

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Yan to the Minister for Housing and Homelands:

Remote Tenancy Management Support Services

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (the Department) has outsourced the function of remote tenancy management support services to indigenous owned organisations located within the remote towns and communities.

- 1. What is the cost difference in outsourcing these functions compared to the cost of the Department undertaking these functions?**

The Department funds \$8.4 million per annum for tenancy support services in the 72 communities, Alice Springs town camps and Tennant Creek community living areas. In locations where a provider cannot be contracted, the equivalent funding allocation is used for employment of additional staff in regional offices to support in-housed tenancy support services activities to the affected communities.

There is no cost difference between outsourcing these functions and the Department undertaking the services. Where the services are in-housed by the Department, the full budget allocation that would have been outsourced to a contractor is used to employ staff in the delivery of services.

- 2. How many jobs have been cut from the Department as a result of these functions being outsourced?**

Tenancy support services have been outsourced to contracted providers since commencement of the Remote Property and Tenancy Management program in 2013. The current service model involves established tenancy contract officers across the Department's regional offices, supporting tenancy support service contractors in the delivery of services to remote communities, Alice Springs town camps and Tennant Creek community living areas. There has been no reduction to funded tenancy contract officer positions in this time.

- 3. How many new private sector jobs have been created in remote towns and communities as a result of outsourcing these functions?**

Where tenancy support services are outsourced (contracted) to non-government organisations, the delivery involves 1 staff member to every 100 houses. There are currently 3,320 households receiving services by a contracted tenancy support provider, this involves approximately 33 private sector jobs as a result of outsourced tenancy management services.

4. What was this decision to outsource these functions based on?

The contracting of tenancy support services is in line with requirements of Commonwealth funding delivered through consecutive National Partnership Agreements, which support engagement of locally based Aboriginal Business Enterprises in the delivery of services to remote Aboriginal communities, as well as maximised opportunities for local Aboriginal employment in those communities. Approximately 69 per cent of tenancy support services contracts are delivered by Aboriginal Business Enterprises, with a minimum 50 per cent Aboriginal employment in the delivery of these services.

5. Does the Department still undertake any remote tenancy management support services? If so, for which communities?

Where the Department was unable to secure a contracted provider, tenancy management support services have been provided in-house with employment of additional staffing to support these functions. Alternative service arrangements are currently in place for the Tiwi Islands and Central Australian communities within the MacDonnell Shire.

6. Estimates highlighted a significant amount of unpaid rents in remote housing. What is the role of the organisations undertaking these outsourced functions in recovering unpaid rents or is this still centralized within the Department?

Tenancy support service contractors are responsible for community and tenancy engagement work, as well as delivery of the Living Strong program to households within the region. The Living Strong program focuses on a proactive, culturally appropriate and engaging experience for tenants, assisting them to develop skills necessary to maintain a safe and healthy home and sustain a successful tenancy. These activities are supported by Department tenancy contract officers, responsible for statutory type work including inspections, arranging new leases and end of lease actions, allocation of dwellings, rent management, and compliance activity.

7. What strategies and plans are being considered or put in place to recover the large amount of unpaid rents in remote public housing?

Department tenancy contract officers have been consulting with residents about the commencement of the new remote rent framework, this includes the waiving of historical debt accumulated before 11 December 2021 and changes to how rent will be calculated against each property.

Department tenancy contract officers continue to work alongside tenancy support service contractors in the delivery of tenancy management services to remote communities, the Alice Springs town camps and Tennant Creek community living areas. A focus of this work is delivery of the Living Strong program which supports residents to understand their obligations in managing a household and maintaining a tenancy. The sessions of this program include a focus on managing your money, and why you pay rent.