

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Morwell—Tuesday, 3 December 2019

MEMBERS

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Ms Georgie Crozier

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Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESSES

Mr Chris Wightman, Coordinator, Social and Community Planning, and

Ms Nina Barry-Macaulay, Senior Advocacy Officer, Bass Coast Shire Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues public hearing. I would also like to begin by acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the land which we are meeting on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and family. I particularly welcome any elders of the community who are here today and also anyone in the audience, gallery—thank you, Rebecca. This is the Legal and Social Issues Committee, and this is the Inquiry into homelessness.

Just to explain a couple of legal positions about this, we are obviously recording via Hansard. You will be sent a transcript. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, as provided by our *Constitution Act* and our Legislative Council standing orders. This means that any information you give today is protected by law; however, any comments repeated outside here may not be protected, and any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the Committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. So you will get a copy of the transcript in a few days, and please feel free to correct anything that is not right on it. Ultimately that transcript will go up onto the Committee's website and the information will form part of our report.

Chris and Nina, if you would like to make some opening remarks, and we will open it up to questions.

Mr WIGHTMAN: Thank you. Good morning to all the Committee Members. On behalf of Bass Coast Shire Council, we would like to thank you all for the opportunity to be here today and to present to the Inquiry into homelessness. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pass on my respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community members.

Bass Coast Shire Council is certainly acutely aware of issues of homelessness that impact on our community in Bass Coast. It has really been brought to light recently with the closure of—and I will cover this a little bit later in the submission—a caravan park and a motel that was used as crisis accommodation for our community. In fact it was the only accommodation available and will imminently close. That really has brought to light and sharpened the focus I think for council in understanding its own role in the space of homelessness and looking at what the issues are, undertaking some analysis and really trying to respond to some community needs within Bass Coast.

The purpose of today's presentation—and just circulated I think is a copy of a draft submission. So council will be considering this submission as part of its ordinary council meeting in December. So please note that obviously before it has been to council, it is draft. It has not been considered fully by our council representatives and may change as a result in terms of its content or format. I will start just by saying that, and predominantly today I will be talking to this submission that you have just received in draft form.

Kicking off with some background from a Bass Coast perspective, we are a municipality that is experiencing significant growth at the moment. Understand that we are actually the second fastest growing regional municipality in Victoria, not only in terms of people moving to the area but also in visitor numbers, which are increasing significantly and which is having an impact on the housing market as well.

It is positive news for council. We welcome the level of interest and investment, people coming to live, work and recreate in Bass Coast shire. It has many wonderful values that really engender that opportunity, but it is—and council is acutely aware of the fact—creating issues from a housing perspective within our community at the moment. What I will talk to you about today essentially follows the terms of reference that were set out in relation to this Inquiry: looking at the changing scale and nature of homelessness, particularly in Bass Coast; the social, economic and policy factors impacting on homelessness; and also, at a local level, policies and practices that council is responding to in relation to homelessness, and that is where Nina will be addressing the Committee.

In terms of the first point of the terms of reference, the changing scale and nature of homelessness in Bass Coast, as I have mentioned we are a municipality that is growing rapidly in population. We are a population of

about 35 000 people at the moment, projected to increase to over 46 000 by the year 2036. There are some interesting dynamics, though, I think, when you start to dig into the population statistics and housing opportunities within Bass Coast, and probably one of the notable ones is in relation to our non-resident ratepayers population. We have got one of the highest percentages of non-resident rate-paying population in Victoria, with around 55 per cent as at the 2016 census. Effectively what this means is that a large proportion of our housing stock is actually not occupied on a permanent basis; it is a seasonal occupation for holiday home purposes, which presents some challenges for the community.

We have just undertaken a very simple analysis of a number of separate dwellings on permanent occupancy rates and average household size compared to our population. What that is showing is that whilst we statistically have sufficient housing stock to address our population needs now and moving into the future, when you take out the non-resident ratepayer population with housing that is not permanently occupied, it does identify that we are moving into a space where we do have a deficiency in our housing stock, which is impacting on our community. We acknowledge that is a very basic assessment and there are a number of complex and interrelating factors in relation to population dynamics and the housing market, but it does highlight, I think, at a very high level that we need to be looking at this very carefully as a municipality.

There are a range of other indicators that lead to people either experiencing or at risk of homelessness within Bass Coast. Looking at poverty indicators through SEIFA, we have a high SEIFA index number for Bass Coast, and that is reinforced through the Victorian Council of Social Service's—the VCOSS—overall rates of poverty, which identify that 17 per cent of the Bass Coast community is actually living in poverty, or about 4000 people within the Bass Coast community. Housing affordability—as you would expect with an increasing population, it is having an impact on affordability of housing, particularly in the private rental sector. We undertook a point-in-time analysis on realestate.com of rental properties that were available across the Bass Coast shire in November 2019. The amount of properties available was relatively low at 68, and when you average out the rental value per week at approximately \$350 per week, it really is indicating that that is putting quite a lot of stress on our community in terms of affordability of private rental accommodation. That is backed up as well by housing stress indicators for Bass Coast, which show that in some pockets of our community, particularly Wonthaggi, around Cowes and the waterline communities—so Grantville and places like that—there are in excess of 20 per cent of our households who are living in housing stress at the moment.

I touched right at the start of the presentation this morning on the Miners Rest Caravan Park and associated Capital motel. As I mentioned, these two facilities are about to close imminently. Just to give you a little potted history of what has been happening, in 2017 a planning permit was issued across these sites for future redevelopment. The permit implementation initially was slow. The initial plan was for a service station and associated retail uses. I think it is fair to say it was probably more of a speculative development proposal. However, earlier this year, in September 2019, we became aware of an interest from Bunnings Warehouse, who have now acquired both the Capital motel and the Miners Rest sites. They are in two different parcels of land but now under the same ownership. That purchase and the intent to submit planning applications and so on has accelerated the need for and importance of a response. As of September–October time there were 60 tenants who were currently residing within those two facilities. So there has been a multi-agency working group that has been established, which includes council, the department, Health and Human Services, SalvoCare as the lead service provider in the Bass Coast area, Quantum Support Services and other agencies as required. So Victoria Police, for example, have been involved there as well as other service providers.

There are 60 tenants, as I mentioned, who are impacted by this who now have great uncertainty in relation to their future housing. There are some longer term tenants who are present within the caravan park in particular. We are working very closely with Bunnings and with the agencies, as I have mentioned, to ensure that those tenants are fully aware of their rights and also are being provided with appropriate support services. So just this week there was a barbecue lunch held for the tenants there to gain more information about the process. As I say, it is very collaborative. Bunnings have been exceptional, I think, in their sensitivity in handling this situation, in making sure that we can try and find appropriate accommodation.

I should hasten to add that probably if there is a silver lining to this situation, the accommodation that was available in both of those premises was terribly substandard. So what we are hopeful for from council's perspective in terms of representing the communities is to ensure that we can get better outcomes for the

community members who were tenanted in those premises for that period of time. So that work continues, and as I say, we will continue to liaise with our agency partners on that moving forward.

In terms of homelessness statistics, the 2016 census indicated there were 45 people who were experiencing homelessness in Bass Coast. Based on the indicators that I have already discussed and also working closely with our agency partners, we feel as though that is probably a gross underestimate of the reality of the situation in Bass Coast, and that will only be exacerbated by the closure of the facilities at Miners Rest and Capital motel. These are in the draft submission, but I would just like to pull out a couple of statistics that really highlight our assumptions in this space. This is from SalvoCare—Salvation Army sent us their client database in Bass Coast, South Gippsland. Request for crisis accommodation from SalvoCare Eastern has increased by 47 per cent since 2016. SalvoCare have assisted 804 people in crisis with housing in the 2018–19 period. And as well, in conjunction with the people they have assisted, sadly they have had to turn away 769 people from the services that are being sought from SalvoCare. So that really, to us, highlights a very significant issue for our community.

It goes deeper than statistics alone, and something that we have done as a council recently is liaising with SalvoCare Eastern, most recently in relation to their Homelessness Week event, which was held in Wonthaggi. It was actually quite an emotional day really for many people, including people with lived experience, seeing some of the experiences and the circumstances in which people in Bass Coast are actually living at the moment. So we feel as though that is really important. Council also is working through its youth action plan with young people who may be at risk of homelessness. Again, earlier this year we held a workshop with young people and the service providers themselves, and it really does highlight the issues that people in Bass Coast are feeling at the moment. So we feel as though those experiential matters are very worthwhile to take into account also.

Moving on to social, economic and policy factors impacting homelessness, the causal factors that sit behind those indicators are obviously very complex and interrelated, which council is very aware of. The key factor that we see that is contributing towards issues of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness is in relation to supply—the supply of affordable housing, social housing and crisis accommodation. What we are finding in liaison with our agency partners is that people are struggling to find crisis accommodation. Once they have, they are moved into transition housing, but really based on some of the indicators I have already discussed there is really very limited opportunities in private rental in particular for people to go after that, so they are sort of cycling through the system of support that is being offered, which is a real challenge. Looking at a few of those causal factors, I have just highlighted some median property value indicators, that are taken again from realestate.com, from 2016 to 2018. Obviously some of our more popular tourist towns have increased—places like Inverloch, with significant property value increases of around \$160 000 over that two-year period. Even in some of our smaller and probably less tourist-influenced towns like Grantville, the property prices there have gone up \$135 000 in that same period. So it is a very significant price increase.

The lack of rentals I have already touched on, and the cost of those rentals is impacting. We are also finding it is very, very difficult, as I am sure you are aware, for people who do not have landlord references et cetera to gain access to the private rental market, which is a particular challenge.

The Airbnb effect—we are finding that a lot of our properties are actually being removed from the longer term rental market and put into that more lucrative, short-term holiday rental market, which is having an impact in terms of availability of properties, but also we consider that to be contributing to the overall increase in value of rental properties in Bass Coast.

A few of the other factors that council has some influence in relation to is land supply and the supply of appropriate residential land for development. As you would be aware, Bass Coast has some pristine and environmentally sensitive coastal locations. Most of our towns are actually in those coastal locations. That is creating an issue in terms of providing an appropriate increase in land supply for our increasing population. The State Government has also recently announced, and it is certainly welcomed by council, the Distinctive Areas and Landscape Program to Bass Coast, which will protect some of those great values and qualities that we see in Bass Coast but will provide additional challenges in relation to land supplying in some of our established townships.

Council is doing a lot of work and collaboratively has been working with the Metropolitan Planning Authority in Wonthaggi, which is our major regional town. A precinct structure plan has been identified and developed for approximately 4500 new homes. One of the issues we are facing in a regional context is the cost of development, so most notably drainage and road infrastructure costs mean that it is actually an expensive process for the development sector to be building homes, and we will touch on this further in relation to council's advocacy, because we are finding those costs are passing ultimately on to consumers in relation to increased prices, which is impacting on affordability.

Public transport is probably the last point that is really impacting on members of our community who do not have access to their own transport. Moving between townships for employment or education purposes is very difficult within Bass Coast and even more difficult when you consider moving to—whether it is the Latrobe Valley or the south-eastern suburbs—where employment opportunities may be available. For people who do not have their own transport the public transport is very limited and does not necessarily have timetabling that supports those employment or educational activities.

Looking forward to where is council and where are we moving towards, council has a very clear commitment through its council plan, through its advocacy strategy and municipal health and wellbeing plan to understand and seek to address impacts. We are very mindful of the role that council has to play in this space, and we see our role at the moment from a council perspective as one of representing the community through targeted advocacy and through collaborating with our agency partners, which I think has been really effective in the case of the Miners Rest example. We also acknowledge that we do have some regulatory requirements in relation to planning approvals and the supply of residential land, but also in licensing accommodation premises under the *Residential Tenancies Act*, which we are also involved with. At this point in time, council sees its future as providing strategic direction in this space and leadership for the community. We acknowledge at this point in time we have no strategic plan for homelessness or affordable housing, social housing or crisis accommodation. That is something that we wish to work on and be very committed to that through our planning but also our advocacy work as well. I might hand over to Nina now to touch on that work.

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: Thanks, Chris, and thank you, Committee, for inviting us today and for hearing our submission. My role at council is as a Senior Advocacy Officer, and I would like to speak briefly about the advocacy that we have been doing towards homelessness and emergency housing for Bass Coast. Every 12 months or so council adopts its top 10 advocacy priority projects. These are projects which council is informed through their community consultation and feedback and their relationships with the community. I think it is really significant and telling that 12 months ago council adopted homelessness and emergency housing as a top 10 priority for them and their community. Historically advocacy priority projects are large capital works projects, such as new aquatic centres, libraries, sports and recreation, and erosion and things like that. So to have a social issue—and this is the first one to make its way onto the priority list—is really telling of the significance of homelessness and emergency housing for our community and also the sentiment in our community.

Our current advocacy ask regarding homelessness and emergency housing is the allocation of \$1.25 million to local agencies to identify and develop emergency housing in Bass Coast. We have been advocating on this for the past 12 months, which has included meetings with the federal Minister, Minister Sukkar, and also the Victorian state Minister, Minister Wynne. Through those conversations and also conversations with key stakeholders, we have received some really valuable and important feedback, and that is that if we were given this \$1.25 million tomorrow we do not know exactly what we would build or exactly where we would build it. There is a really critical piece missing for us at the moment in the strategic space of identifying available land and appropriate land for emergency housing and social housing solutions, and also a feasibility study into exactly what we need and exactly what it should look like moving forward.

At the December council meeting we will be reviewing our advocacy projects. This priority project will be staying on the list, but it will be changing, where our ask will now be for some funding to do a land audit and land study to identify suitable land in our shire for emergency housing and social housing, and also a feasibility study to go into the detail of what exactly we need for our community moving forward and projecting forward into the future as well.

Ms LOVELL: Sorry, Nina, can I just ask: the \$1.25 million, was that for a study or was that to actually build?

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: That was to build. That was for a bricks and mortar solution.

Ms LOVELL: So, five houses?

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: Yes, so looking at probably four to five two-bedroom units. But, as I mentioned, that was sort of something that was quickly come up with through collaboration with agencies without really that formula or strategic work behind it, underpinning it.

The CHAIR: Of working out is that what you really need. Yes.

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: Yes. So I guess—and Chris touched on this before—particularly with the closure of the Miners Rest Caravan Park and the Capital motel, this is becoming critical for us. But also within that space there have been some opportunities that have come up in terms of public-private partnerships and investment, and some opportunities for private investors wanting to demonstrate goodwill and make contributions. It is a really fantastic opportunity, but again without that work of having this is where we can build it or this is what we need, it is a missed opportunity as well. That is another I guess example of why we are changing our advocacy request from funding to build the bricks and mortar to funding to undertake some strategic work.

I guess I just wanted to really quickly share with you an anecdote that was one of the many stories that really brought to the forefront for our councillors the issue of homelessness and emergency housing in Bass Coast. As Chris mentioned, once the caravan park and Capital motel closes there will be no emergency accommodation in our community at all, which is quite alarming. There was a woman about 12 months ago who had a business on Phillip Island and lived in Grantville in the waterline community, and unfortunately her home became unsafe for her to live in. As a requirement of council we actually needed to evict that woman from her home because it was unsafe. There was no housing for her in our community for us to relocate her. The closest options for her were on the peninsula or in the Latrobe Valley, and of course that meant that she would no longer be able to maintain her business on Phillip Island if she were to do that.

That really was one of the demonstrations to our councillors of how important an issue this is, because without having a local solution we are needing to displace people from their community, and with that come a lot of challenges and barriers—which I am sure you are all aware of, but it is always nice to hear an anecdote. So I might now pass back to Chris. We will continue in our advocacy work. We will continue lobbying State and Federal Government and working really closely with our local agencies, SalvoCare and our local stakeholders, and pursuing opportunities. We really look forward to being able to develop a land audit and land assessment study and then from that also develop a feasibility study for our community so that we are moving forward with some really clear direction. I will pass back to you now, Chris.

Mr WIGHTMAN: Thanks, Nina. Just on a number of other strategic directions council is taking, I mentioned about increasing our housing supply and seeking assistance for funding to release more quickly some of that residential land. We have touched on improved public transport. That also forms part of our advocacy work—improving timetabling, frequency of services within Bass Coast and also connecting within the region and back to Melbourne. Council has also, via the MAV, made submission to the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Planning Mechanisms for Affordable Housing, and we share the view that we should be able to secure social or affordable housing as a percentage of future residential development based on some flexibility of local needs and assessments, also identifying that there may be appropriate applications for financial contributions in lieu of those bricks-and-mortar contributions as well. So council has been quite active in that space.

The other space in which council operates is in primary prevention. Through our municipal health and wellbeing plan we are very, very active in the prevention of family violence space. Until recently we were a White Ribbon-accredited workplace, working very, very closely with the community. There was an incident on Phillip Island, the murder of Sam Fraser. Council has been part of that Change for Sam committee, and just last weekend we were down in Cowes with the Turn it Orange Festival really trying to tackle some of the gender-

driven drivers of family violence. So that forms a very, very important part of our work, and there again—some of the causal factors for homelessness in our community. The health and wellbeing priorities as well for council within our plan: improving access to services, supporting social connectedness, reducing harmful use of drugs and alcohol, and also with focuses working with Gippsland PHN, for example, on improving mental health outcomes and preventing violence and injury. So we are very active in that space.

In conclusion, council is seeking to position itself from a strategic perspective in relation to its response to homelessness. We are working with agencies. You may be aware of a project called the Geelong Project, which we are currently actively considering as part of an agency group in Bass Coast working with young people to identify, and early intervention to prevent, young people at risk of homelessness. That is moving forward at the moment. As Nina mentioned, with the experience we have had with the Capital motel and Miners Rest and working with Bunnings, it has really opened our perspective from a council point of view that the private sector and opportunities for ethical investment are out there, and how can we—from a public sector perspective—tie in with that. The thing we are finding is that the willingness and the intent is there, but the understanding of how we can help and what is best placed to do that—we do not have the answers to that at this point in time, but we feel as though there really is some opportunity there to work with colleagues in the private sector.

That concludes it from us. I think I have run over time, for which I apologise, but thank you again for the opportunity. We are happy to take questions.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Chris. Thanks, Nina. Yes, we have just got a few minutes, so I would ask Committee members to ask single questions not multiple questions, to give everybody a chance.

Ms VAGHELA: Thank you very much for the detailed information that you have provided. We met with different organisations, but it is good to hear from the council perspective how big this issue is over here, and it is good to see that as a council you have put this as one of the top priorities. That means you have identified this as a very significant issue in the region. In your view, what should be the three strategic priorities of the Government to address this issue?

Mr WIGHTMAN: That is a tough question. From our perspective it is really having, I think, the mechanisms to actually achieve affordable housing. I actually come from a town planning background, and I left the UK in the late 1990s to move to Australia. In the late 90s in the UK it was commonplace to have quotas on residential developments, and we are talking quite significant—25 to 30 per cent—quotas for all developments. I often think, had those opportunities been realised that number of years ago, what that supply might look like from an Australian or a Victorian perspective. So I think that some of those mechanisms embedded within, in this case, the Victorian planning provisions would be a very significant step for councils and broader agencies to have that ongoing supply. From our perspective, we need to get those settings right so that we can provide that supply base.

From council's perspective, really understanding where we sit in the homelessness picture I think would be really beneficial. We see our role at the moment as advocates and as understanding and working in connecting. We do not see ourselves in a supply space, and I think really understanding and having clarity for all parties, including the private sector, as to how that system is actually working would be really beneficial. So those two points are certainly interrelated. We are learning a lot from our agency and service providers at the moment. It is not a space in which we have technical skills and competencies, but we certainly have the passion and commitment to be working there. So there is a couple from me. Nina, I do not know whether you would like to add anything?

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: Yes, I would 100 per cent agree, Chris, and I think some additional observations on that, too, are not knowing where we sit but also there being a little bit of that greyness across different parts of the sector as well. So for example, this strategic work that we are really keen to pursue—we would not necessarily see that in the remit of council but we would be happy to lead that element of the project. We certainly see that with the local agencies, it is not within their scope or their resource to be able to be doing that strategic work because they are really heavily inundated with their case management and the crisis end. So some clarity, guidance and direction around the responsibility of that strategic space and who it sits with, and I think certainly a lot of collaboration in that space as well, particularly collaboration across State departments—Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning—would

help to be able to really clearly see the collaboration happening across those spaces and the opportunity for local councils to be involved to demonstrate their local stories and their local environment as well.

Dr KIEU: Thank you for your submission. It is a bit alarming; the picture you are presenting is a bit bleak. I know that you are going to have a strategic planning meeting soon, in December. In order to do that planning you would need to know where the land is available, but then what would be dependent on the breakdown of the needs of the homeless or at risk? For example, is it the youth or Aboriginal communities, or is it family—do you have those statistics or some view about that? That is sort of the space that is missing. Our advocacy ask will be for \$130 000 from the State Government to be allocated to council to undertake that work. It is about \$30 000 for a land audit and assessment and then about \$100 000 to do exactly what you are saying: to collaborate with local agencies and use their data that they have to collect other data as well to do consultation with our community and to collate and really analyse all of that to be able to provide a really strong insight into who is in need of accommodation in our community and what they are in need of—is it families; is it two to three-bedroom units; is it youth; is it the foyer model that they are using in Shepparton?

Ms BATH: I wrote that down.

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: We do not know at the moment what our priorities are.

The CHAIR: We have just got a short period of time. Who has got some burning questions?

Ms BATH: It comes off the back of that. Nice to see you. Can I just understand then: you were talking about the level of urgency and an audit feasibility study. That quantum I came up with of roughly \$150 000 is not an enormous amount, and it is not so hard that it could not be achieved in a reasonably short space of time.

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: That is right.

Ms BATH: I was writing ‘urgency’ under here, urgency overlaid by the fact that the caravan park and those people are going to be—

The CHAIR: Yes, Miners Rest is closing.

Ms BATH: Have you got a time line for Miners Rest closing and Bunnings? Have they put that out, because that would then create even more urgency for this reasonable feasibility study to be done.

Mr WIGHTMAN: At this stage SalvoCare are leading that. I know they are presenting this afternoon, so they may give more—I understand that notices will be served on tenants in, it is anticipated, February 2020.

The CHAIR: And that is a six-month notice, I think we heard yesterday.

Mr WIGHTMAN: And it is a six-month notice period. So that gives you an indication. From February that takes us through until August–September 2020.

Ms LOVELL: Congratulations to council on doing the work that should be being done by the State, really. I just wanted to know: are you working in conjunction with a housing association or provider, and what work is the Latrobe Valley Authority doing to assist you in this space?

Mr WIGHTMAN: We are working primarily at the moment with SalvoCare Eastern as the homelessness service provider.

Ms LOVELL: But they are not a housing provider or a housing association.

Mr WIGHTMAN: They are not; correct.

Ms LOVELL: In order to attract funding you would need to be working with a registered provider or association—Community Housing Ltd or something.

Mr WIGHTMAN: We have connections with Launch Housing and other organisations. We have not really formalised any of those relationships. We are acutely aware, and that needs to be part of our strategic picture. If

we can increase the supply, how will that supply be managed in an appropriate way? I think we are almost as council acknowledging that there are some gaps from a strategic perspective. We need to fill those gaps to understand. What we do not want to do is sort of move forward on a bit of a piecemeal, reactionary basis. It is really understanding what is out there and being able to respond to what the community needs are. That is where our immediate priority is, and that will include building relationships with organisations.

Ms LOVELL: What about the Latrobe Valley Authority? Are they doing any work in this housing space?

Mr WIGHTMAN: No. I should not say no because I do not know.

Ms LOVELL: So you are not linked in with them?

Ms BATH: Not in Bass.

Mr WIGHTMAN: Not in Bass Coast.

The CHAIR: That you are aware of.

Mr BARTON: Just a quick question. How many new properties were built in the council shire in the last 12 months? I just want to get some numbers so we can think about—

Mr WIGHTMAN: I would need to take that on notice. We can certainly provide that and maybe even include it as part of our written submission.

The CHAIR: Because I think if you are looking at quotas, to get an idea of ‘a percentage of what’ would be helpful.

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: We do have the *Wonthaggi North East Precinct Structure Plan*, which includes 4400 new homes to cater for the doubling of the population of Wonthaggi, which is forecast over the next 10–15 years. There has been a lot of work done there, so we could include that as well.

The CHAIR: With that Wonthaggi plan, is there a social housing component in that currently?

Mr WIGHTMAN: No, and my understanding of the reason behind that is that we do not have the mechanism to actually achieve that. There are development contributions associated with that precinct structure plan, but those contributions are going towards some infrastructure—some social infrastructure in terms of child care and early years facilities, recreation facilities et cetera—

The CHAIR: But the basic infrastructure of drainage and things like that?

Mr WIGHTMAN: Correct. There is no contribution towards social housing in that space.

Ms BATH: Chair, could I just be indulged? Taking Mr Barton’s point, I guess the other comment is that because of the nature of your wonderful shire it is really skewed, because whilst you could be building houses, they could be secondary houses—holiday homes. So it actually sounds like, ‘Gee, there’s a lot of housing development here’, but it is down on Phillip Island and it is some Melbourne person’s dream beach house. Is there any way that you can clarify that at all, or is that too challenging?

Mr WIGHTMAN: It is very difficult. I think when you also look at the demographic profile of Bass Coast, we are an ageing population, and that also presents its own challenges in relation to homelessness but also in relation to housing supply. As Nina has touched on, some of the work we need to do is really to understand what type of homes we actually need to provide in Bass Coast. I would anticipate not only are there a lot of empty houses, but there are a lot of houses that are only partially occupied. It may be a permanent basis, but they have probably got two or three bedrooms that are not being used. So we are really trying to have a very clear understanding of what we need to provide for our community moving forward. We do not have that at the moment.

Ms LOVELL: So if you are looking for that in relation to the social housing need, the department of human services should be able to give you a breakdown of your housing waiting list. Currently on the waiting list for

Inner Gippsland, which is the Morwell waiting list, there is 1698 applications on that waiting list for social housing, of which 656 are actually listed as priority housing. So those are people who are homeless, at risk of recurring homelessness, who have a disability, who are escaping domestic violence and people with special housing needs. They will be able to tell you of those applications whether they are single applications, a couple or a family of four or five. They will be able to give you some data there to assist—

The CHAIR: Yes, so it is part of that strategic plan that they are developing.

Ms LOVELL: Yes, but it shows you the need. You talked about 35 in the census data; there are 656 listed in that priority. And that is applications; that is not just people—it might be 3000 people. We do not know how many that 656 applications represents.

Mr WIGHTMAN: We can certainly build some of these factors into the submission once we finalise that for the Inquiry by the end of January.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just a quick question for me. Diggers Rest, one would assume that is what you call crisis housing, but how long are people living there at the moment? Do you have any idea?

Mr WIGHTMAN: There are some long-term residents in there who consider it to be home. SalvoCare Eastern would be better. They are actually doing the casework and they are actually engaging directly with each of the tenants, so I would imagine they would be able to give you an accurate breakdown of that.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks, Chris.

Ms MAXWELL: I would just like to thank you for being here and the work that you are also doing in the primary prevention space. I think that is something that goes hand in hand when we are looking at homelessness; it is preventative. So thank you.

The CHAIR: And I think you have got some advocates here for your strategic planning funding.

Mr WIGHTMAN: Sounds good.

The CHAIR: I think we all appreciate the sense of urgency that you have given this but also the thinking outside the square that the council appears to be doing. Thank you so much, it has been a really good start to the morning.

Mr WIGHTMAN: Fabulous. Thanks for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: We appreciate it. As I say, a transcript will be coming to you in the next few days. Thank you.

Ms BARRY-MACAULAY: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.