informed by the Victorian housing register demand data and also other housing indicators as well as that regional housing investment to date. So we do want to make sure, again, that split is there. We understand where the demand is and how it is that we need to make sure that we address it, if that gives you a bit of context, Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, that is great. So just quickly, with each region, how do you decide which type of home is needed for which community – maybe like the Colac community? Do you use profiles of either household configuration or population and household size? Because we know that one of the most – I think 47 per cent of households in Warrnambool, for instance, are single-parent households or just two people. Do you use that data to shape what your strategy is?

Harriet SHING: Yes is the short answer there, Ms Ermacora. We are guided in addressing the needs and the demands that are detailed in housing register applications and in particular around priority social housing

applicants. The way in which applications are made is essentially that you can make an application if there are specific and exceptional circumstances – for example, family violence – in place or a risk to the life or to the security of a person. They can make an application and identify up to five different areas where they might be amenable to accepting a home.

We know that where we can find housing that meets needs it will generally fall into categories of homes with smaller numbers of bedrooms. We also know, though, that accessible housing is of particular importance, where we have people with medical needs, for example, people who are not able to climb stairs or who require ramps. People who have multiple children or dependants will need homes that are very different to somebody who wants to age in place as a single person. This is guided by the information that we have on the register and on applicants, but of course that changes over time. There is always, through the work of Homes Victoria and the data that we have, an approach that is intended to best meet need, but it is also about futureproofing the need in the work that we are doing now. There is an approach that distils data as we have it but which also understands the impact of population growth, particularly in those regional centres, of infill, particularly in areas like Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong, for example, and the type of housing that might be needed elsewhere in the smaller rural centres.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Also just on the construction or adaptation of homes for accessibility, I presume that would be part of the additional cost in the construction of a home.

Harriet SHING: Accessibility is one of those parts of a build which needs to be considered, and we do see variations in pricing as a result of, again, the factors that I referred to with Mr McCracken – essential and trunk infrastructure; land acquisition; levelling that might need to be done, and that is not a cheap process by any stretch of the imagination; and accessibility is a big part of that too. The homes that we build have to comply with various contemporary standards. They have to have adequate light and ventilation, and if there are particular needs or adjustments that must be met – whether that is ramping, handrails, no stairs – then that is part of it. But we do not build houses for particular people; we build them for the purpose of allocating to the demand data that we have in the housing register, which may mean that there are adjustments undertaken to ensure that homes can be utilised and occupied by residents with particular needs. That is part of the work that Homes Victoria does as a matter of course.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ermacora. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thanks, Chair, and thanks, Minister. Minister, to take you to English Street, Morwell, where the athletes village was going to be situated, you mentioned 10 lots. I am assuming you mean 10 housing lots rather than 10 houses.

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Melina BATH: So they are 10 housing lots.

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Melina BATH: Can you provide to the committee the planning, timeline and number of dwellings that will be for social/affordable housing and how many of those 10 lots will be sold for private dwellings?

Harriet SHING: So it is 10 for social and affordable housing.

Melina BATH: Of that whole entire estate? Is that what your answer is, 10?

Harriet SHING: That is the allocation under the Regional Housing Fund.

Melina BATH: So 10 social and affordable houses from that whole estate?

Harriet SHING: Ms Bath, what I might do perhaps is go back to some of the evidence that I have given to this inquiry before and that I have also taken the Parliament through and made very clear reference to in public comment. We have allocations of –

Melina BATH: Sorry, so there were going to be a thousand athletes in that village, and then the dwellings were going to be repurposed. Just confirm for me, if you would not mind, that there are going to be 10 social and affordable houses now built on that site?

Harriet SHING: At a development that will include private housing.

Melina BATH: That is right.

Harriet SHING: And that 10 is part of 175 homes under the Regional Housing Fund in Gippsland.

Melina BATH: That is right. But only 10 in that English Street site?

Harriet SHING: We got feedback. Again, this was something which was part of the discussion at the regional forums that I held – you may have attended one of them, or both of them in fact – where it was made very clear that people wanted permanent accommodation through the Regional Housing Fund in locations other than the athletes villages site. So that is why we have got 175 across Gippsland, of which 10 will be in the site that was proposed.

Melina BATH: This is a greenfield site. Can you tell the committee how many dwellings in total will be there and when they will be built?

Harriet SHING: That is a matter for the private development that is occurring there, Ms Bath, so that is not actually within the remit of the Regional Housing Fund.

Melina BATH: Can you identify to the committee when those 10 social and affordable houses will be built and available?

Harriet SHING: The work is being explored with a partnership, potentially with a community housing provider. That is also work that is being undertaken as part of negotiations and discussions now, so I am not going to prejudice those.

Melina BATH: No, that is fine. But when will community know? Ten houses are important. When will community know?

Harriet SHING: Again, as that work is finalised –

Melina BATH: Right. So you cannot give us a date?

Harriet SHING: and I am looking forward to telling the community as that work goes on around planning processes.

Melina BATH: Sure. Thank you. You mentioned, of inner Gippsland, that there are going to be 10 in Morwell. We see figures, and these are Gippsland –

Harriet SHING: Not just 10 in Morwell. So, Ms Bath, I do want to be really clear.

Melina BATH: That is what I need you to be clear on for us, because I do not think it is clear.

Harriet SHING: Morwell is included within inner Gippsland.

Melina BATH: Yes.

Harriet SHING: There are 110 homes for inner Gippsland.

Melina BATH: Yes. Can you tell us then where else they are going to be placed?

Harriet SHING: So 100 additional homes, and that also adds to the 65 in outer Gippsland.

Melina BATH: Yes, I have got that. I have got the number.

Harriet SHING: So the sites are –

Melina BATH: Where will they be situated?

Harriet SHING: This goes back, again, to the answer that I have given in previous answers. The sites and the locations are determined in partnership and in consultation with communities and with councils.

Melina BATH: Yes, I have got that.

Harriet SHING: Well, if you have got that, then you would understand that we will work through that. We have allocated housing through areas, Ms Bath, and we will continue to do that in allocating locations.

Melina BATH: Let me put it in context, Minister. Minister, you have said here in your opening discussion with us that there is a need and demand. The homelessness network in Gippsland said that in 2023 there were 123 people experiencing primary homelessness, 111 people in emergency accommodation and approximately 84 in rooming houses and caravan parks. That was three years ago. That is a significant quantity of people. Yet you were just saying, 'Well, I can't tell you how many or where they're going to be.' There is a desperate need in our regions.

Harriet SHING: I have just told you how many.

Melina BATH: Yes, but where are they going to be, Minister?

Harriet SHING: I have just told you where they are going to be. They are allocated by areas, Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Yes. But you clearly can see that there are more people here in need, and our homelessness network do an amazing job –

Harriet SHING: They do.

Melina BATH: but they do not have the homes at the moment. There are not new homes are being built.

Harriet SHING: There are new homes being built, Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Minister, you also said 180 new and upgraded homes are completed –

Harriet SHING: A hundred and –

Melina BATH: 180 new and upgraded homes. It is in this document here that Mr McCracken has. How many of those new and upgraded homes are new, and how many are upgraded?

Harriet SHING: There is a fair bit in what you have just said, Ms Bath, around your question on homelessness, so I might go to that first. When we look at the homelessness allocation through the budget – and you would note that there was a recent report on government services, which has precipitated, again, the commentary that you are referring to and the need for assistance – there was \$507 million provided to Victorian homelessness services in 2022–23. That is funding from both the Victorian and the Commonwealth governments. There is \$197 million for homelessness on top of the \$300 million that we already provide. This is about providing assistance to people as a front door and entry point and service allocations. It is then also about making sure that we are providing housing. Housing is one part of homelessness, and that is where the regional housing Big Housing Build, which I have taken you through with that more than 3000 figure, is about allocating homes to people across the priority area of the register.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Minister, you just mentioned funding for homelessness. Is some of that funding going to be directed toward our assertive outreach workforce in both inner and outer Gippsland?

Harriet SHING: Yes.

Melina BATH: They are going to have an outreach workforce – assertive outreach workers?

Harriet SHING: Ms Bath, this is not funding within the Regional Housing Fund.

Melina BATH: I know that, but you have just put that on record for us today.

Harriet SHING: Well, you have asked about homelessness.

Melina BATH: You have gone into that space, and now I am asking about assertive outreach workers. Will that be included in some of this funding?

Harriet SHING: As you would see then, Ms Bath, from the report that you have referred to, this consists of funding from the Victorian government and the Commonwealth government's national housing and homelessness agreement. It includes programs across the state for over 70 homelessness access points, assertive outreach, supportive housing teams for rough sleepers, adult and youth crisis accommodation and the private rental assistance program.

Melina BATH: Fabulous. Minister, will Gippsland be getting those assertive outreach workers?

Harriet SHING: Additionally, Aboriginal –

Melina BATH: It is not a hard question. You have identified it there. Will Gippsland be getting some of those fantastic assertive outreach workers?

Harriet SHING: It is spread across the entire state based on –

Melina BATH: Right, so you are not going to tell us whether Gippsland will get them. Would you like to take it on notice? That would be great.

Harriet SHING: Sorry, Ms Bath, I am trying to assist the committee, and it appears –

Melina BATH: Yes.

Harriet SHING: There is no need to have a combative approach to information that I am trying to provide to you.

Melina BATH: No, no, I think it is fabulous. We would like to understand whether or not Gippsland is getting any of them.

Harriet SHING: This sits very, very separately to the work that is being undertaken through the allocation of homelessness services, so funding distributions for the 2024–25 period, as you would also note from the report on government services, are being developed –

Melina BATH: Minister, could you please answer the question that I asked.

Harriet SHING: Ms Bath, I am trying to answer the question.

Melina BATH: No, no, you said 180 new and upgraded homes. How many are new and how many are upgraded?

Michael GALEA: On a point of order, Chair, the minister is not being given an opportunity to answer the questions that Ms Bath is putting to her. I would appreciate it if she could be given that opportunity.

The CHAIR: I will give the minister a moment to answer that question.

Harriet SHING: Thank you. Victoria supported the highest number of people experiencing homelessness. If you go to the allocations there, for outer Gippsland, East Gippsland and Wellington we have got allocations for 2023–24 and they are \$7.8 million, and then in inner Gippsland we have got \$11.5 million in the 2023–24 year. Of course that is in the report, Ms Bath, that you have referenced.

Melina BATH: But you actually have not answered the question that I asked. I will just put that on record.

Harriet SHING: The question was about outreach services and about homelessness funding. I have given you that answer.

Melina BATH: My question was: will Gippsland receive those outreach workers?

Harriet SHING: I have just indicated the answer to you based on the split in the report, Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: No, you have not, but anyway. Nor have you answered of the 180 how many will be new and how many will be upgraded.

Harriet SHING: 175 homes – they will be both new and upgraded social and affordable homes, Ms Bath, and we will develop that in partnership with communities, which is what I discussed at those –

Melina BATH: Are you happy to take it on notice?

Harriet SHING: No, I am not indicating that to you at all, Ms Bath.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thank you for returning to this committee, Minister Shing.

Harriet SHING: It is my pleasure, Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I guess quite a number of the questions have been directed at understanding where the housing is, how much is being built, what type of housing it is, whether it is new housing, whether it is refurbishment. Is there somewhere we can find this information on an ongoing basis? Where is the reporting transparency around this? We have been given a list from the department on the type of housing. It does not exactly match with the press release figures that were provided; I think Mr McCracken provided them earlier. It does not entirely correlate with some of what you have presented today. Where do we find updated figures that give us a sense of all of that information?

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Dr Mansfield. This goes directly to the challenges of reporting and updates on housing that is delivered through a range of different budget allocations, and we have got multiple jurisdictions operating there too. As I talked you through, there is a split between the Regional Housing Fund and the Big Housing Build, and when we talk to committed investment across the minimum investment guarantee for the Big Housing Build and other capital projects, that is \$1.1385 billion. That is as of 31 December 2024. But under the ‘homes delivered’ column there are 1238 and under ‘homes underway’ there are 2408. I am very happy to see how we can disaggregate that information. Homes Victoria does publish information about where and how those areas will be allocated funding, but again it is about making sure that we can continue to update it as we go. Indicators will also include regional housing investment that changes through private development. I know that is not perhaps a direct answer in a yes or no fashion, but why don’t I see what I can do by way of disaggregating information and what Homes Victoria might be able to do to provide a split on how that is being progressed?

Sarah MANSFIELD: I think it would be helpful because I think there is a concern that we have got multiple different funds and it is hard to get a sense of how much housing is being delivered under which funds and whether there is any movement between those funds. Previous announcements have been shifting around. Personally, I am a fan of refurbishment, but there is some concern that these funds were announced to provide new housing. I would have thought that with existing public housing, if it needs upgrades, renovation or refurbishment, that should be part of ongoing maintenance and renewal programs that the government undertakes. The fact that that is being mixed in and there is going to be some affordable housing mixed in – it sounds like a great proportion will be public housing, but how much of that public housing is existing public housing versus new public housing?

I just feel like there is a lot of murkiness here. There have been a lot of numbers thrown out, and standing back from this, there is a huge need for new housing and lots of community organisations have presented to this committee saying, ‘Where’s the housing? We’ve got no idea what’s happening.’ Having some sort of transparency about what is going on and exactly where the new housing is, what type of housing it is, if it is refurbishment, what fund is supporting it – all of that would be very useful.

Harriet SHING: Sure. The media release that Mr McCracken referred to was about delivering 1300 – at least 1300 – social and affordable homes through the Regional Housing Fund. Maintenance and repairs are separate to the money here. If we are talking about upgrades, they are structural upgrades. They are upgrades of a significant nature to enable homes that may not have been habitable to be habitable. Often there is significant

work that goes on there to make a home that was not previously able to be occupied into a home that is occupied and able to be tenanted to somebody who is on the priority register. I just want to make that point because it is important to note we do have an investment – we have got a fund and we have got supports for maintenance and for repairs as part of the ordinary work that occurs across Homes Victoria's inventory. That is separate to the work that is going into making homes either habitable and able to be tenanted where they have not been or new homes. I am very happy to see what can be done to break that down in a central position. It is published, but again for ease of digestion, why don't I see what can do. I think you have got Mr Newport appearing this afternoon. That might also be something that he can look into.

It is hard, because there are multiple areas of funding, and that includes the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund as well. That is also something where we had the first 20 projects announced last year, last October – Minister Tierney announced that – and then there is another round that just closed last Friday around that \$150 million. That is also about taking pressure off the private rental market and social housing system and the need for worker accommodation, particularly in those peak times, whether it is harvest or peak tourism periods.

So why don't we see what we can do. Again, it sits across multiple departments as well. Worker accommodation is within the regional DJSIR department. Homes Victoria is in DFFH, and that is also where the Regional Housing Fund and the Big Housing Build sit. I will do my best to try to synthesise that in a way that means that people can track what is happening and how.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thanks. Given we do not have that information, I will ask some more questions about the figures.

Harriet SHING: Sure.

Sarah MANSFIELD: With the 70 per cent public housing – it is about 630 dwellings of the 900 of public housing, according to what you have provided – how much of that public housing will be new public housing versus refurbishment?

Harriet SHING: Thank you for that question. As you have pointed out, 900 social housing units – about 70 per cent public housing, which is what I said in my opening remarks. Again, it is about making sure that homes, where they are not tenanted, are able to be refurbished and upgraded to a point where they are. The objective here is to bring down the pressure on the housing register and also to make sure that people are not becoming homeless because there is an inadequate supply of stock.

I will look to see what I can get you on existing stock and new stock, but one of the things that is really important to note in public housing is that where people are living full-time and permanently in a home the wear and tear that occurs is much faster and much more significant than when somebody is not. That is often where we do see a variation in the need for significant upgrade, structural upgrade, within public housing that we might not perhaps see in other parts of the system. On that basis, why don't I see what I can get you. But as I said, maintenance and repairs are a separate allocation of funding.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I understand that. It is just wanting to understand how much of that is brand new public housing versus housing that is in need of a full refurbishment.

Harriet SHING: It is about refurbishing old stock so that it can be brought back on line for new renters – so not currently able to be occupied.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I absolutely understand that, but also I think a lot of us are aware of plenty of public housing that has been sitting there empty in all of our different electorates, and it has been like that for a long time. So it is welcome to see that being refurbished and used for housing.

Harriet SHING: 138 have been refurbished and returned to habitable condition already, and that work will go on. Why don't I see what I can get you by way of a split to date, but that will progress –

Sarah MANSFIELD: I guess I would just be interested to know how much new public housing is coming on line, like brand new public housing, versus public housing that is possibly already – I do not know whether in the department figures that housing that is not habitable or is needing refurbishment is still counted as existing stock.

Harriet SHING: If it is not occupied, it is not stock that can be used for the purpose of the register. Let us see what I can get you. I am mindful that the noise went, whatever it is.

The CHAIR: The buzzer went, yes. Thank you, Dr Mansfield. Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Thanks, Minister. I am glad we are spending so much time talking about regional Victoria, having grown up there yourself and with your previous portfolio history in regional development. Something I touched on I think at the very start of this committee process was just where we have come from in my lived experience in regional Victoria. For me, growing up in the 90s, it was a very, very different era. I think it is important to look at the contrast, because we had a situation where train lines were being closed, schools and hospitals removed, wages stagnating, services being cut and banks following suit. It was very dark and gloomy – pubs closing, footy clubs folding up, that sort of thing. We have got challenges now, but they are different. We have global inflation. We have Ukraine putting pressures on – materials, labour supply. We have had this issue, and obviously responding with housing. I think you touched before on the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund, and obviously – we share the same electorate – that has benefited health and tourism. We have had Tiny Towns and food and fibre investments through the rest of this package and festivals, events and tourism and Aboriginal business employment and cultural tourism. I just want to come to that First Nations piece, because that was very early on flagged as an important part of this, and with the First Nations housing – the Gunnai/Kurnai and Bunurong in my electorate, I deal with them a lot. With this regional housing package and engagement with them, can you just talk a bit to that?

Harriet SHING: Yes, absolutely. It is one of the areas of need that is of particular importance when we look at systemic disadvantage and a lack of intergenerational wealth and opportunity. The statistics are actually really shameful. The rate of home ownership for First Nations families and mortgagees is about 20 per cent lower than it is for non-Aboriginal households. We also know that it is harder for potential buyers of homes who are Aboriginal to be able to enter the property market, and that is as much as anything due to ingrained and systemic discrimination – frankly, racism – in the system. There has been a lot of work going into trying to address that through the homebuyers equity fund previously; it has been converted into the Help to Buy scheme federally. We ran it for a couple of years, and it helped around 11,000 people to get into a home with a shared deposit scheme. The fund there was 5 per cent deposit or 3.5 per cent deposit for First Nations homebuyers. We have got an allocation of 10 per cent as a target within the work that we do across social housing.

We have also got allocations of targets of 10 per cent for victim-survivors of family violence. Family violence, we know, is the number one law and order issue in Victoria. It causes just the most extraordinary amount of grief and injury and loss of life and loss of opportunity, and that has got to stop. It also requires systemic responses.

Those targets serve a really important purpose. Not only do they enable a specific allocation to be made in new builds, but they also ensure that they match up with the priority social housing components of the Victorian housing register. We need to also address the need that exists in housing and the demographics – again, victim-survivors of family violence, Aboriginal households and young people. This has been a focus of the discussions that I have been having with Commonwealth counterparts around the allocation of money for housing. I have advocated and will continue to advocate for specific streams of funding for First Peoples housing, but the Commonwealth has announced and committed to \$1 billion alongside the work that the Premier has done with the former Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, primarily with a focus on victim-survivors of family violence and young people. They are over-represented in the statistics around homelessness. The disadvantage is devastating, and we cannot turn away from it.

Tom McINTOSH: Thanks for talking to that. I want to follow up on some comments that were made earlier around prices of housing and whatnot. I actually worked in construction for about 10 years, and yep, you can get a building. You can get ones that look good from afar – the old saying ‘Good from afar but far from good’ – or you can get houses that are –

Joe McCracken interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: I will ignore that interjection.

Harriet SHING: Don’t be like that, Mr McCracken. I am sure that the homes that you built, Mr McIntosh, were very, very commendable.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, indeed. But in all seriousness, you can look at the quality of a build and you can see the difference. I may have missed it, but I do not think enough was gone into around – I think there was a touch on accessibility – energy efficiency, for one, and the ongoing cost to tenants. I will start with energy efficiency and you can talk to other measures. I just wonder if you can expand on, when you invest in a quality build at the start of a project's life, the difference that it makes and the longevity of the project – there is a lot of conversation here about maintenance on buildings – by investing properly at the start of a building's life and what that means for the tenants, for maintenance and for all that going forward.

Harriet SHING: Yes. Thank you for that question, Mr McIntosh. We do have, and for good reason, a number of standards that apply to the housing that we provide. Where the government, as the state's largest landlord, is providing housing it needs to be of a consistent quality. This is where housing has been built over a number of periods and eras where standards have been different and the types of materials that have been used – and you would know this from the work that you have had in a life prior to politics. Wet areas of homes had previously contained asbestos underneath membranes, which had caused all sorts of difficulties and health risks and indeed led to the deaths of people. We also know now that with some of the older housing stock we have got we have got mesothelioma and silicosis emerging as some significant areas of risk for DIY projects, and we also know that a lot of our public and social housing – mostly public housing – is reaching the end of its usable life. So the housing that we build now has to comply with, and rightly so, not just the building codes that apply but the energy codes that apply. It is also about accessibility and amenity, and it is also about making sure that we are able to spend the money and invest the money in a way that will be enduring. We do have a commitment to building homes that will last for significant periods of time, but it is also – again, as I said in response to Mr McCracken's question – about price per unit comprising everything that goes into the delivery of a home. It is not just bricks and mortar – it is not just a concrete slab or a waffle slab or whatever kind of preconstruction you are talking about – it is everything.

Tom McINTOSH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I have got a couple of points that I want to follow up on from some earlier points. The first is: I agree with Sarah Mansfield on the need for a proper time series to be able to follow these points very closely. I think anything, Minister, you can do to assist with that would be much appreciated.

Harriet SHING: Yes.

David DAVIS: The second is: as I understand it, Minister, the waiting list for public housing has actually been growing longer. It is actually well over 60,000 now. For a long period it was just a bit over 40,000. As I understand it, that list has got longer.

Harriet SHING: That includes transfer applications as well as new applications, Mr Davis, just to be really, really clear.

David DAVIS: Nonetheless there are a huge number of people waiting and the number of properties has not grown, as I can see, and I will look forward to the material you are going to provide to Ms Mansfield. But as I see it, the numbers of properties have not grown but the waiting lists have actually grown considerably. In that circumstance, I am also interested in a breakdown between city and country. I get you have got a regional fund, but as you yourself have alluded to, the reality is that this is in the context of other spending. We would welcome a further breakdown that breaks down the city and country divide. I do not know whether you can provide that.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Davis, for that point. I absolutely agree with you that the waiting list has increased. This speaks to a number of pressures that exist, but it has also been one of the things that has driven the investment that we have made into housing across the state. We want to make sure that in the work that we have done we are also deploying partnerships, whether that is with the community housing sector or with development partners and the work in the housing statement, not only to provide new housing but to prevent people from needing social housing in the first place. The housing statement, as you would know, Mr Davis, has provided a range of measures through streamlined planning pathways but also initiatives like the small second dwelling. If you can have a small second dwelling on a site of at least 300 square metres, you can have

that small second dwelling without need for a planning permit, up to 60 square metres. That will keep people in a home-based environment with their own entrance and exit points in a fully independent living situation without them needing to go, for example, and look for a private rental. We are starting to see housing affordability and availability ease. We are starting to see rents stabilising in Victoria. That will hopefully be a measure of relief for people who are looking not to be vulnerable to housing such that they are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the homelessness figures that we have also include, in comparison to other states, a really broad definition there.

But, Mr Davis, I have got regional housing register data. As part of the overall September data for new applications, in terms of the priority preferences, we have got 27,964. That comprises 31.2 per cent of the total. And we have got total preferences regionally – that includes new and transfer applications – of 27 for priority; and ROI preferences are 18,655, so that is 29.6 per cent.

David DAVIS: All right. Thank you. We look forward to those coming to the committee in a structured form that enables us to make those comparisons between country and city.

The other point I want to pick up is the matter around quality of build. I agree that the quality is important. But one of the points is the choices that consumers have – people who are wanting to go into public housing or are being moved from one public housing location to another. I am interested in the survey work that you have done. Is there survey work that tests their views, their preferences and their priorities?

Harriet SHING: The short answer to that is yes, there is, Mr Davis, and it is really important that we are providing people with options. Waiting times vary significantly based on a range of factors, and that also includes availability of housing in the areas that people have nominated. This is why when people nominate one area only, it can often be a wait that is significantly longer than an application that does nominate multiple areas. So when you apply for social housing –

David DAVIS: If I can just back up a little –

Harriet SHING: Yes.

David DAVIS: on the choices and preferences, where you have got survey work, it would be helpful for us to have some copies of that survey.

Harriet SHING: Sorry, Mr Davis, I just want to clarify. This is based on what applicants select as their location preferences. There are broad bands, and they choose up to five waiting list areas. So applicants might be offered a property in any suburb or town from their chosen waiting list areas.

David DAVIS: I am just trying to understand here: you do not go out and talk to people and understand what sort of format they want, what sort of kitchen –

Harriet SHING: We do. That is exactly what they nominate as part of their areas of need. So when somebody –

David DAVIS: Okay. So is that tabulated in any way?

Harriet SHING: No, because it comes down to individual applicants, Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: It is not aggregated up in some way so that we can see preferences that are clear across the system? I am not interested in the individual –

Harriet SHING: Yes. We know, for example, that in certain parts of metropolitan Melbourne we have a much greater preference for housing that is within certain areas where they have lived previously – the more densely populated areas. We also know that in metropolitan Melbourne the vast majority of housing need comprises studio and one- and two-bedroom homes. That is a very significant departure from the housing that was delivered in previous generations, which is why again development needs to make better use of the land that we have available so that we can, firstly, put more housing onto it, but secondly, have housing that meets people's needs. It is also about making sure we are minimising overcrowding, which is another issue that appears as a significant challenge, particularly within certain population cohorts, and that we are in a position to meet need as it relates to housing as expressed on applications.

David DAVIS: Do you have that tabulated together or put together in a report format that looks at all those preferences so that the committee can understand the different preferences that are there in some aggregated form? Obviously we are not interested in the details of any personal –

Harriet SHING: Confidentiality and privacy requirements are absolutely imperative here, Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: I would be staggered if it is not aggregated up into some report –

Harriet SHING: So bedroom sizes, for example, are reported on by preferred waiting list areas. They indicate the type of housing size requirements that an applicant is approved for. There can be fluctuations in numbers over time. That might be influenced by allocation to those priority areas and eligibility criteria, which again change. Let me see what I can find for you, though, Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: That would be helpful.

Harriet SHING: There is a bit of variation in what you have asked for, but let us see what we can dig up.

David DAVIS: Well, then there must be some aggregation of this material. I would be staggered if your department –

Harriet SHING: I am not saying there is not, Mr Davis. It is just about how you would like that configured and what we can do to assist the committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Davis. I will ask a few questions now. The government talks a lot about social and affordable housing, but it is my understanding that there is not actually a clear definition of affordable housing and there was some work being done on that. Could the minister update the committee on what the definition of affordable housing actually is?

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Chair. You have touched on an issue of significance not just in Victoria but around Australia. When we talk about affordable housing there has been variation in definitions that has plagued the national system for quite some time. Affordable housing is defined in the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. That is an act which is about 28 years old now and therefore it no longer – it is not 28 years old, it is much older than that. It is a piece of legislation that was designed at a certain time to distinguish between metropolitan and regional housing, between singles and couples in low and moderate housing and to determine how housing would be made available below market value. That is as distinct from social housing, which again depends on whether you are talking about public housing, which is 25 per cent of a household's income, or community housing, which is up to 30 per cent, which also includes a Commonwealth rental assistance rebate.

There are a number of different eligibility matters that apply here. If you earn over a certain threshold, you cannot be eligible for public or social housing, for example. Affordable housing is made available to people who have a household income that is specified each year in a table in the *Planning and Environment Act*. But it is also about saying how do we harmonise that across the country. If we have different definitions – and Victoria has a different definition to New South Wales, for example – and if we have got providers and housing systems that are operating across different jurisdictions and people are having to manage different regulatory frameworks, it can be enormously complex, and unnecessarily so. So there is a review being undertaken into the *Planning and Environment Act*, and that is something which will be part of that work.

The CHAIR: Thank you. If you are building affordable housing, how do you know if it is actually affordable housing when you do not really have a clear definition at the moment?

Harriet SHING: We do have a clear definition in Victoria. There are monetary values that are ascribed to the way in which the cap applies for singles and for couples around what their incomes look like. The challenge is that that is a different proposition to what occurs in other jurisdictions. When we work with builders and developers and when we look at the split of what we might be able to provide – again, this is a metropolitan example but I will give it anyway. The Kew site, the old VicRoads site, is I think about a 2.6-hectare site. That will have up to 500 homes on it, which will include a component of affordable housing. So that is then about partnerships with developers; there might be a consortium. A part of the allocation for that for the purpose of a contract or an agreement for the purpose of development of that land might well be a component of affordable

housing. That is also within the housing statement, the development facilitation fund and what is required to be considered as part of a component of affordable housing within that allocation. That is why again we want to increase the stock that is available – ‘key worker affordable housing’ might be a way to define it – so that it is made available to people who do not then have to live 3 hours from where they work.

The CHAIR: Thank you. One of the issues that has been brought up by witnesses is they were concerned about the composition of the housing stock. It has been put to the committee that some of the high-demand type of housing is single-bedroom housing, and they were concerned that some of the government’s new projects are not this type of housing that is on the waiting list and in high demand. How is the government going about determining what the correct composition is?

Harriet SHING: We do see variation, and this goes perhaps to questions that Mr Davis has also raised around the demographics. We know, for example, we have an ageing population. We also have a difference in the way in which people live now. There used to be, for example, a lot more intergenerational living. But we are also seeing children and dependents staying at home for longer, as much as anything because they are saving for a deposit for a home of their own. So the way in which we use land – the block sizes, the proximity to schools or to early childhood or for people who are ageing in place – has meant that the need has changed over time. We are seeing, as I said, a significant component of request for social housing for studio, one- and two-bedroom. So that has certainly informed, for example, what we have done with our ground lease models 1 and 2.

We also need to take account, though, of feedback from communities around where larger size configuration needs to be accommodated, and we know that in multicultural communities where, for example, we have multiple generations of families living in one residence, that will often require three- or four-bedroom homes. There will be a proportion that might be accommodated in developments for that purpose, and there have been examples of where we have done exactly that. Again, it is a city example, but it is the one that comes to mind. At the old red brick towers in Elgin Street there were homes that were reconfigured to enable three- and four-bedroom homes to be delivered because that was what community was telling us. So renter consultative committee work is important, community engagement, demographics and also the sorts of configurations of applications that we have on the register.

There is also an element of speculation there: how do we make sure the housing that we are developing now is fit for purpose? If we can make better use, for example, of a block that previously had a three- or four-bedroom home in it that had one person or two people living in it by actually subdividing that and having four, say, one- or two-bedroom homes on it, that is then bringing people off the register. So it is a moving feast, but it is one which we have a sense of because of changes in demographic population and applications to the register.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And one thing that I wanted to ask you about – and this is something that is new – is the recently implemented stamp duty concessions for townhouses and apartments –

Harriet SHING: And units.

The CHAIR: and units; presumably this would enable cheaper construction in some circumstances for, for example, affordable housing that is built in the private sector. What work has been done by the government to try and prioritise this to take advantage of those concessions, or is that not really something that matters here?

Harriet SHING: By the government?

The CHAIR: Obviously it would not apply to public housing or social housing necessarily, but some of these other developments are being delivered by the private sector by developers, and presumably they would have some incentive to prioritise certain types of development to take advantage of those stamp duty concessions. What sort of work has been done by the government to try and push that forward a bit faster? Because it is very limited timeframe; it is only a 12-month window.

Harriet SHING: It is 12 months, but this is about alleviating some of the congestion in the system that sits alongside the work we have done within the housing statement. One of the primary objectives of the housing statement as it was announced was to streamline those planning pathways, but we also know that buying off the plan is something that we want to see more of because that then provides a measure of certainty and therefore liquidity for developers, and when time is money that is of crucial importance. The 12-month stamp duty

exemption for off-the-plan purchases of apartments, units or townhouses is intended to address that. Again, that is an ongoing discussion around how we facilitate and support that.

It is also, within a regional space, about infill, because when we are talking about infill and we are talking about subdivision, removal of those requirements for planning permits, stamp duty exemption and the opportunity for people who are within previously excluded categories to be able to access that exemption for that 12-month period mean that we can actually get more development occurring in a way that meets developer priorities and that also brings certainty to people who can save on what would otherwise have been paid in stamp duty. So it is for the proportion of the build that has not yet been undertaken. It may well be that people can save considerably more money the earlier they get in, which is what the objective of that particular policy is.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I believe Mr Galea and Mr McCracken have a couple more questions, so I will go to Mr McCracken first.

Joe McCracken: Thank you. I just love reading your media releases, Minister Shing. I was particularly looking at the 34 homes allocated to Central Highlands. Where will they be?

Harriet Shing: The Central Highlands allocation, Mr McCracken, is about a region again. So that will be developed –

Joe McCracken: I understand that it is a region, but within the Central Highlands there is Ballarat, Ararat and Maryborough – big cities, large towns. They are quite distinct and separate from each other. Do you have any indication of any of those towns that might be getting a particular allocation?

Harriet Shing: We have got about \$140 million in Ballarat, as I think I said when I made my opening comments – no, sorry, it is the Big Housing Build and other capital programs. We have got a committed investment of \$144 million. 213 of those homes have been delivered, 378 of those homes are underway and 1294 jobs have been created. That is within Ballarat.

Joe McCracken: You said before 165 were underway in Ballarat.

Harriet Shing: Under the Big Housing Build and other capital programs.

Joe McCracken: Yes, we can check the Hansard if you like.

Harriet Shing: So that is a committed investment of millions of dollars – 213 delivered, 378 underway.

Joe McCracken: I do not know where we got the 165 you said before, but that is okay. I still want to know where the 34 are going to be.

Harriet Shing: Across the Central Highlands area.

Joe McCracken: Across the Central Highlands under the billion-dollar Big Build?

Harriet Shing: Yes. That includes Ballarat, obviously, and that is separate to what I have just talked about across regional local government areas. Why don't I see what I can get you. But again, this will be work that happens after we have continued that discussion with communities. One of the examples I want to give you very quickly, Mr McCracken, as to how we need to make sure that we are dexterous in this work is the work on flood recovery and the work on the allocation of those homes. We received feedback in the course of that discussion around how we would allocate those 70 homes that then meant that we had dwellings that were reconfigured –

Joe McCracken: Thirty-four homes, not 70.

Harriet Shing: Seventy dwellings to support communities impacted by the 2022 floods in Shepparton, Seymour and Rochester.

Joe McCracken: Sorry, I was talking about Central Highlands.

Harriet Shing: No, no. I am saying, by way of example, there was a change to where and how that housing was delivered as a result of community feedback and discussion with councils. So that is work that,

again, within those local areas and regions we will continue to work through. But that is the allocation that has been committed within that first 1000.

Joe McCracken: Is 34 enough for Central Highlands?

Harriet Shing: Again, I will take you to the figures that I have just read out, Mr McCracken. Across the Big Housing Build and across the work that we have done in allocating funding across multiple programs, we have got that total number of homes which I took you to, which was \$144 million, 213 homes that have been delivered, 378 homes underway – and that is the Big Housing Build and other capital programs. The Regional Housing Fund, that \$1 billion, is for the Central Highlands area, and that is within the first tranche of the allocation of at least 1300 homes.

Joe McCracken: Okay. Are any of the houses underway at Delacombe in Ballarat at all?

Harriet Shing: I do not know. Bear with me. Can I take that on notice? I do have materials, but I have got a giant folder here, and we have been going for nearly an hour and a half, so I suspect things are a little out of order. Why don't I see what I can provide you.

Joe McCracken: The reason why I ask is – can I finish? Is that all right?

The Chair: Yes.

Joe McCracken: The reason why I ask is I know that there are works at the Delecombe site. I have been there before.

Harriet Shing: Yes. I am just wondering about the bucket of money from which it is coming, though, Mr McCracken. I do not want to mislead you.

Joe McCracken: Sure. The site itself has been vacant for about 18 months or so. There have been probably about 12, maybe 15, new dwellings actually created. The rest is fenced off. It has got long grass, and the houses were demolished in 2023 to make way for new houses that have not been built yet. What is the reason for the delay?

Harriet Shing: There can be multiple reasons – if there is site remediation required, if there are changes to planning that are required, so if permits are required to be submitted, or if planning and master planning need to be undertaken. There can be a range of factors. Why don't I see what I can get you, though, in relation to Delacombe and the timeframes associated with that build. That is also something which occurs across the entire system. There can be a multiplicity of reasons.

The Chair: Would you be happy to take that on notice, Minister?

Harriet Shing: Yes. Why don't I see what I can get you, Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Leawarra Crescent is the area.

Harriet Shing: If you want to give me the details, let us see what I can get you. But that is part of the ongoing conversation on the inventory. The government is the largest landlord in Victoria. It is a huge inventory, so if you do have specific examples that you would like to talk through, I am very happy to take that offline.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Mr Galea.

Michael Galea: Thank you, Chair. Thanks again, Minister. I just want to touch on something that you actually discussed with Mrs Tyrrell earlier, and that was in relation to the flood-affected areas of Victoria in particular. In fact I believe you were using one of those areas as an example with the 70 new dwellings in the central-north region around Shepparton, Seymour and Rochester in your response to Mr McCracken. I am wondering if you could give the committee more detail about projects in these specific areas, particularly as they pertain to social and affordable housing.

Harriet SHING: Sure. Thank you, Mr Galea, for that and for building on the question that Mrs Tyrrell asked earlier. The impact of flooding can never be overestimated – not just the immediate impact that it has on recovery and the sheer waste and often hazards that it leaves behind once water is moved on. It is then about the challenges of finding contractors, finding people to be able to do the work – workforce shortages. The construction and the sourcing are in progress to deliver up to 70 dwellings to support communities who were impacted by those floods – and there will be other people who will be part of other programs who have been affected, but this is dedicated funding for flood-affected tenants and residents. Five of those homes are already tenanted, three are in the process of being tenanted and there are another 12 homes due for completion by the end of this year.

Again, it is a process of not just making this available for specific purposes but providing support for people who often have a really lengthy period of time needed for recovery, who also then need to remain connected to their communities and have significant financial disadvantage because of the circumstances of flooding and often because they are not insured or they are insufficiently insured. The Commonwealth government has recently completed an inquiry into the impact of floods across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and that includes insurance and the consequences of people being left in really severe financial distress as a result of natural disaster.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Quite right to point out too it was not just Victorian floods; it was right across the eastern seaboard, and in our state that region in particular was hardest hit but it was not the only region hit. I know you have touched on places like Colac and Wodonga. Are there any further details you can provide us on those areas?

Harriet SHING: Yes. Sure. In Colac we have got Pound Road. That is well underway. That will see 50 new homes. Thirty of those will be social housing homes, 20 will be affordable. They will be built on vacant land that is really close to the town centre. To earlier questions, they will be a mix of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom homes, and there will be community consultation that takes place around that particular project. Then in Wodonga three sites will deliver 41 new homes. Ten of those will be affordable, 31 of those will be social housing – so public housing. That will be a total increase of 24 homes on the site. Seventeen households will be relocated, and they are to be completed by November, with construction to start next year and those homes to be brought on line as soon as possible.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today, Minister. You will receive a copy of the transcript for review in about a week, before it is published on our website. The committee will now adjourn until 2:40 pm.

Witness withdrew.