

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne – Wednesday 7 June 2023

### **MEMBERS**

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Paul Hamer

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell



**WITNESSES**

Mr Colin Brooks MP, Minister for Housing,

Ms Peta McCammon, Secretary,

Ms Camille Kingston, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria,

Mr Danny O’Kelly, Deputy Secretary, Community Operations and Practice Leadership, and

Ms Sherri Bruinhout, Executive Director, Homelessness and Housing Support, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates. The committee’s aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing this afternoon via the live stream and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee’s website.

I welcome the Minister for Housing the Honourable Colin Brooks and officers from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; you too are very much welcome here. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

**Colin BROOKS:** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present to the committee on the housing portfolio today, including our government’s investments in the 2023–24 state budget.

Can I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we are meeting on today and pay my respects to elders past and present.

I should introduce Peta McCammon, the relatively new Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Danny O’Kelly, who is the Deputy Secretary, Community Operations and Practice Leadership; Camille Kingston, who is the Interim CEO at Homes Victoria; and Sherri Bruinhout, the Executive Director, Homelessness and Housing Support, at Homes Victoria.

**Visual presentation.**

**Colin BROOKS:** Sherri is driving the slides. Next slide. This year we will continue to implement enduring reform to the homelessness system to break the cycle of homelessness. More public housing stock will be renewed and replaced, transforming homes and the renter experience. As part of the Big Housing Build, 10 per cent of all net growth in homes will be for Aboriginal Victorians. We will continue to invest in partnerships with the community and private sector to deliver affordable housing where Victorians need it most.

Next slide. The government has invested over \$275 million in the 2023–24 state budget in combined output and asset funding as part of our continued commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness and improving social housing for more Victorians, including through the delivery of our commitment to install air conditioning in our public housing high-rise towers.

Next slide. This year's investment builds on our significant track record of funding our housing and homelessness portfolio commitments. The completion of stimulus programs and commitments introduced to respond to COVID-19 sees funding targets come back in line with pre-COVID levels from this financial year.

Next slide. This government has made the largest single investment in social and affordable housing ever seen in this state: \$5.3 billion has been committed to the Big Housing Build to deliver more than 12,000 social and affordable homes. To date, more than 7600 of these homes have been completed or are in construction, and 2000 of those households have people living in them or are ready to be moved into.

Next slide. At the conclusion of the Big Housing Build we will have generated an estimated \$6.7 billion in economic activity and created an average 10,000 jobs per year. We are increasing access to social and affordable housing stock by investing in a range of projects. Recently completed projects include Ascot Vale and Ashburton, which are being tenanted as we speak, providing safe, secure homes for 375 households. And we are continuing to invest in the innovative ground lease model, where we partner with the community and private sector to deliver social and market rental homes.

Next slide. In addition to investing in new housing stock we are also deeply committed to improving the livability of existing social housing across Victoria, and this includes significant investment in maintaining and improving more than 24,000 homes. That is already above the 23,000 target and on track to improve 25,000 public housing homes. We also have several large-scale public housing renewal projects underway that will transform those sites and create thousands of job opportunities.

Our commitment to building and upgrading existing infrastructure only tells part of our housing story. We have continued to support those Victorians most in need through emergency support packages to those affected by natural disasters and through homes and support for victim-survivors of family violence and for people with a history of rough sleeping.

This year we have also had a particular focus on supporting Aboriginal Victorians, and we have expanded our commitment to providing rental assistance and supporting Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver and manage growth in housing for Aboriginal Victorians, thereby supporting self-determination and enabling Aboriginal people to have a choice about who provides their housing. In addition to ongoing annual funding for homelessness services of \$300 million, this government is making a significant and lasting impact on homelessness and rough sleeping by implementing initiatives that are making a huge difference for families. The homeless to a home program is the largest investment in a program based on Housing First principles by any state or territory in Australia. Ongoing funding will ensure that these households continue to have support as their needs change.

In conclusion, I am proud that this government is continuing to deliver more homes for more Victorians, because this investment is changing lives, providing employment and giving some of the most disadvantaged members of our community the dignity they deserve to live the lives they want. Thanks again to the committee for your interest in this portfolio.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. First up we are going to go for 7 minutes to Mr McGowan for questions. Your time starts now.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you, and thank you, Minister, for the presentation. Minister, I just want to share with you – it relates to page 18 in respect of the Big Housing Build in the budget. For the purpose of this I will just call this lady Wendy. She has two teenage children and they were given an uninhabitable home in April of this year. They were advised by the neighbours that the home had been empty for the 12 months previous. After paying a deposit on the family home, she only lasted four days there in total. There was no hot water, there was no stove and no blinds on the windows at all. By 1 June – this is the email that, we will call her, Wendy sent:

I just wanted to update you so that you can see how the process continues. My housing person from salvocare messaged on Friday saying they were going to put in my housing application with Frankston housing. I am still yet to hear if this has actually been actioned as I was told that a few times over the last month and still yet to be done. Collingwood housing I just spoke to again this morning, I still haven't received my refund of \$356, am told to just be patient as it needs to be processed and apparently can take another week. I am looking at more private rentals this week, not that we can really afford them but if we don't get a private rental in the next couple of weeks we will no longer be eligible for the private rental assistance of two months rent in advance, so I won't be able to afford any private rental.

But with the housing application not even in yet I can imagine a public housing offer is a long way away. We have now been homeless since April last year.

This system is just so incredibly broken and is causing people much more stress than it does support.

Minister, what do I say to Wendy and her two teenage children?

**Colin BROOKS:** Thanks for raising that, Mr McGowan. Can I ask just a few questions on the issue that you have raised. So that was an email to you or to another member of Parliament?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** To the shadow minister.

**Colin BROOKS:** Has that been forwarded on to us for action?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** I am happy to provide any details to you after today, certainly.

**Colin BROOKS:** The first thing I would say is that with a housing portfolio of around 70,000 homes, whilst our staff both in terms of maintenance and tenancy arrangements do a great job right across the state, there are of course instances where people are not happy with the services provided or the standard of the housing provided. In those cases often members of Parliament will write to myself as the minister or raise it directly with Homes Victoria for action to be taken. So I would suggest if it has not been forwarded to us, that can be forwarded to us and we will follow it up.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you, Minister. I certainly will. In respect to that, Secretary, just a question. In terms of the total dwellings in the portfolio for the public, in 2018 I believe there were 86,813 and in 2022 there were 86,887. Do you have a recent figure for 2023?

**Peta McCAMMON:** Sorry, I missed the start.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** The number of public dwellings in total.

**Peta McCAMMON:** Just let me find the page.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** I am happy to take that on notice if you would like to have a look at that, But perhaps while you are looking at that, I will just ask another question if that is okay.

**Peta McCAMMON:** Sure.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Minister, the *Housing Assistance: Additional Service Delivery Data*, which is usually released in October each year and accounts for housing stock, has not been released for 2021–22. I am referring to that data there. Do you know why that is taking so long?

**Camille KINGSTON:** I can take that one.

**Colin BROOKS:** I might refer that to the interim CEO.

**Camille KINGSTON:** I can answer that question. It was fundamentally an oversight within the department that we have not published that data. There is no other issue behind it and we actually picked that up only recently, so it will be published, you know, fairly shortly. There was no other reason.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Okay. Is it possible to obtain that in the next – what are we talking, is it just a technical issue or is it something that can be –

**Camille KINGSTON:** It was literally an oversight within the department. We had not realised that we had not kind of put the wheels in motion to have the data published, as we ordinarily would.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Okay. Thank you. Is there a chance we can receive that today?

**Camille KINGSTON:** I am not quite sure about today, but I think certainly –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Tomorrow?

**Camille KINGSTON:** Yes, fairly quickly.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** That would be great. Thank you very much.

**Colin BROOKS:** Can I just ask a question – if I can, through you, Chair – to Mr McGowan? When you asked the question of the Secretary before about the amount of public housing were you referring to the overall figure of social housing? Because I think the figure you referred to was in the budget papers in relation to the overall amount of social housing. Is that right? Page 192 of budget paper 3.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Correct. What figure have you got there, Minister?

**Colin BROOKS:** There is a target for the 2023–24 year. Is that what you were referring to?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Yes. I am looking for the actual, though, as opposed to the target, of the year to date for social housing.

**Peta McCAMMON:** Okay. Year to date – I do not have that with me at the moment.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** I will take that on notice. Thank you very much.

Minister, in June 2018, in budget paper 3, page 219, there are 86,813 social dwellings, and four years later, in June 2022, there were 86,887 social dwellings – an increase of only 74 additional homes. The Big Housing Build, as you know, boasts 12,000 new homes by 2026. How many of the existing homes will be cannibalised in the process, and what will be the real increase in social housing by 2026?

**Colin BROOKS:** Thanks for the question, Mr McGowan. I think you are referring to page 192, not page 219.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Page 219 in respect to the 86,813, and page 192 in respect to the 86,887.

**Colin BROOKS:** My budget paper has page 219 as ambulance and drug prevention. Sorry.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** There is a slight difference between –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** They are different year budget papers.

**Colin BROOKS:** Sorry, I just wanted to clarify that.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Budget paper 3, page 219, is 2019–20 and then June 2022 is in budget paper 3, page 192, of 2023–24.

**Colin BROOKS:** The answer to your question, which I think at the end of that was how much social housing will be increased at the end of the Big Housing Build – as I mentioned in my presentation, the Big Housing Build is a \$5.3 billion investment.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Sorry, Minister. Can you speak up a little bit?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. Sorry. The Big Housing Build is a \$5.3 billion investment delivering more than 12,000 new social and affordable homes, and the uplift in social housing will be 10 per cent.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Ten per cent.

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** How many homes is that?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Ten per cent new homes – is that what you are saying?

**Colin BROOKS:** Ten per cent growth in the total social housing.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** But how many extra actual homes is that?

**Colin BROOKS:** We can give you the exact figure.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** You can give that to us later.

**Peta McCAMMON:** Yes.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Or you have got that now; I am happy to take that now of course.

**Peta McCAMMON:** Yes, we can.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** You can give that to us. Okay. Thank you.

Minister, the priority housing list for March 2023 indicates an increase of 3681 total families, 842 of which are priority families since March 2022. How many of the current social dwellings are vacant?

**Colin BROOKS:** The question at the end of that was, in terms of, if I understand your question correctly –

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Minister. Mr McGowan, you are out of time. We are going to hand over to Mr Galea next.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister and officials. Minister, I would like to start also by referring to the Big Housing Build, specifically referring to budget paper 4, page 128, and I note that the Big Housing Build has funded rounds in the Social Housing Growth Fund. Minister, can you update the committee on some of the projects that the Social Housing Growth Fund has already delivered?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr Galea, for that question. As you have pointed out, the government has continued to invest in social housing. We have just mentioned the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build. It is well underway, as I said before, with some 7600 homes already completed, and that is since its announcement in the year 2020.

I want to take a moment to reiterate that over 2000 households have already moved in or are getting ready to move in – so 2000 homes completed. And the Social Housing Growth Fund which you have referenced is an absolutely pivotal part of making this happen. As part of the Big Housing Build the Andrews Labor government has invested \$1.38 billion on top of the \$1 billion previously invested in the 2018 year to deliver a target of 4200 new dwellings. I am pleased to say that the government has contracted more than 3000 homes and awarded over \$950 million to community housing agencies as part of this program.

Some of the really important projects that have been delivered and have welcomed renters are projects such as a project in Cheltenham delivered by the National Affordable Housing Consortium, who were approved funding to deliver this project under the Social Housing Growth Fund rapid grants round. The project received \$42 million from Homes Victoria. That project in Cheltenham has delivered 69 one-bedroom and 51 two-bedroom social housing homes, so that is 120 dwellings in total, for an anticipated 171 residents. I had the privilege to visit that project a few months back with the local member of Parliament at the official opening. What we saw and heard from local residents was truly amazing. These new homes are brand new, all electric, energy efficient. They are built to the 7-star NatHERS rating. Large projects like that one are Green Star 5-star rated, and they are built to be more accessible – that is, to the silver standard of Livable Housing design – so they are really well designed apartments. These particular apartments are well located, close to the station there at Cheltenham and close to the shops. I spoke to residents. I remember actually speaking to three women who had been at risk of homelessness, and it is fair to say that at the opening there were tears in people's eyes at some of the stories that we heard as we opened up that new social housing development. So what the Social Housing Growth Fund is delivering is truly life changing. You can see the difference it is making in people's lives, particularly vulnerable members of our community.

I also recently visited a project in central Preston with the local member of Parliament there, where Homes Victoria is partnering with Housing Choices Australia to deliver 24 one-bedroom and two-bedroom social housing homes. This project has received \$10.6 million under the Social Housing Growth Fund rapid grants round. It is shaping up really nicely, and again, should be open very soon – again, all energy-efficient, modern and accessible homes. This project is a great example of how state government and local government can both support community housing providers to deliver social housing, and in that case Darebin council contributed land to the project on a long-term lease.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Minister. Aside from what you just mentioned there, what local government areas in particular are seeing benefits from the Social Housing Growth Fund?

**Colin BROOKS:** Thanks, Mr Galea. Most of the LGAs around the state are benefiting from the Social Housing Growth Fund. One of the best parts of the Social Housing Growth Fund is it supports community housing providers to deliver housing in the areas with an identified need. As part of the request-for-proposal process when a new social housing growth fund round is opened up, community housing providers are provided with the Victorian Housing Register demand information, meaning they can target areas of high demand for housing. It also means they have to work with community need, so they deliver a really bespoke project to deliver what is needed in terms of housing outcomes for that local community.

Although 70 per cent of all longer-term social housing delivered by community housing providers is in metropolitan Melbourne, the regional rapid grants and mental health Social Housing Growth Fund rounds are all contributing significant amounts of social housing in our regions. The community housing sector owns or manages more than 5000 properties in regional Victoria. Major regional centres containing the highest numbers of social housing include Greater Geelong, Greater Bendigo, Ballarat and Greater Shepparton, and under the Big Housing Build social housing in the regions will grow, again through programs such as the regional round, which has invested almost \$240 million to deliver 739 new homes in regional Victoria.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Minister. Are there more Social Housing Growth Fund rounds in the pipeline?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes, absolutely. In fact Homes Victoria have just released a request for proposal for round 2 of the mental health supported housing round – so homes will be delivered through the mental health supported housing rounds following the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. The housing support model has been informed by the outcomes of a co-design project which has involved people, of course, with lived experience of mental illness. The fourth evaluation period for the homes for Aboriginal Victorians closed in April 2023, and a fifth evaluation period seeking further proposals is due to be released in June, with proposals due in November this year. Through these rounds, Homes Victoria aims to commission up to 500 homes for clients living with mental illness and 420 homes for Aboriginal Victorians, respectively. A new grants program is under development to support delivery of Big Housing Build targets. Further details will be provided to the housing community and industry in the coming months.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Minister. I would like to switch now to budget paper 3, page 40. In relation to youth housing and homelessness, I note that the government has allocated \$40.5 million over four years for targeted housing and to meet that critical demand. Can you please outline what organisations and programs will be receiving this funding?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. Thanks very much. I am really pleased to be able to speak to the investment that is outlined in the 2023–24 budget for targeted housing to meet critical demand. This \$40.5 million investment will be invested in a number of programs delivered by our community sector partners. There are four congregate crisis supported accommodation centres, which provide case management, integrated alcohol and other drug services and other essential health services, such as dental and podiatry. They also provide legal and financial support as well as material supports such as food and laundry to people experiencing homelessness. These services are being delivered by Launch Housing, the Salvation Army and VincentCare.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies to cut you off, Minister. The next 7 minutes belong to Mr O’Brien.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister. Can I just go back to the discussion you were just having with the Deputy Chair about the number of homes? The figures that the Deputy Chair referred to – 86,813 social dwellings in 2019–20 and in this year’s budget 86,887 – there has literally been an increase of 74. But I am just trying to work out how many actual new homes we are going to end up with at the end of the big build. You said 10 per cent. That would be 8600, or thereabouts.

**Colin BROOKS:** There is a line that has been running – I would not say for political reasons; I would not dare suggest that – that the Big Housing Build has only delivered 74 homes, which is an absolute furphy. It is by looking at a figure that predates the beginning of the Big Housing Build in 2020. The Big Housing Build was announced in 2020, and as I said, it will deliver more than 12,000 new social and affordable homes. So to



answer your question: more than 12,000 new social and affordable homes, but 2400 of those are affordable, the rest are social. Just in terms of answering the question –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Yes, but what I am trying to get at here is the net. So when you say 'new', that is in addition to what we had previously at the start of it, not just ones that have been knocked down and rebuilt.

**Colin BROOKS:** No. I will be really open and up-front with you. It is more than 12,000 new social and affordable homes. That is the new amount. There is a 10 per cent uplift in social housing because of the Big Housing Build. As part of the Big Housing Build –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Minister, sorry, but if we started at 86, 10 per cent does not give you 12,000 new homes.

**Colin BROOKS:** But there are projects where we are replacing old, run-down social housing and rebuilding housing on those sites. So there is a net loss in the first instance when the demolition happens. When the new housing is built and we build more it will replace and add to the total.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** But are those houses included in the 12,000?

**Colin BROOKS:** The net increase, as I said, is 10 per cent of social housing, and that is 8200 homes. The figure has just been provided to me.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. So when we have been saying all this time 12,000 new homes, they will be new – newly built – but in terms of actual addition to the social housing stock to house people, it will be actually 8200.

**Colin BROOKS:** We have been very up-front all the way through that it is a 10 per cent uplift in social housing.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Well, that is good; I am glad you have been up-front. I do not recall your predecessor saying exactly that figure at any of these hearings, Minister, so that is very interesting.

Can I just ask: one of the issues is the waiting list, clearly. One of the frustrations that we are getting a lot I am sure as local members is people coming to us and saying, 'This house is public housing. It's been vacant for 12 months,' or 'It's been vacant for six months,' or whatever. Now, we understand there is going to be a changeover. When someone dies or when someone leaves there is going to be a changeover, or when there is maintenance and everything. Perhaps this is for the department, but is there a standard target for vacancy time – that a home should not be vacant for more than three weeks, or something?

**Colin BROOKS:** I am happy to invite the department to comment, but just before they do, there are sometimes reasons for a property to be vacant, and it might not be immediately apparent to neighbours, for example. It could be that a tenant has left the property and has left belongings behind, and under the *Residential Tenancies Act* there is a process –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** And I understand all the reasons that can be –

**Colin BROOKS:** There might be maintenance requests that need to be carried out; there might be a change in tenancy and some works that need to be occurring at that property in the interim, so there might be –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Which regularly happens, but the question I am getting to is: is there a metric that you record as to how long public housing is vacant for between tenants?

**Colin BROOKS:** I will cede that to the department.

**Danny O'KELLY:** The KPI that we work to is 28 days in terms of a public housing property, but that is assuming that the property is ready to re-let. That depends on the state of the property when we take the property back. More often than not we will need to do inspections and will need to do some work to get the property to a state where we are ready to re-let, but the KPI that we work to is 28 days.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Even that – sorry, Mr O'Kelly, if the property is ready to re-let, why does it take 28 days?

**Danny O’KELLY:** It is the time to work through who the next eligible applicant is, the time to work through approaching them, making the offer – there are a series of steps that we have to go through.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** And not to get into the weeds on this, but are we talking 28 days from the date someone vacates to the date a new person is in, or offered the place?

**Danny O’KELLY:** We work towards 28 days from the time the property is ready to re-let.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Until it is –

**Danny O’KELLY:** Let.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Literally someone signs a contract –

**Danny O’KELLY:** Yes.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** or a lease. They do not sign a contract; I get that. Okay, so 28 days. In terms of that KPI, what is the department at at the moment?

**Danny O’KELLY:** In terms of –

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Are we hitting the 28 days?

**Danny O’KELLY:** We are not far above it now, and historically we have been able to hit that KPI. But like a lot of other things, we were impacted a fair bit by COVID in terms of our ability to get trades in and out of sites and turn properties around quickly. I cannot remember the exact figure we are on this week.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** If you have got an exact figure, Mr O’Kelly, could you provide that on notice?

**Danny O’KELLY:** A number of our areas are actually hitting that KPI, but –

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Would you be able to provide that to us on notice by region as well as total?

**Danny O’KELLY:** Yes.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Thank you. Minister, the waiting list is the other thing which I am getting at here too, and I understand the figures were only updated yesterday. On the priority list there are an extra 1000 people basically from March last year to March this year and another nearly 3500 to 4000 people – when I say ‘people’, I mean applicants, so that is often households. How is it that we are spending \$5.3 billion on new housing? We have supposedly got all these new houses, yet we have actually still got the waiting list going up.

**Colin BROOKS:** It is the number of people coming onto the waiting list, Mr O’Brien.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** Sorry, can you speak up again, Minister?

**Colin BROOKS:** Sorry, yes. It is the number of people coming onto the waiting list, Mr O’Brien. The broader economic conditions – cost of living, interest rate increases – are pushing people onto the housing waiting list. Indeed, as we all know, there are tough times across the whole housing continuum, and we are seeing a lot of pressure in terms of both the broader Victorian Housing Register – the broader waitlist – and indeed the priority list.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** That being the case, do we need to go to a bigger housing build and actually do more?

**Colin BROOKS:** If the Nationals and the Liberals in Canberra passed the housing package in the Senate, we could do more.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** We cannot do anything about that, I am sorry, Minister. Maybe Ellen should ask that question. You might have a go at that too.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Mr O’Brien; your time is up. We are going to go straight to Ms Kathage.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. Minister, I am not sure if you know, but I used to work in a youth shelter, so youth homelessness is something that is particularly important to me. I see that there is funding set aside for a lot of initiatives and programs that I am interested in in support for young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. How will they be supported?

**Colin BROOKS:** Thanks very much for your question, and it sort of tails off from a question that was asked previously. We know that more than 16 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are young people aged between 15 and 24. As a government, it is critical that we are delivering more social and affordable housing so that there are more housing options for everybody, including young people. We are investing in a range of initiatives and models which specifically address supports focused on young people and the unique challenges of avoiding or indeed breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Earlier this year I announced projects that were successful in receiving funding under the \$50 million youth capital grants. I fact I think Mr Hilakari might have been with me at that particular announcement out in Werribee at a wonderful facility out there. Through these grants we are partnering with a number of community housing organisations and providers to deliver a range of models that specifically tackle youth homelessness. That is sector partners like the Salvation Army, Melbourne City Mission – which I think was the organisation we were visiting at the time – BeyondHousing, Kids Under Cover and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, just to name a few. These projects will be delivered across the state in locations like Bairnsdale, Mildura, South Morang and Frankston. The South Morang location would be of interest to you, Ms Kathage. They include a range of housing options, such as Education First Youth Foyers and youth supported accommodation.

I mentioned in my previous response a number of programs in the 2023–24 state budget, and there are some great initiatives we could go to further, such as Village 21 in Preston, the Holmesglen Education First Youth Foyer, Kids Under Cover and the Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative. We know that it is critical to intervene early when we are tackling homelessness and providing these supports, particularly to vulnerable young Victorians, so it is important that we look at various factors that are impacting youth homelessness, whether they are contact with the justice system, leaving state care, barriers to accessing education or mental health issues. That is why each of these programs is so important. Take, for example, the Kids Under Cover studio program, which this government had already invested \$1.9 million in. I recently had the opportunity to attend one of the Kids Under Cover studios that was delivered to a family home in Boronia. I was able to meet the family there and hear firsthand about how life-changing the addition of the studio on the property had been, not just for the young person living in it, but for the whole family. If you have got a very full house, some would say overcrowded, and a young person who is struggling, potentially at risk of leaving home and being homeless, then having this modular unit placed in the property's backyard gives that person a sense of independence and space from the rest of the family while also keeping them connected to a stable family environment. This program is delivered by Aboriginal Housing Victoria, who do great work, and Kids Under Cover, so we are making sure that this young person and many like them are receiving culturally safe supports. Homes like these provide Aboriginal youth with the dignity and stability they need as they move from childhood into adulthood.

Another program which provides supports to young people experiencing homelessness is the Wyndham H3 Alliance. This program provides supports to a range of vulnerable people in the Wyndham area, where housing demand is extremely high. This program looks at important support provisions specific to the Wyndham growth corridor area across a range of priority groups: young people unable to live at home, people experiencing mental health issues and people experiencing family violence, which is another example. That program is obviously location specific.

More broadly to your question, youth homelessness is a complex issue and needs to be addressed in a number of ways, and that is why we are investing in diverse programs that range from area-specific issues that face places like Wyndham to Education First based approaches that support access to further training, linking people into really important further education or supporting accommodation programs that build the skills of young people to set them up for successful independent living.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thanks, Minister. You mentioned an Education First Youth Foyer; it is not a model I am familiar with. Are you able to explain that and how it is supporting youth?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes, absolutely. Education youth foyers go further than simply providing a home – a roof over someone’s head. These foyers provide integrated learning and student accommodation in mainstream educational settings, such as TAFEs. Young people aged between 16 to 24 are particularly at risk of experiencing homelessness. These programs are critical in breaking down the structural, institutional and personal barriers to accessing education by providing accommodation that is located, for example, as I said before, on TAFE campuses.

This program supports young people undertaking education and training for a period of two years, providing them with supports as they undertake their further studies. These supports include mentoring, peer support and coaching as they transition to independence. The foyers have got staff who assist young people to access opportunities to develop education and training pathways that lead on, hopefully, to employment and independent living. These programs are an investment in prevention and an investment in these young people’s abilities and prospects to connect and contribute in the broader community. The program is delivered by a number of our community sector partners, such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Launch Housing and Berry Street.

As an example, Launch Housing operate the Holmesglen foyer. The approach combines affordable accommodation, education, training and employment to break the cycle of homelessness, create opportunities and help young people to lead independent lives. Our 2023–24 state budget is delivering funding to this foyer through the \$40.5 million to address targeted housing and critical demand.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you. And Village 21 Preston – I think you mentioned that before in regard to a visit with Nathan Lambert potentially. Is it a new model? I mean, it sounds place-based to have Preston in the name. It sounds –

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. It is a really exciting proposal. It is another one of the housing models that we have to address youth homelessness. It receives funding through this \$40.5 million allocation in this current budget that we are discussing today. That is funding that is targeted directly towards housing in critical demand, which I will talk to you later about.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Apologies to cut you off. The next 7 minutes goes to Mr McGowan.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you. Thank you, Minister. Just to go back to those figures before, just so I am clear, there are 12,000 new homes, but of the actual homes that have not been refurbished or demolished and have been built, it was 8200. Do you have a breakdown, in terms of that figure, of what are social and what are affordable homes of the 8200?

**Colin BROOKS:** So the uplift of 10 per cent in social housing –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Just social housing – the 8200.

**Colin BROOKS:** 8200 – social housing, yes.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** And that is completely new dwellings. We are not talking about a refurb or a rebuild. They are just completely new.

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. The Big Housing Build: 12,000 new social and affordable homes, which will lead –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** That is social and affordable, not distinguishing between the two?

**Colin BROOKS:** I do not mean to be confusing you. The program delivers more than 12,000 social and affordable homes as part of that, because there are some homes that are redeveloped, so you lose older stock as you redevelop new stock and increase it. At the end of that process there is a net uplift of 8200 – 10 per cent, 8200 – social homes.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Social homes.

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** And in terms of the youth project, because I did see a press release recently that mentioned \$50 million.

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Does that include provision in there for the youth housing, or is that a separate initiative?

**Colin BROOKS:** I think it does, yes. Let me come back to you and confirm that. I am pretty sure it does.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Okay. If you could confirm it, that would be great. Secretary, just taking up the question that was asked earlier in respect to how often properties are left for. I appreciate there is 28 days once you receive a property in a condition that you can pass it on, but do you collect data in respect to how long a property remains once somebody has vacated the dwelling?

**Danny O'KELLY:** We do, but depending on what we are doing with the property, as there are number of things that can happen. There could be a –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Where you are going to relet or repurpose a property – that is, you do not have to rebuild it or refurbish it; it is simply a matter of sprucing it up, for the lack of a better expression. Do you track how long that takes?

**Danny O'KELLY:** If we are doing a refurb to get a tenant back in, then yes – refurbishing to get a tenant back in, then yes. That is the measure effectively.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** What is the target period there?

**Danny O'KELLY:** The target period – it is 28 days to try and get the property back online.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** No, that is once it is ready to go, right? I am trying to understand. Take me a step back. As soon as a tenant or an occupier vacates that property, how long does it take to get it ready?

**Danny O'KELLY:** If there are not significant work that needs to be done, we are working on 28 days. Once we know the property is cleared, there is nothing left behind, there are no issues in terms of ending the previous lease, the clock starts ticking. As soon as we know we can relet that property, if there is some work that we need to do, we will try and do that in the 28 days. We are going as quickly as we can to get that property back online. I am not sure whether I am following your line of questioning. Obviously we have to inspect to see whether or not there are things that need to be done, but effectively what we work really hard to do is get the property – if it is one we are keeping and we want to house someone in, we are trying to do it as quickly as we can, so within 28 days we want to see a tenant back in a vacant property.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** I appreciate that. Thank you. Secretary, again, in terms of future projections, have you provided the minister with any advice in respect of obviously the interest rate increases recently but also the minister has detailed for us how obviously the list keeps growing, so surely you are already doing that work and just looking forward beyond the big build, I would guess, to project the needs in the future for the minister?

**Peta McCAMMON:** So is your question whether we have projected –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Have provided advice.

**Peta McCAMMON:** In terms of the interest rate impact?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** No, in terms of future projections given the current environment.

**Peta McCAMMON:** No, not that I am aware of in my recent time as the Secretary.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Okay. And you are not doing any modelling work? Minister, I am happy for you to take the question, because this is an obvious thing, right? You are sitting there as minister and you are getting thousands and thousands of more applications. At some point you look at the money. You have only got so much money and you have got a huge demand backing up.

**Colin BROOKS:** I think the issue at the moment, Mr McGowan, is that we are investing \$5.3 billion – it is the biggest investment in the state’s history in social and affordable housing – and we are still seeing more people coming onto the wait list because of the pressures in the broader economy. At this point in time our priority is getting as much of that social housing on the ground as quickly as possible for people who need it and making the case to our friends in Canberra for more funding support as well so we can try and do more. One of the advantages of having a pipeline of projects through effectively the middle of the Big Housing Build is that we have got the ability to scale that up if we get that funding from Canberra.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you, Minister. A further question, Minister. The Victorian government indicated in budget paper 3, page 216, that in 2022–23 applicants on the waiting list should obtain housing within 10.5 months. The data shows that for the most vulnerable – that is, the 67,120 families on the waiting list; that is the applications on the Victorian housing register, Homes Victoria – the wait time has now increased to 20.2 months for a home. What strategies are you now adopting to decrease the waiting times to an acceptable level?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. Again, I think you are talking about page 192. Is it 192?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** 192, correct; budget paper 3.

**Colin BROOKS:** Sorry, 191. There is no doubt that that measure, in terms of the wait time for – if I have heard your question correctly – those people who are on the priority wait list who have experienced family violence is moving in the wrong direction, absolutely. It is, as you say, over 20 months now. Just to be clear, that is the measurement that measures the wait time of people as they are allocated, so it is not measuring the average wait time of people who are currently on the list. That is not an excuse or a deflection from the issue; it is just I suppose an explanation for the committee that it measures one thing that is probably not immediately apparent. Certainly, it was not to me when I looked at the measure a while ago. But we need to do much better there.

Part of that answer – a large part in effect – is delivering more housing. Whether we are talking about youth housing, providing more accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness or exits out of the family violence system, so people who are exiting refuges or crisis accommodation, all of these areas, whether it is about providing options for people who have been impacted by emergencies like floods, the answer to all of this is having more social housing stock to provide those exits for people, to provide safe and secure housing.

So the answer to your question in that measure is that, yes, it is heading in the wrong direction, because we are getting more people coming onto the list. Last year we allocated more homes to people in that category than we had done for at least the last couple of years. I think we are on track to do even better this year, but the answer to the question is more social housing so we can exit people into those properties.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Can you tell me how many received the homes last year? I will take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McGowan. Your time has expired. We will go over to Mr Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, officials, for your time this afternoon. Minister, if I could take you to budget paper 4, page 129, which outlines the ‘Homes Victoria Ground Lease Model Project 2’, are you able to expand on this program and how it is benefiting Victorians?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes. Thanks, Mr Hilakari. This is a relatively innovative model here in Victoria. There is a ground lease 1 if you like, a first project that is underway, but your question I think was around ground lease 2, which is the second of those packages. That is being delivered at sites at South Yarra, Prahran, Port Melbourne and Hampton East. The model itself is based on the build-to-rent framework. It is in partnership with community housing organisations and a consortium connected to the community housing sector. It means in practice that these sorts of sites will become home to more housing options for more people who want to call those particular suburbs home, and it will just go to the point that we were just talking about in terms of the need for more housing – more social housing but also more affordable housing and more market rentals as well to take the pressure off those people in those housing streams.

At the same time this project will be transforming 502 outdated public housing homes that are in extremely poor condition. The ground lease model 2 will deliver approximately 1400 social, affordable, specialist

disability and market rental homes that are welcoming and secure and which meet the modern design standards and accessibility standards that I mentioned before. Ground lease model 2 will also deliver more social housing, not less. It will include at least 650 new social housing homes with at least a 10 per cent uplift on each of the four sites. It is important to note that the current renters at those four sites – the people who have been living in those older public housing estates – will have the first right of return on their existing arrangements to a brand new home once the projects have been completed, and of course we will support those renters in their relocation process for the period of time that they are not at that particular location.

The project itself is a win in terms of having more social housing and more housing in general for market rent and also renovating and upgrading from old stock into brand new stock for people – more energy efficient, cheaper for people's bills, more accessible and providing a lot more opportunity. Undoubtedly it is the right policy direction. We need to provide more housing, as we have just been talking about, in terms of whether it be exits from family violence or from youth housing – more social housing and better quality social housing.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I thought I heard that there was almost a doubling of the housing that was going on in this part of the project. I am just questioning who owns the land under the ground lease model.

**Colin BROOKS:** As the name suggests, this is a ground lease approach, so the effective answer is the government retains ownership of the property. And the beauty of the ground lease model, as the name suggests, is that it is a lease. The consortium of the community housing organisations leases the land from the government for 40 years. At the end of the 40 years, after maintaining that, they hand the land back to the state of Victoria for us to utilise.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Fantastic. And Minister, the community housing management for social housing renters – what are the benefits of that?

**Colin BROOKS:** To add to what I have already mentioned in terms of the community housing providers that are doing a really good job at fostering mixed social tenures, back when the Big Housing Build was designed there was a very deliberate policy decision made to look at the ways in which we create communities and the ways we can do that by socially supporting people to build strong, resilient and integrated communities. The ground lease model allows us to create homes for different housing tenures, different people, and we are continuing to support Victoria's most vulnerable whilst also opening up affordable housing options for key workers who might be doing it tough in the private rental market. The ground lease model means we can support people to live close to work, close to schools and, most importantly, their social networks. Community housing providers in particular are really doing a good job of making sure that social connection is maintained.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** It is a 40-year lease, we will retain control. And we know that there are difficulties around housing in general. What are the sort of time lines that we are looking at for this second phase of the program?

**Colin BROOKS:** As I mentioned before, the ground lease model 1 project sites are in Flemington, Brighton and Prahran. That construction is well under way – people will be moving into those properties next year. These projects will be completed next year. When you visit, for example, the Horace Petty estate in Prahran and the old public housing towers there and you look across to the construction at Bangs Street just across the road, you see the quality of the build and that project going ahead and you can really see the importance of this new construction for that particular ground lease model.

In terms of ground lease model 2, there is actually a tender process that is underway at the moment – live at the moment – so there will be announcements about that soon. They will be published on the Homes Victoria website, but for obvious reasons I cannot give you much more indication at this point in time other than to say we are excited about being able to produce more social housing, more affordable housing and more market rentals as well for the people in those communities.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** So a bit more detail to come soon; I look forward to it. Minister, I might take you to budget paper 3, page 192, and the footnote under the performance measure 'Total number of Victorian Affordable Housing Program (VAHP) affordable housing dwellings'. That discussion and the implementation of the affordable housing rental scheme – what does that implementation mean in real terms?

**Colin BROOKS:** This is a really timely question. As you can see from the budget papers, we are setting a target for 630 affordable dwellings to be delivered in the next financial year, 2023–24, so the affordable housing rental scheme is part of that \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, delivering the 2400 affordable homes that I mentioned before that are part of the Big Housing Build. The first 34 homes in this scheme are in Kensington – there is one apartment building there in Kensington – and were listed for rent back in January 2023 and have now well and truly welcomed renters. I am not sure if that is your electorate, Ms Sandell? It is, yes? There are very happy customers in that development. The first tranche of a further 67 homes in Ashburton was listed in mid-April and the subsequent tranche listed in early May.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Minister, to interrupt you. We have got 7 minutes for Ms Sandell.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister. Now, when we come to the Big Housing Build, I think some of the detail is quite important. Isn't it true that actually what this project is doing is we are demolishing public housing, we are rebuilding it with private and social housing, which is very different, and therefore we are seeing a net loss of public housing properties of several thousand?

**Colin BROOKS:** Ms Sandell, as I have just indicated in a previous answer, across the whole Big Housing Build there will be a substantial increase in social housing.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Social, but there will be a substantial loss of public housing, that is correct?

**Colin BROOKS:** At the moment, with people desperate to find social housing and some of the issues that have been raised by members of the committee in terms of the need for social housing, I think that the key thing for people is to have safe, secure, modern housing, and that is what the Big Housing Build delivers.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Look, I appreciate that is the government's position, but there is a big difference between public housing, where the rent is capped at 25 per cent of your income and you have certain protections, and social housing, which does not have all those same protections. So isn't it true that we are actually seeing a net loss in public housing across the state?

**Colin BROOKS:** I would take issue with the comment that you have made. With community housing providers, when we engage with them through the Big Housing Build through the service agreements we have with them for providing management of some of the housing properties, we have service arrangements which stipulate the conditions. So those are almost the same as public housing arrangements. One of the key differences for community housing providers is that they are eligible for Commonwealth rent assistance, which enables them to provide services, where public housing renters, as you would know, are not eligible for Commonwealth rent assistance. So it opens up a funding stream for delivering services for our social housing.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I appreciate that, but it is a net loss in public housing. Essentially this model is a way for the government to avoid the cost of building and maintaining public housing. Isn't that correct?

**Colin BROOKS:** I would suggest that our budget papers show \$5.3 billion of government spending. It is not avoiding costs. We are deliberately investing in social housing more than we ever have before and more than any other government in this state has.

**Ellen SANDELL:** How much are developers making off these sites, though? How much are private developers making off these sites?

**Colin BROOKS:** Well, when we build new housing we engage builders.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Private developers are making a mint from this project, aren't they?

**Colin BROOKS:** I think when you look at any public housing, public housing is built by private builders as well. We do not have a building company that is owned by the state of Victoria.

**Ellen SANDELL:** But there is not that profit motive as there is with the Big Housing Build. There is not the same profit motive that developers have. If the state was building public housing, it would not have the same profit motive. Yes, you would be engaging builders, but you would not be essentially giving land to private developers to make a profit off.



**Colin BROOKS:** And as I have just mentioned, we are not giving land to private developers.

**Ellen SANDELL:** It is a long-term lease, which is very similar to privatisation, isn't it?

**Colin BROOKS:** No, I would not say it is. It remains in public hands.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Well, in terms of social housing going forward, my understanding is the government was preparing a 10-year strategy for social and affordable housing. It was due to be launched last year but then it was scrapped. Now we have a budget that does not have any funding for a new housing build post 2027. So does the government actually have a plan? We have got 67,000 families on the public housing waiting list, probably over 100,000 people. What happens after 2027?

**Colin BROOKS:** I heard one of your colleagues on the radio the other day saying there is no money in this budget for social housing for new direct construction. I would refer you to budget paper 4 where there is over \$800 million from Big Housing Build contingency funding for the Big Housing Build, so there is definitely direct investment in the development of social housing in this budget. As I indicated before, we are about halfway through the biggest expenditure on social and affordable housing in the state's history – \$5.3 billion. We are pushing out more social housing, more affordable housing, delivering more than 12,000 new social and affordable homes – the 8200 uplift that we talked about before.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I guess, what is the long-term plan post 2027?

**Colin BROOKS:** And I think, as you have heard, the Premier has indicated publicly that we are working on a housing strategy that will be delivered later this year. I am sure you will be interested to hear what is planned as part of that strategy.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I will definitely be interested. In particular I am interested to know: will there actually be any money in the future housing strategies for public housing or will this government be continuing with supporting private and social housing? Is the government washing their hands of purely supporting public housing into the future?

**Colin BROOKS:** I will take that question to the task force for you.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. We are still waiting on the social housing regulation review, which was commissioned by the government as part of the Big Housing Build. I understand the final report was given to you last year – it has not been made public. When will that be made public?

**Colin BROOKS:** The social housing reg review in particular is an important piece of work, because we are seeing more of the social housing in Victoria managed by community housing providers, as you indicated before. So that social housing regulation review is an important piece of work. It is currently with government, and we are considering the recommendations in it. We will advise people in due course when we land on a position on that one.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Do you know what the average wait time for public housing applications and transfer applications is with the department?

**Colin BROOKS:** I will defer to one of my colleagues.

**Peta McCAMMON:** We publish some wait time data in BP 3, which we had some commentary about before. I will just have to check with my colleague whether in terms of transfer data –

**Danny O'KELLY:** We do not differentiate in terms of transfer.

**Colin BROOKS:** Are you just after the general statewide figure for transfer wait times?

**Ellen SANDELL:** Yes, in particular for transfer applications. In my electorate we see a large number of transfer applications when people particularly have a growing family or they have some other need to move out of, say, a small two-bedroom apartment into more of a family home, and we are seeing huge blowouts in those.

**Colin BROOKS:** Can we take that away and see if we can provide that figure to you? Thank you.

**Ellen SANDELL:** That would be appreciated. Thank you. No further questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Sandell. I will now go to Mr Hamer for the last session of 7 minutes.

**Paul HAMER:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, officials. If I could just continue where Mr Hilakari left off on the affordable housing rental scheme, I was wondering if you could perhaps expand on the program, particularly in terms of eligibility of applicants and maybe a description of the cohorts of people who were applying for that scheme.

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes, thanks very much, Mr Hamer. We talked about the targets before, the 630 affordable homes in the budget, as part of the previous answer, the 34 affordable homes that have been delivered as part of the Kensington development and further affordable housing that is coming on line. In terms of the eligibility, which I think was a key part of your question there, it is aimed at low to moderate income earners. We use the limits that are set out in the *Planning and Environment Act*, so they are set out in the statute. In real terms, just to give you an indication of the dollar figures at the moment and what that means for people, to access the affordable housing rental scheme in the Melbourne metro area, it is for singles earning up to \$64,000 and families earning up to \$134,000. These are rounded-off figures. And in regional Victoria, singles earning up to \$46,000 and families earning up to \$98,000 are eligible. Renters are also protected by a cap, so 30 per cent of median income for either metro or regional, meaning that affordable renters will not ever pay, in today's dollars, more than \$305 a week for a one-bedroom in Melbourne, as an example, or \$225 a week in a regional Victorian location. As I said, we have got that program underway now, and Kensington was the first. There is affordable housing not just delivered now as standalone, but there are many projects which are underway which have a mixture of affordable and social, which will mean we are able to add to that stock pretty rapidly.

**Paul HAMER:** Thanks, Minister. Just a follow-up from that, how is the application process managed, and what sort of cohort of people are you finding that are applying to that? Is it mainly singles or families, or a diversity of cultures?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes, I think there has been a lot of interest in the program given the current state of the rental market. There have been quite a lot of people interested in this affordable housing scheme. I should point out, if I did not mention it before, that once people's eligibility is checked and verified, the allocation process for the affordable housing rental scheme is via a ballot process so that there is the removal of those sorts of biases that might sometimes come into play in the private rental market. It also adds to a more fair and transparent process and gives everybody a real confidence, who is applying, that they have an equal shot at getting one of these affordable housing rental homes. As I mentioned, just as an example, the 34 that have been delivered in Kensington went out in January 2023. Several hundred applications were received for those 34 homes – so as I say, significant demand. I think you will be pleased to hear that the successful renters were from a range of backgrounds, including younger people, working students, some older people, single parents – a real mixture of people in that particular building – and of real diversity in occupation as well: education, sport, hospitality, arts. One of the key things with this scheme of course is providing options for people who are on those low incomes but are in key worker roles and making sure that – so for example, in the Kensington project, – they are close to some hospitals and schools in that area that need those key workers.

In fact I will just point to an article in today's *Guardian*, an excellent article by Benita Kolovos, who has written up a story on two of the renters who were in that particular affordable housing rental project. Miranda, it says, is a player in the women's A-League, which is really great, but she and her partner, who I think is an apprentice, were struggling with their existing rental arrangements. She said when she got the call that they had been selected for one of these affordable housing rental homes that it was a massive relief, so a really good story there. The other person that is featured in this story is a university student, Julia, who again with her partner was in a private rental over in Camberwell. The rent went up \$300 a month, despite a broken dishwasher and a whole range of problems, and she said that when she was accepted into this affordable housing rental scheme she cried tears of relief. So the investment we are making in that affordable housing rental scheme is one that is really having an impact on people's lives, and hopefully it also demonstrates to the broader private sector that there is a market for affordable development so that we are able to direct the private sector to examples of successful development where we have got people living in those particular developments.

**Paul HAMER:** Thank you, Minister. You mentioned that the first set of accommodation was in Kensington. I think you mentioned Ashburton as well. Is it planned for the program to be rolled out regionally as well? Does the government have plans for regional investment?

**Colin BROOKS:** Yes, it is, Mr Hamer. There are more projects, as I mentioned, in the pipeline but, yes, also regionally. We recognise that rental access is also a particular issue in regional areas. Access and affordability are a challenge right across the state, not just here in metropolitan Melbourne, so we are delivering new homes and delivering the scheme in the regions too. As an example, Delacombe in Ballarat will be home to 70 affordable rental scheme homes as part of the Leawarra neighbourhood redevelopment. There will also be, as an example, affordable rentals in Virginia Hill in Bendigo, and I will be able to give you some more details on other projects in the very near future. Again the value of this scheme in terms of regional Victoria as well is potentially where there is lack of accommodation for key workers, which is obviously quite a significant issue in regional communities, where there might be –

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Minister, to cut you off. That brings us to the end of this session for questions.

Minister and department officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will now follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is now going to take a very short break before beginning its consideration of the portfolio of multicultural affairs.

I declare this hearing now adjourned.

**Witnesses withdrew.**