

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**  
**Inquiry into the 2021-22 Budget Estimates**  
**29 June 2021**

**PORTFOLIO: HOUSING**

**Witnesses:**

- Mr Richard Wynne, MP
- Ms Sandy Pitcher
- Mr Ben Rimmer
- Ms Sherri Bruinhout
- Ms Nicola Quin
- Mr Andrew Minack
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**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**QUESTION 1**

**Why did the Harris Capital proposal not get up?**

**Mr Riordan:** So can you tell me why, for example, the Harris Capital proposal that was given to you—I believe there was a successful stage 1 project of about 57 homes in Footscray and they came to you with offers to buy more land and build more houses purely out of a philanthropic desire to help solve the problem.

**Mr Wynne:** Sure.

**Mr Riordan:** **Why would a project like that not get up and why would they be forced to walk away from dealing with this state government when they have got multimillions of dollars, land—everything that you seem to be asking for—and yet they cannot get a deal with you?**

**Mr Wynne:** Well, obviously I do not assess the projects. I mean, it would be quite improper for me to be making those sorts of assessments.

**Mr Riordan:** At face value does it seem strange?

**Mr Wynne:** Well, they have to be professionally assessed. I am unaware of that particular project. I am not sure whether one of my colleagues here can provide any further advice. If we cannot, I would be happy to take that on notice and take further advice about it. Obviously it is entirely appropriate that these applications are dealt with in an independent way and not assessed by me.

**Mr Riordan:** Mr Rimmer, you look like you can comment. If someone comes to you and says, 'We want to build one house a day for 365 days', like, that is a pretty generous commitment.

**Mr Rimmer:** Sure.

**Mr Riordan:** Why wouldn't that be taken up?

**Mr Rimmer:** So first of all, in relation to Harris specifically, I would need to check our records for where that proposal is up to. But we have to go through proper procurement and probity processes and things like that—

**Mr Riordan:** I understand that, yes. But this is a company that tells me they had built you 57 homes, they have got fantastic tenants, it is very successful, and yet they have thrown their hands in the air and walked

away with disgust because they just cannot get through your department, and that is from what I can gather \$10 million to \$15 million going elsewhere.

Mr RIMMER: Well, that is disappointing. We will have a look into it and come back to the committee.

***BE Hearing Transcript, p. 2-3***

**Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr Riordan**

**RESPONSE**

**Answer:**

- In May 2020 Harris Capital provided a proposal to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) for the development of social housing. The proposal included 43 modular temporary homes developed on unspecified surplus State Government owned land, and the purchase and refurbishment of 18 existing social housing dwellings in Pakenham.
- The proposal was developed following discussions across Government, including with the Department of Treasury and Finance and DHHS. The proposal included Harris Capital part funding the cost of the modular units, with the Victorian Government providing a grant to fund the balance of the project.
- At the request of DHHS, Land Use Victoria assessed a range of surplus Victorian Government owned sites for the modular housing proposal and several sites were considered.
- Only one site was deemed suitable by Harris Capital but it could not accommodate the required amount of transportable homes. The purchase of the Pakenham site was also unsuccessful.
- Harris Capital was then encouraged by DHHS to partner with a community housing agency and apply for the \$500 million social housing build and upgrade program, as part of State Government's Building Works initiative. Harris Capital did not apply for funding under this program.

**QUESTION 2**

**Regarding the recently announced South Yarra estate – 330 homes; where is it going to be actually built and how big is the building going to be?**

**Mr Hibbins:** You made an announcement recently regarding the South Yarra estate—330 homes.

**Mr Hibbins: Where is it going to be actually built? You know more detail. Where is it going to actually be built, how big is the building going to be?**

**The Chair:** I am sorry, Mr Hibbins. Your time has expired.

**Mr Riordan:** I am sure the Labor Party will cede some of their time so he can answer. Members interjecting.

**The Chair:** Mr O'Brien has the call. Mr O'Brien can decide whether he would like to cede time. **Mr HIBBINS:** I thought I was congratulating the government and drawing some attention to it.

**Mr Wynne:** No, no, no, you were. No. Look, I was delighted to see your tweet and—

**Mr D O'Brien:** I do not cede time, Minister, but I am happy if you will agree to take Mr Hibbins's question on notice—if you could say yes or no, for the Hansard record.

**Mr Wynne:** All right. I will take it on notice.

*BE Hearing Transcript, p. 8*

**Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr Hibbins**

**RESPONSE****Answer:**

- The Victorian Government announced in June 2021 that 330 new social housing homes will be built in South Yarra. The new homes will house Victorians waiting for social housing on the Victorian Housing Register and create jobs to strengthen the Victorian economy
- Planning is underway and the new homes will be delivered as part of the overall development plan to reinvigorate and activate these sites in South Yarra in a manner suitable for one of the most valuable land holdings of the State. The exact locations, size and nature of the buildings to be determined in this process through design development and cost considerations under a competitive procurement process and consultation with the community, as is the case at the Bangs St site, which is currently moving into construction.
- The project teams are being mobilized and plans are being progressed for development work to commence.

**QUESTION 3****What is being done to address people living rough in the CBD of Melbourne?**

**Mr D O'Brien:** Can I sneak in a quick one, Minister? This time last year we were all celebrating the fact that there were basically no **people living rough in the CBD of Melbourne**. There clearly are a lot back out there again. **What is being done about that?** We thought we had not solved it but addressed it at least to a point.

**Mr Wynne:** Well, I will come back to answer that question, because I do have quite a detailed answer I want to give you in relation to that because I know you have a longstanding interest in that.

**Mr D O'Brien:** Sure. Perhaps one of the government members will—

**Mr Wynne:** But I definitely want to come back to that, and my colleague Ms Bruinhout will also be able to assist us. She has been managing that program for us.

**Mr D O'Brien:** Thank you

*BE Hearing Transcript, p. 9*

**Name of Committee member asking question: Mr O'Brien**

**RESPONSE****Answer:**

- The Victorian Government is responding to rough sleeping and homelessness in the Melbourne CBD and across Victoria through the Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan, the From Homelessness to a Home initiative and other targeted investments.
- Addressing rough sleeping often requires active engagement with people and flexible support to respond to the complex trauma people have experienced and involves more than a housing response.
- The Victorian Government continues to support the City of Melbourne and other local councils to deliver projects that reduce the incidence and severity of rough sleeping and homelessness.
- Through Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan people sleeping rough in the CBD as well as in rural and regional Victoria are supported to access the services they need through assertive outreach and supportive housing teams.
- Each year, assertive outreach teams assist over 1,000 people to access housing and/or health services and supportive housing teams provide flexible support for up to 800 people, including assisting people to establish or maintain housing.

**Melbourne CBD Rough Sleeping Service Coordination Project**

- Homes Victoria is continuing its' work addressing rough sleeping in the Melbourne CBD with the City of Melbourne through the jointly funded Melbourne CBD Service Coordination Project, established to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable people sleeping rough in Melbourne's CBD.
- This is achieved by bringing together specialist homelessness services, alcohol and other drug services, mental health and health services to coordinate housing and health responses for people sleeping rough.

**From Homelessness to a Home program**

- On 28 July 2020, the Victorian Government announced the \$150 million From Homelessness to a Home (H2H) initiative, which provides housing and support packages for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping who were placed in emergency hotel accommodation due to COVID-19.
- A further \$16.9 million in the 2021-22 Victorian Budget ensures up to 1,845 housing and support packages are available to assist people in hotels to move into safe and secure longer-term housing, with a flexible support package provided for up to 24 months.

- This is achieving many life-changing outcomes already, with people who have experienced long-term homelessness moved to safe and secure long-term housing.

### **COVID-19 specific responses**

- Since March 2020, the Victorian Government has invested over \$46 million to help people experiencing homelessness keep safe from the transmission of COVID-19. This has included:
  - \$8.8 million for the COVID Isolation and Recovery facilities for people experiencing homelessness
  - \$20 million for additional Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) and private rental brokerage to keep people in safe accommodation and provide additional specialist support workers, including drug and alcohol support.
  - \$7.2 million for more specialist homelessness services through the Working for Victoria Fund.
  - \$10.2 million for the Homelessness Hotel Emergency Response for security and health supports for people experiencing homelessness accommodated in hotels.

### **2021-21 Victorian State Budget homelessness commitments**

- The 2021-22 Victorian Budget builds on Government's commitments to housing and homelessness services and provides \$220 million to continue successful programs and tackle rough sleeping by creating pathways to housing and improving people's access to, and participation in, treatment for primary health, mental health and drug and alcohol support services.
- Targeted interventions tackling rough sleeping across Victoria include:
  - \$46.9 million over four years to continue the Rough Sleeping Action Plan, delivering assertive outreach and supportive housing teams to rough sleepers
  - \$15.3 million over three years to continue Journey to Social Inclusion to provide intensive wrap-around support and head-leased properties
  - \$8.4 million over two years for on-site delivery of therapeutic health and addiction services at three congregate crisis accommodation facilities in Inner Melbourne
  - \$10.9 million to establish a linked dataset to integrate data from departmental and agency systems, with a focus on rough sleeping.
  - \$5.5 million over two years for the enhanced housing pathways program for people exiting prison.
- Additional homelessness initiatives in the 2021-22 Victorian Budget include:
  - \$110.2 million over four years for the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP), including PRAP plus and the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program
  - \$7.4 million over four years for the Kangan Education First Youth Foyer.
  - \$11.2 million over four years for accommodation responses for young people leaving care and youth justice settings.
  - \$4.1 million over two years for the H3 Alliance, to prevent and resolve homelessness in the rapidly expanding Wyndham growth corridor.
  - \$25.8 million over five years for assist people experiencing homelessness through a new Partnership Addressing Disadvantage initiative.

**QUESTION 4**

**4a: In respect of community consultative committees – was the decision on who chairs those committees a departmental decision?**

**4b: Can you provide a list of who the chairs are for the committees?**

**Mr Newbury:** How many of the redevelopment projects have community committees set up—which are, from the department’s website, an important way for local community members to be involved and engaged in the process?

**Mr Rimmer:** Thank you, Mr Newbury. I believe most if not all of the large projects do have a community consultative committee, and I believe that Brighton has one.

**Mr Newbury:** So you are saying all of them in fact do, and all of them have chairs—was the decision on who chairs those committees a departmental decision?

**Mr Rimmer:** I cannot recall that, Mr Newbury—that was made before I was in the role—but I do not know whether one of my colleagues can help me with that. I do not think we have that information right here.

**Mr Newbury:** Okay. Do you mind taking that on notice?

**Mr Rimmer:** Sure.

**Mr Newbury:** And also providing perhaps a list of who are the chairs of the committees?

*BE Hearing Transcript, p. 11-12*

**Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr Newbury**

**RESPONSE****Answer:**

- When the need arises for a new community consultative committee or community reference group, Homes Victoria seeks out interested people with leadership experience that have connections to the community in which the housing will be built to nominate as chair. A strong track record in one or more aspects of community building such as health and wellbeing, recreation, education or housing are also desirable.
- Once the nominated chair has accepted the role, they are formally welcomed by the CEO of Homes Victoria and the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Richard Wynne MP.
- Below is a list of current chairs of existing consultative committees:

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Committee</b>
Carlo Carli	Brunswick West
Nina Taylor MP	Brighton
Juliana Addison MP	Delacombe
Danny Pearson MP	Flemington
John Kennedy MP	Hawthorn
Anthony Carbines MP	Heidelberg West
Kat Theophanous MP	Northcote
Sheena Watt MP	North Melbourne
Cheryl Bagatol and Ken Lay (Co-Chairs)	North Richmond Precinct
Nina Taylor MP and Judith Klepner (Co-Chairs)	Prahran
Kat Theophanous MP	Preston