



Queensland Housing Strategy 2021-2025 Local Housing Action Plan (Final Draft)

Boulia Shire Council

www.boulia.qld.gov.au

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Introduction

Introduction

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government*, Boulia Shire Council (Council) and the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) to respond to a range of immediate, emerging and longer-term housing challenges in the Boulia Shire.

This is an iterative process that does not intend to duplicate existing actions of Council or the actions under The Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025. It seeks to identify opportunities, consider an agreed response, develop targeted actions on key priorities and enable ongoing review of effort to adapt and respond to changing need.

The Plan aims to:

1. **develop agreed priority actions** to respond to housing need,
2. **establish strong foundations for longer-term housing responses** to assist housing and homelessness outcomes in the Boulia Shire into the future.
3. **incorporate existing information and plans** that assist with developing responses to housing need and acknowledge work already completed by the Council, State Agencies, private and not-for-profit organisations.
4. **facilitate targeted interaction between all parties through agreed actions** to ensure a focus on deliverables and projects that can improve housing responses in the short and longer-term.



Approach and methodology

The plan provides an overview of key community and housing characteristics, and emerging issues related to housing in the community and identifies a targeted initial set of priority actions to respond to housing need. It has been developed through a review of a range of supporting documentation including:

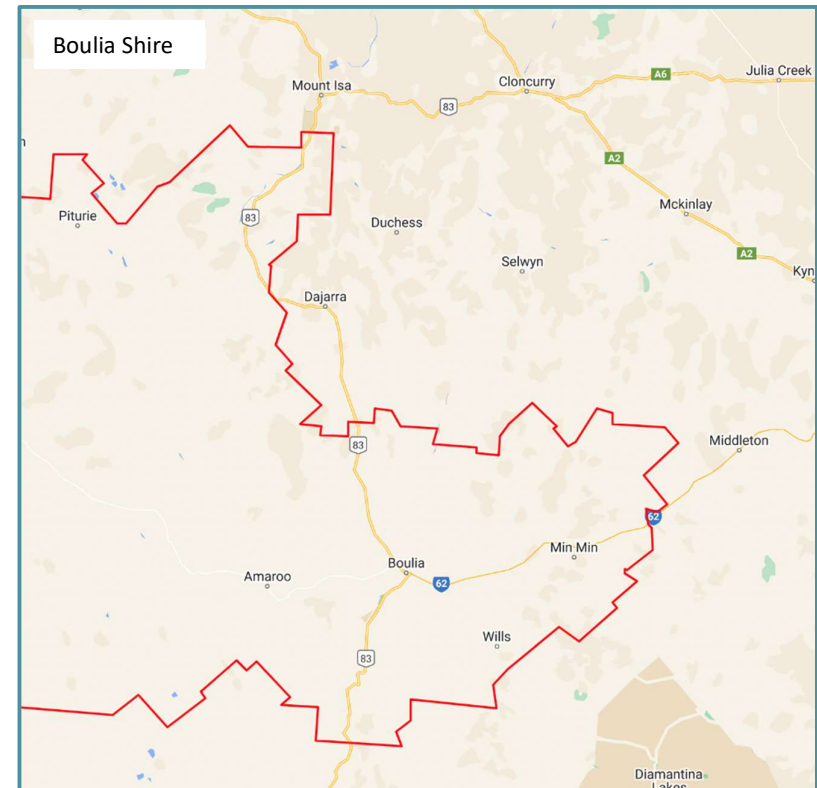
- Regional Infrastructure plans
- Boulia Shire Council Planning Scheme
- Relevant Council strategy reports and plans
- Statistical data via the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, including Census and other data sets such as building approvals, rental market data, housing approvals
- Housing needs data from the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and other state agencies as required
- *The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* and the *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025*.
- Other local data and information such as RAI reports

Emerging issues and opportunities, key challenges, and potential responses have been developed from review of a range of data sets, anecdotal feedback and preceding engagement opportunities with Council and other stakeholders.

* The Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025

Boulia Shire key details

- Boulia Local Government Area (LGA) has a total land area of 60,906 km².
- Boulia is the main population centre and is located approximately 1,717km, or 19-hours' drive, north-west of Brisbane. It is also 303km south of Mount Isa, a 3½ hour drive.
- The shire also has smaller locality of Urandangi to the north of Boulia.
- The agriculture industry is the primary focus through beef production.
- The region also has a growing tourism sector, with visitors drawn to scenic landscapes, cultural experiences, and the Min Min Light!





Key Community Characteristics

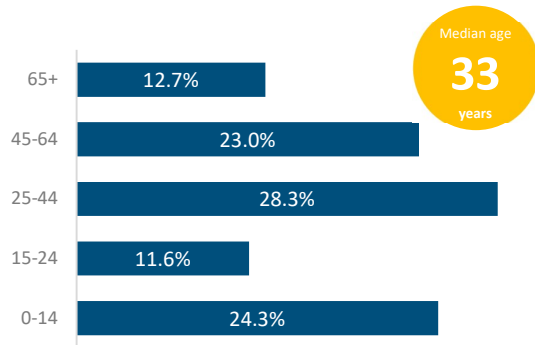


Key Demographic Characteristics

Estimated resident population is **458** and is projected to reduce to **447** by 2041 (-2.4%)

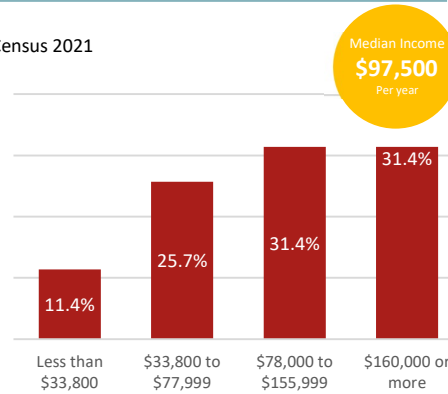
Age

Census 2021



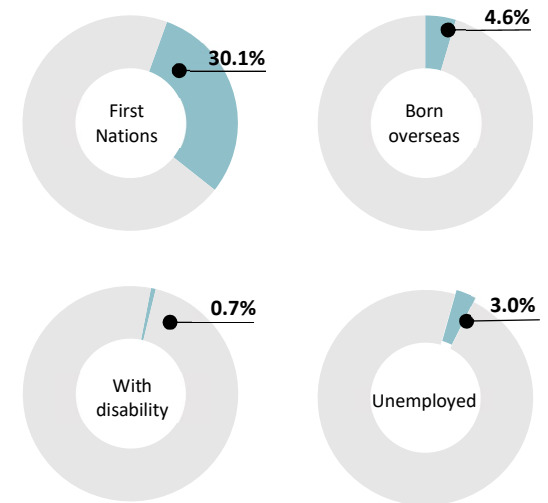
Family Income

Census 2021



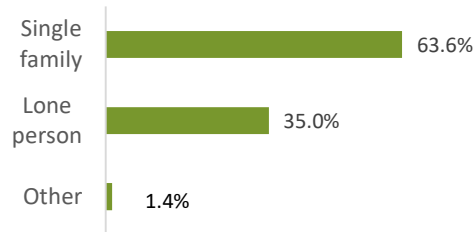
Other characteristics

Census 2021



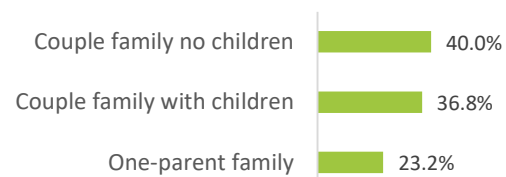
Household composition

Census 2021



Family composition

Census 2021



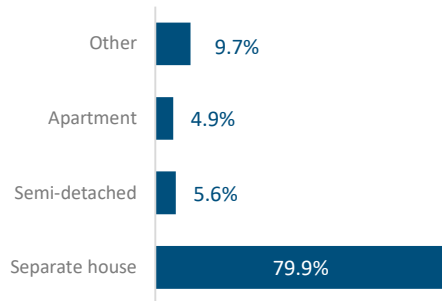


Key Housing Characteristics

Total Occupied dwellings (2021) **144**

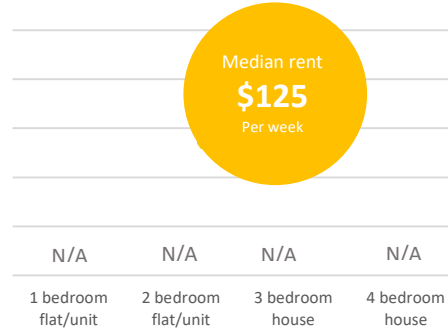
Dwellings by Structure

Census 2021



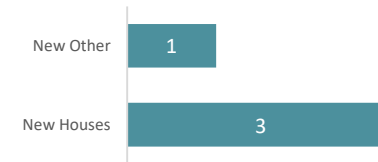
Median rent

Census 2021



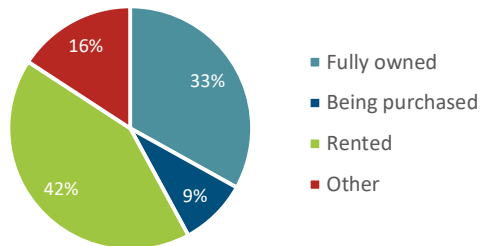
Building approvals

12 months to 30/06/22 - ABS



Dwellings by Tenure

Census 2021



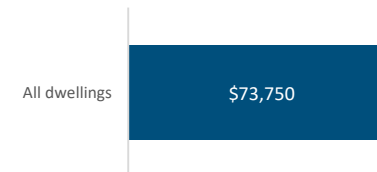
Number of sales

12 months to 30/06/22



Median Sales Price

12 months to 30/06/22





Key focus areas identified

Areas of emerging concern have been determined through a review of existing data and engagement with stakeholders as identified in the methodology. These concerns will be considered when identifying and prioritising shared actions.



1. Housing Availability

There is no available housing or land for purchase or rent in Boulia. When properties are available, they rarely go to market as they are snapped up quickly. Accommodation for visitors is also at a premium for most of the year but is particularly limited during the high tourist season from May to September. This is exacerbated by the need for tradesperson and contractor accommodation year-round due to Boulia's role as a service hub. There are no real estate agents in Boulia – any sale or property management is generally handled by agents in Cloncurry or Mount Isa. Generally, over the past few years there have only been around 1 or 2 houses for sale at any one time. There is no serviced land available for sale.

Council is currently developing an industrial estate and has un-serviced land available for development in the future (approximately 50 lots).

There are 202 private dwellings in Boulia - 72% of these are owner- occupied.

Major property owners are the Council – 38 in Boulia and State Government social housing - 22 (8 -2 bed, 12 -3 bed, and 2 -4 bed). The vacancy rate of these dwellings is unknown, but all appear occupied, and some are in poor condition. There are 8 dwellings for Government employees provided on the operational sites occupied by the police, the school, and the health clinic and also privately rented accommodation.

It is currently proposed to build 2 new social housing dwellings and 2 new dwellings for health staff. Further investigation is needed to identify the land holdings of the State Government to see if serviced land is available for these 4 dwellings. There may be land available on the Police reserve that Council may be interested in purchasing from the State Government.

Little data exists regarding movements in the median house price but anecdotally it is believed to have risen. The more recent peak may have been influenced by drought recovery and the COVID pandemic which may have influenced a trend of relocations to regional areas. Sales of 4 houses in the last 2 years have varied from \$45,000 (in very poor condition), to \$150,000 and around \$200,000 - \$250,000 for two newer properties in good condition.

The housing stock has generally aged, and its standard in some cases, has not been maintained to attract investment and capital return other than from rental income. While land prices are relatively low, costs of construction are substantial due to the material supply logistics and limited local housing contractors in the region. There have been very few private houses constructed in the shire between 2016 and 2021. New construction for private rental stock to increase the market availability is likely to be financially difficult due to the low rental return and the current challenges with material supply and construction cost increases and limited number of builders and tradespersons.

Council has constructed 4 new dwellings in recent years and carried out basic maintenance and refurbishment of its stock. Two new dwellings have been constructed by a private developer. Aged pensioner units have recently been refurbished to a higher standard. These will be used for staff, pensioner, and short-term Council contract staff. Council has recently received approval to construct 6 new, 2-bedroom dwellings. These are proposed for staff use. Council has limited available serviced land for future needs.

Response opportunities

- Focus on immediate housing responses to the current housing shortage and develop longer-term resilient and sustainable housing options that can underpin the economic development of the region.
- Council continue to construct 6 new dwellings for staff.
- Council to complete the industrial development.



- Council encourage further infill subdivision to smaller lots in existing residential areas.
- Council encourage more short-term self-contained accommodation options in unit blocks, motels, and caravan/cabin type accommodation.
- Council undertakes preliminary planning work for the new residential land (including servicing requirements).
- Further investigation be undertaken to identify the land holdings of the State Government to see if serviced land is available for the proposed 4 dwellings – 2 for social housing, and 2 for GEH.
- The Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) and State Government consider development of a major marketing strategy to highlight the housing affordability advantages and other lifestyle and employment opportunities offered by the regions.

2. Rental Market

Almost all Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Queensland are considered to have 'tight' rental markets (characterised by a vacancy rate under 2.5%). Over three quarters of Queensland LGAs (77%) have vacancy rates under 1% as at MARCH December 2021. The current vacancy rate (as of August 2022) in the Boulia is near 0.0%.

The rental market in Boulia is very strong – with properties being tightly held and being rented out immediately. Rents range from around \$250-\$350 per week. New construction for private rental to increase the market is likely to be financially unviable for many years due to the current challenges with material supply and construction cost increases and the limited number of builders and tradespersons in the region.

Census data shows that 30% of dwellings are unoccupied – this level of vacancy needs further investigation.

Owner-occupiers are 40% and 60% of residential properties are rented.

The current range for rentals and increasing construction costs limits the viability of private investors undertaking major renovations of existing stock to improve the standards.

Council age pensioner units are rented for a subsidised rent. Low income and supported individuals and families have limited entry into the private rental market. Their only option is to seek social housing alternatives. Social housing development provides additional options for those most susceptible to private market challenges and reduces demand on lower-priced private properties.

Increasing accessibility of social housing through increasing availability by reduction in vacant periods and increasing the number and type of supply is an option to reduce rental stress for the vulnerable communities. Opportunities for management through local oversight has been raised in the community interviews.

As the demand for employee rentals increases for transient fixed contract staff, local community rental demand is challenged. Anecdotally, it was noted this situation results in increased rental prices for houses with reasonable liveability quality. The cost of delivery of employee housing adds to the cost of delivering services which is difficult to pass on to already financially struggling communities. Federal Government assistance to support employers in these situations maybe one of the options for consideration.



Response opportunities

- Consideration be given to bring forward any proposed social housing projects to increase the rental stock and free up lower cost rentals for market availability.
 - Council proceed to facilitate development options as discussed previously in the Housing availability section.
 - Support for service provider employers to construct employee housing to free up transient employee monopolising higher quality housing a higher rental which displaces community rental access.
 - Census data shows that 20% of dwellings are unoccupied – this level of vacancy needs further investigation as it is not evident on the ground.
-

3. Social Housing Supply

There is a high demand for social housing across Queensland and allocations are focussed on supporting households with the highest need. Weekly median household incomes in Boulia Shire are \$1,490 compared to the Queensland median of \$1,675.

Discussions with local support group suggests that 4 new 4 bedroom and 4 new 2-bedroom dwellings are needed for social needs.

Interviews with local stakeholders indicates that some community members may have withdrawn from making applications for social housing until they are aware of houses becoming available.

Overcrowding and “couch surfing” has been raised in a number of interviews. The interviewees consider that these situations aggravate social issues that cause other unintended consequences such as family and domestic violence. Also, the limited availability of housing may be resulting in persons relocating from the region.

Response opportunities

- Investigate options to urgently address the short fall such as provision of temporary single/double units. Consider alternatives to tenancy management and engaging local management partnerships with a focus on tenancy performance in order to minimising costs of repairs.
 - Investigate partnerships with social housing providers for development of a private facilities on Council land.
 - Research what type of product is best for Indigenous Housing .i.e., more of a community style development with sleeping separate from outdoor cooking and meeting areas.
-



4. Aged Housing and Care

Council provides aged pensioner housing in the Shire - a total of 3 in Boulia. With the aged population increasing there is likely to be a need for increased accommodation – more research is needed in this area.

Response opportunities

- Undertake a needs assessment to determine the future needs for aged accommodation.
-

5. Employee Housing

In order to employ appropriately skilled and suitable staff, employers are required to prioritise attraction and retention incentives such as housing when housing stock is limited, and the standards do not match accommodation expectation. Boulia is an extremely remote area, and the provision of good standard staff housing is an essential part of the employment packages. Without such housing Council is continually in a position of not being able to recruit staff and therefore services suffer.

Relocating employee's family away from more populated areas creates stress, therefore availability of good standard of housing assists in the transition and performance. Council provides houses for 35 staff and 3 for community purposes or organisations – these are leased with a variety of subsidy levels, generally depending on the negotiations to attract the right staff at a reasonable cost. Increasingly, the need is to provide free or heavily subsidised arrangements.

The State Government supplies housing for its employees under 2 systems. GEH provides a range of housing types for government employees in government owned dwellings. The majority are provided for Police, Health and Education. In addition, these departments provide “operational housing” for staff were located on operational sites e.g., police stations, hospitals and schools. They also rent housing in the private market.

GEH has not recorded any demand for additional employee housing in Boulia meaning the additional housing for health staff will be provided directly by Queensland Health.

Private rentals for employee housing are also in use throughout the town.

Response opportunities

- Council to progress provision of the 6 new 2-bedroom dwellings.

- Investigate the supply and demand of government employee housing and consider opportunities for additional rental housing if any government employees are currently utilising private rentals that are able to re-enter general community rental market.

6. Cohort Specific Housing

The following cohort specific housing has been identified as being required to be addressed in the housing configuration.

- Domestic and family violence
- Disability
- Youth homelessness
- Family homelessness
- Sleeping rough

There are no facilities in Boulia to provide services for any of these situations. A support group has suggested there is a need for 2 safe houses for domestic and family violence victims (1 for males and 1 for females). An existing shed in the Catholic church property could be converted to provide 1 facility at an estimated cost of \$75,000. Further assessments are required to determine whether there any other related needs.

There are few sleeping rough problems but there are occasions of public drunkenness. Homelessness does not appear to be an issue generally but there are overcrowding problems instead.

Response opportunities

- Investigation into crisis housing for domestic and family violence to confirm the need for such housing should be carried out. Seek grant funds for conversion of the shed to a safe house.
- NDIS housing requirements should also be investigated.



Image: Tourism and Events Queensland

Response Opportunities

A local housing action plan enables engagement across all levels of government, and benefits from partnerships between private and not-for-profit organisations.

An initial set of tactical actions has been developed, enabling refinement through an ongoing iterative process. These actions provide for a targeted response and outcomes that will seek to either create immediate benefit or establish a foundation for the next phase of actions. More specific responses then can be determined that provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.

Response opportunities

A local housing action plan enables engagement across all levels of government, and benefits from partnerships between private and not-for-profit organisations. An initial set of tactical actions has been developed, enabling refinement through an ongoing iterative process. These actions provide for a targeted response and outcomes that will seek to either create immediate benefit or establish a foundation for the next phase of actions. More specific responses can then be determined that provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.



Actions

The Boulia Shire Council with the support of the Queensland Government through the Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 is committed to engage in the delivery of its initial Local Housing Action Plan through this set of actions, developed to target immediate to longer term housing responses. This is an iterative process, and these actions and target outcomes will seek to either create immediate benefit or to establish foundations that help respond to ongoing housing need.

1	Land and Development	Timeline Starting in March 2023 (months)
1.1	Conduct a detailed assessment of current Council and State-owned residential land and buildings to support immediate development of temporary housing provision including repurposing of existing buildings to address the present housing crisis.	6
1.2	Review other land holdings (vacant or disused buildings) to identify lots that would be suitable for permanent development and/or redevelopment/repurposing to support short and longer-term housing outcomes	12
1.3	Council continue to construct 6 new dwellings for staff.	6-18
1.4	Council to complete developing the industrial estate.	12-24
1.5	Council encourage further infill subdivision to smaller lots in existing residential areas.	Ongoing
1.6	Council encourage more short-term accommodation options in unit blocks, motels, and caravan /cabin type accommodation.	Ongoing
1.7	Council undertakes preliminary planning work for the new residential subdivision (including servicing requirements).	6
1.8	As new stock is developed, the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) and State Government consider development of a major marketing strategy to highlight the housing affordability advantages and other lifestyle and employment opportunities offered by the regions.	12
1.9	Further investigation is needed to identify the land holdings of the State Government, in particular the Police reserve, to see if serviced land is available for the 2 social housing and 2 health dwellings to be built. Council to consider the purchase of the Police reserve, if available.	6
1.10	Census data shows that 20% of dwellings are unoccupied – this level of vacancy needs further investigation.	Immediate

2	Planning	
2.1	Undertake, in conjunction with the Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC) and WQAC, an analysis of the LHAP Data Collection for Flinders Shire to assist in the assessment of housing needs and the identification of opportunities in relation to local density aspirations, opportunities for secondary dwellings on existing blocks, mixed use development options, repurposing unused commercial space, types of construction permitted and any other specific initiatives to address future housing need for both public and private sectors..	6
2.2	Prepare a draft Boulia Shire Council Housing Strategy with targeted action for the next 10 years in consultation with the community, business sector and government agencies and informed by other policy settings such as, infrastructure and servicing, transport, economic development and environmental management.	12
2.4	Consider amendments to Council's Planning Scheme to allow subdivision down to 400m2 lots increasing density in existing areas, where feasible, and allow increased density in new developments.	12
2.5	Undertake planning work and prepare required Development Applications (DA's) for development of Council future residential lands.	12-24

3	Optimisation	
3.1	Council and the State Government investigate and coordinate options to develop under-utilised sites in partnership with the not-for-profit sector, private sector including employer housing providers and with Federal Government assistance, having regard to the assessment of underutilised land and buildings and the housing needs assessment.	12
3.2	Assess use of possible lease, purchase, new for old land exchange, redevelopment, change of use or renovation of existing buildings to optimise community outcomes that support housing need.	12



4	Master planning	
4.1	Consider master planning of identified options to ensure resilient development meets community expectation of how its town acknowledges its heritage. The planning may be at allotment, street, or locality level.	12-24

5	Supports	
5.1	Federal Governments provide programs/funding/incentives to encourage and assist local youth to take on trades in the local building industry.	12-24
5.2	State and Federal Governments provide financial assistance in grants for rural and remote LGA's to support provision of employee housing to reduce the financial burden on communities of meeting these additional costs and obtaining equitable access to essential services.	12
5.3	State Government to consider providing interest free loans to be used for the development of serviced land for sale.	12
5.4	State Government ensure there is sufficient housing of an acceptable standard in rural and remote LGA's for State Government agency and service staff to minimise the impact to the general housing markets.	5 years

6	People in need	
6.1	Consider how Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) can be incorporated into existing where required and future developments.	12-24
6.2	Undertake a detailed needs assessment, having regard to the Bouli Shire Data Collection findings and determine necessary actions of any specific identified cohorts such young people, individuals and households in response to domestic and family violence situations by way of immediate support in regard to crisis housing on a temporary or more permanent basis.	12-24
6.3	Seek assistance to obtain a \$75,000 grant to convert an existing shed on the Catholic Church property to a safe house to help with domestic and family violence issues.	6



7 Construction		
7.1	Identify opportunities to enable housing construction in the private market and social housing including the use of non-traditional housing options in response to emergent need, however, in the longer-term the built form needs to be reflective of the traditional housing character but using more sustainable and resilient materials	12-24
7.2	Encourage housing development which may repurpose existing commercial property for specific cohorts to address emerging needs.	12

8 Capital solutions		
8.1	Develop capital solutions in partnership with the State and Federal Governments through land provision and funding partnerships to construct and manage delivery of current and future housing needs.	12-24
8.2	Develop funding partnerships with not-for-profit social housing providers to deliver short term outcomes for specific cohorts in the interim with longer term arrangements being incorporated in these arrangements.	12-24
8.3	Engage with private land owners and developers with land opportunities to maximise use of existing underutilised land.	12-24
8.4	Consider buy to rent options for housing sales.	12-24



Next steps

Establish a Local Housing Action Plan Working Group of key representatives from Council, relevant State agencies and community organisations, to oversee and progress actions, review findings, report quarterly on progress and further develop the LHAP in an open partnership to address and ultimately resolve the housing challenge.