



## Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

### **Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022-2023** **ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

---

Asked by Mr Peter Cain MLA on 17 November 2023: Mr Peter Muir ACT Official Visitors, took on notice the following question(s):

Reference: Hansard [uncorrected] proof transcript 17 November 2023 [page no 13-14]

In relation to: housing quality

**THE CHAIR:** I thought I had a housing-related question, but I will make it a substantive. Page 22 of your report details issues of housing quality, as we have just touched on. They have seen several properties which are of poor standard and require significant maintenance. Repairs and maintenance requests are slow to be actioned by the organisations responsible for the property. That is from page 22. Can you tell us about some of the properties you have seen that led to putting housing quality as one of the systemic issues?

**Mr Muir:** I will take that on notice to the Homelessness Official Visitor and give you an answer on that.

**THE CHAIR:** In cases where you have advocated for residents in these sorts of properties, what sort of response have you seen from the government?

**Mr Muir:** We will take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have any insights as to why the response times from organisations like Housing ACT can be so slow?

**Mr Muir:** We will take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Last one: have you seen any examples of the government downplaying or not taking seriously the health and safety concerns of tenants living in their properties?

**Mr Muir:** We will take that on notice.

**ACT Official Visitors:** The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

**Question 1 – The properties we have seen identifying housing quality as a systemic issue**

Of highest concern to OVDS are cases where quality and maintenance issues impact on the safety of residents and staff. Unaddressed maintenance issues are the primary context for OVDS concerns about quality.

OVDS have seen:

- properties where partial repairs occur, either in the first instance or in response to OVDS escalation, with residual issues (sometimes substantial) remaining unaddressed.
- distinctions drawn between what is classed as modification as opposed to maintenance, which then impacts on where the cost falls. In some cases, this has resulted in delays to repairs, at times resulting in ongoing risks to the health and safety of both residents and staff.
- unaddressed maintenance issues that may lead to structural problems or additional damage to the property (such as wet areas leaking water into other parts of the house, or roof leaks), potentially impact on emergency egress (such as damaged doors), may present a fire risk (such as an oven having caused singe marks when it was in operation), or create individual risks to residents (such as inadequate lighting in a dim kitchen, where a resident was at risk of injury when preparing food at the only accessible benchtop).

OVDS have sighted written attempts to address and escalate issues and have noted ongoing inaction for matters that had been brought to the attention of the responsible parties.

**Question 2- The sort of response we have seen from the government.**

Responses have been variable. On some occasions OVDS have received fulsome background or explanation on an issue and seen problems rectified. On other occasions, this has not been the case. Since the end of the reporting period, new escalation pathways have been put in place whereby OVDS liaise directly with a nominated senior Housing ACT official. Results have been mixed, and OVDS are hopeful that this process will mature in the near future.

**Question 3 – Insights about slow responses from organisations like Housing ACT**

OVDS have the impression that the speed and adequacy of responses to maintenance issues is contributed to by the involvement of multiple parties. Housing ACT may have an ultimate interest and responsibility, but a service provider may raise an issue with the relevant community housing provider such as Havelock Housing who may be relied upon at the front line. A contracted maintenance entity then completes the relevant work. Areas of responsibility, lines of communication, and appropriate pathways for escalation are often unclear to service providers or residents who are reliant on those services. In a similar vein, the opacity of systems and processes mean that service providers, who might otherwise be the backstop to issues falling between the cracks, have no visibility to whether an issue is being properly prioritised, is soon to be acted on, or has been inadvertently and incorrectly finalised.

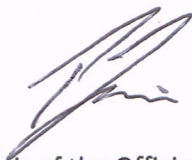
**Question 4 – Experience of the government downplaying health and safety concerns of tenants**

OVDS do not have the impression that the particular vulnerabilities of residents in disability visitable places are being taken into account (adequately, or perhaps at all in a practical sense). What may be a suitable level of priority for one person, may be wholly inadequate for another.

OVDS have not had any experience of concerns being explicitly downplayed, other than by inference when issues of concern are not fixed in a timely manner.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Signature:



Date: 28 November 2023

By Mr Peter Muir, Chair of the Official Visitors Board, ACT Official Visitors