



Minister for Housing and Public Works

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Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petition 1942-12 and e-petition 1917-12 relating to current housing reforms and their impact on public housing tenants.

The Queensland Government's goal is to ensure the most effective use of the social housing system to provide housing assistance to as many people in need as possible, for the duration of their need.

In June 2012, I sent a letter to all public housing tenants explaining the crisis with the current public housing system and seeking their input on proposed reforms to address the current levels of under-occupancy. The petitions make reference to that letter, which contained three possible responses to addressing under-occupancy. These included tenants transferring to smaller properties; paying more rent; and/or sharing their current property.

Feedback indicates that downsizing is the most popular option, followed by paying more rent to remain in an under-occupied property. The third option, relating to sharing arrangements, was not popular with respondents and will only be considered if directly requested by a tenant.

Reviews of under-occupied households are occurring gradually and will be conducted with the utmost compassion and sensitivity. Housing service centres will work with tenants to determine their housing requirements with each household's individual circumstances being taken into consideration. This includes the potential impacts on an individual's health and wellbeing. Where ongoing reviews indicate that under occupancy is occurring, Housing Service Centres will continue to work with tenants to explore their options.

It is the intention of the Queensland Government to offer tenants more appropriate housing and to free up larger properties to assist those applicants eligible for long-term social housing. After having been made a reasonable offer of an alternative smaller dwelling, some tenants may elect to stay in their current dwelling and pay a modest rent increase. Any additional rental income will be allocated to the construction of new public housing.

As indicated in my June letter, I implemented a rent amnesty for households with an undeclared occupant. The amnesty allowed tenants to declare previously undeclared occupants without having the rent backdated to when they first moved into the public housing property. Public housing tenants took advantage of this amnesty with the

department receiving information from over 2300 households. The appropriate rent for these properties can now be collected.

Other areas for public housing reform include seeking cost savings in administrative and maintenance expenses. The reforms will also focus on exploring opportunities to partner with the private sector and non-government housing providers to revitalise the social housing portfolio.

An excellent example of partnership with the non-government housing sector is the Churches of Christ Care development at Mitchelton. A total of 22 applicants from the Housing Register will move into this housing along with another three tenants who have chosen to transfer from existing public housing properties. An additional 24 units—currently under construction—will be allocated to existing public housing tenants who of their own volition choose to downsize to smaller dwellings later in the year. This type of partnership demonstrates excellent outcomes for tenants living in public housing while moving towards a more sustainable use of public housing stock.

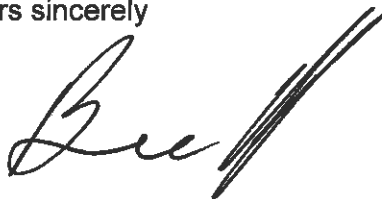
Another exciting project, aimed particularly at reducing homelessness, is Brisbane Common Ground at South Brisbane. Brisbane Common Ground will provide affordable housing for 146 tenants using a supportive housing model. Tenants will have access to onsite services to help them sustain their tenancies and address the issues that may have contributed to their homelessness. Both the Australian and Queensland Governments contributed to this project, as well as key partners including Grocon, Common Ground Queensland Ltd and the not-for-profit organisation, Micah Projects Inc.

With the demand for social housing growing faster than the State Government's capacity to assist, and costs to maintain social housing increasing from year to year, some tough decisions have to be made about how available resources can be used to best effect. The implementation of the housing reforms outlined above are aimed at addressing the growing pressure on Queensland's social housing system and will help to house vulnerable and homeless Queenslanders.

In addition, the Queensland Government is actively working towards improving the cost of living for Queenslanders through a range of initiatives. So far, the government has focused on reducing the cost of commuting and freezing the domestic electricity tariff and car registration costs. Work has also started to amalgamate South East Queensland bulk water entities to save on water bills and the government has re-introduced the principal place of residence stamp duty concession to save up to \$7000 when buying the family home.

I trust this information addresses your enquiry. If I can be of assistance with other matters within my portfolio, please do not hesitate to contact my office on telephone 07 3237 1832.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce', with several long, sweeping strokes extending to the right.

Dr Bruce Flegg MP
Minister for Housing and Public Works