



MURWEH
SHIRE COUNCIL

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

Murweh Shire Council

www.murweh.qld.gov.au

November 2022



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
Approach and methodology	3
Murweh Shire Council key details	4
KEY COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS	5
Key Demographic Characteristics	6
Key Housing Characteristics	7
KEY FOCUS AREAS IDENTIFIED	8
1. Housing Availability	9
Response opportunities	10
2. Rental Market	10
Response opportunities	11
3. Social Housing Supply	11
Response opportunities	12
4. Aged Housing and Care	13
Response opportunities	13
5. Employee Housing	13
Response opportunities	14
6. Cohort Specific Housing	15
Response opportunities	15
7. Future Housing Demand	16
Response opportunities	16
RESPONSE OPPORTUNITIES	17
Response opportunities	18
Actions	19
NEXT STEPS	23





Introduction

Introduction

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government*, Murweh 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 Murweh 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 Murweh 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:

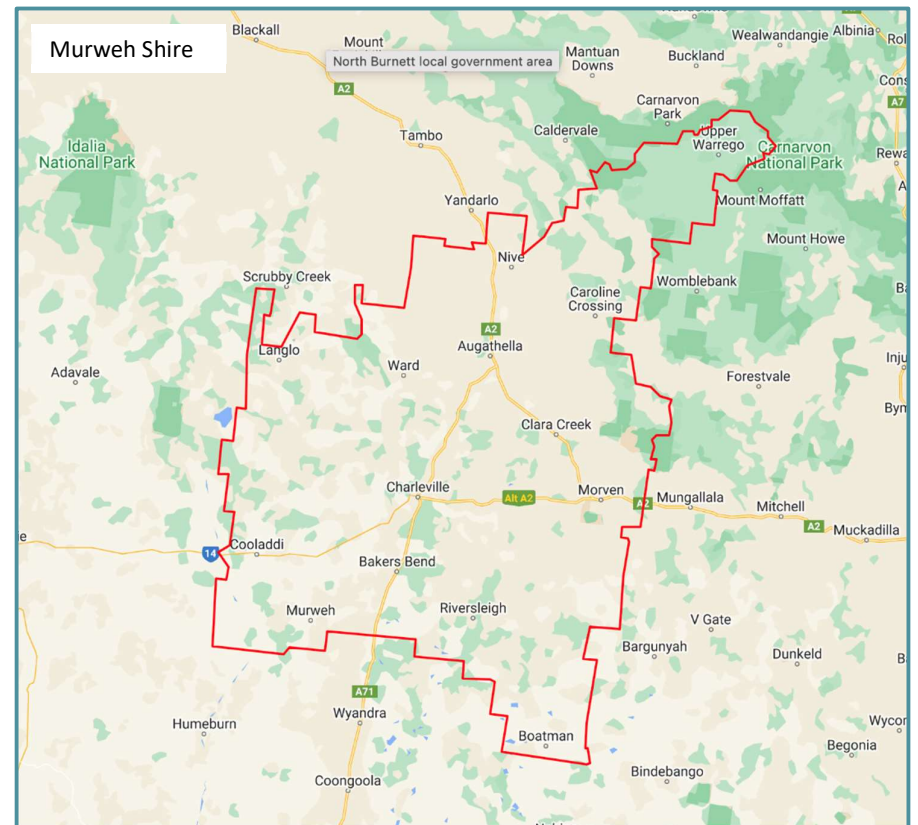
- Regional Infrastructure plans
- Murweh Shire Council Planning Scheme
- Relevant Council strategy reports and plans
- Statistical data via the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, including Census and other data sets such as building approvals, rental market data, housing approvals
- Housing 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

Murweh Shire Council key details

- Murweh Local Government Area (LGA) has a total land area of 47,828 km².
- Charleville is the main population centre and is located approximately 786km, or 9-hours' drive, west of Brisbane.
- The shire also has smaller localities of Augathella, Cooladdi and Morven.
- The agriculture industry is the primary focus through beef, sheep and goat production.
- The region also has a growing tourism sector, with visitors drawn to scenic landscapes, wildlife, cultural experiences, historic sites and clear skies.





Key Community Characteristics

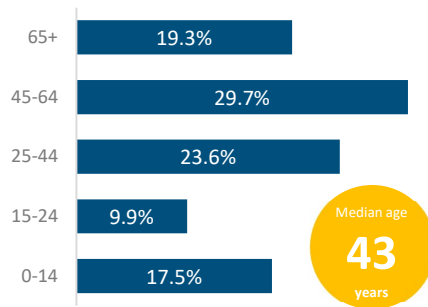


Key Demographic Characteristics

Estimated resident population is **3971** and is projected to increase to **4044** by 2041 (1.84 %)

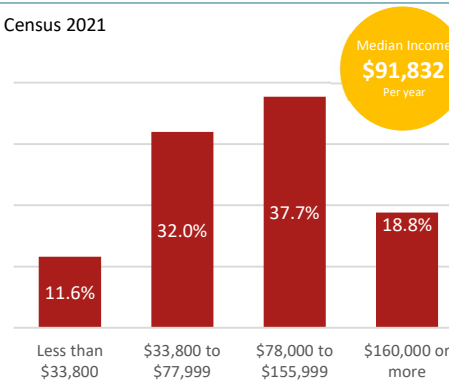
Age

Census 2021



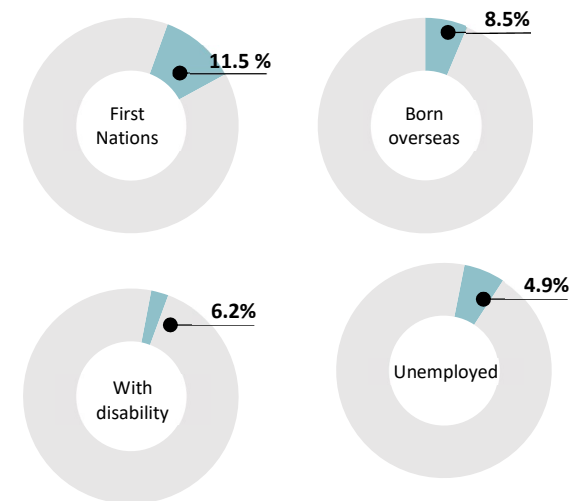
Family Income

Census 2021



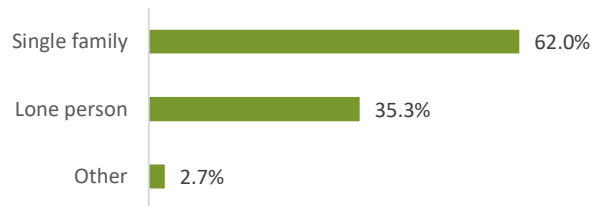
Other characteristics

Census 2021



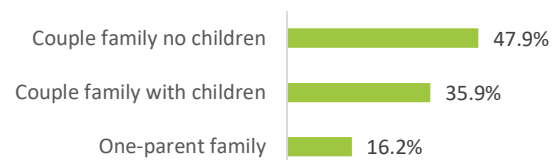
Household composition

Census 2021



Family composition

Census 2021



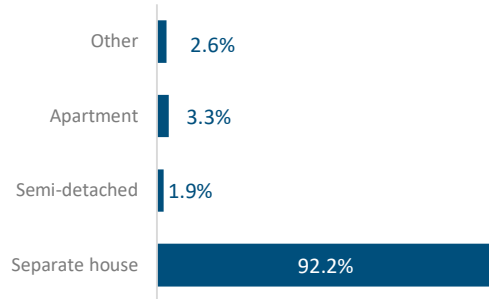


Key Housing Characteristics

Total Occupied dwellings (2021) **759**

Dwellings by Structure

Census 2021



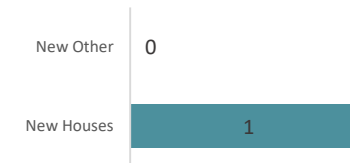
Median rent

Census 2021



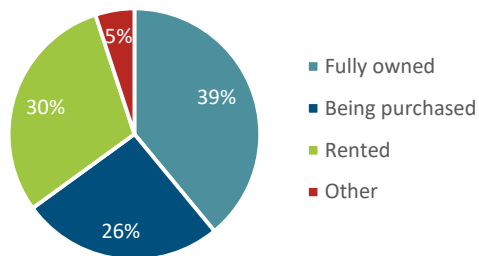
Building approvals

12 months to 30/06/22 - ABS



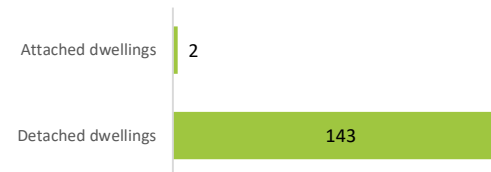
Dwellings by Tenure

Census 2021



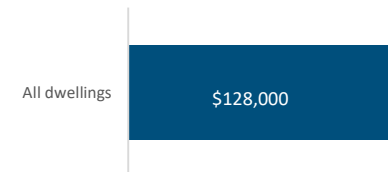
Number of sales

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

Housing demand in Murweh Shire is based on growth of government and Council employees as well as social and affordable housing. In the region 63.6% of private occupied dwellings are owned compared to 63.5% in Queensland and of these properties 25.1% are owned with a mortgage.

Occupied dwellings at the 2021 census represented 81% of the housing stock while unoccupied dwellings were 19% (ABS). While this represents a single point in time it may continue to be representative of the current position, however, the percentage of unoccupied dwellings is likely to be lower. This figure needs to be further investigated as it is not the experience on the ground.

The breakdown of the housing situation in terms of detail of utilisation and supply in 2021 is as follows:

- Households with families represented 68% of the households
- Single-person households made up 28.9%
- Detached houses made up 93% of the dwellings
- Semi-detached dwellings were 6%
- Units were 1% of the total dwellings
- The average number of bedrooms per dwelling was 3.3
- The average number of people per household was 2.5.

The ratio of availability of beds to persons per dwelling suggests sufficient capacity if dwelling mix aligns with demand structure. This situation would indicate a focus on the provision of smaller two-bed semi-detached dwellings and units for future housing stock supply, however, Council would still prefer to consider a mixture of housing to encourage families to further develop the community.

Currently, there are 91 dwellings for sale in Charleville with prices between \$100,000 and \$400,000. House sales over the past decade have ranged between 40 and 60 houses annually with median sale prices as low as \$70,000 and as high as \$145,000(RAI). The median house price has recovered from the low price of \$65,000 in 2019, to \$105,000 in 2021(RAI). The more recent peak may have been influenced by both drought recovery and the COVID pandemic, which may have influenced a trend of relocations to regional areas.

Fifty-five dwellings were sold in the past 12 months with a median price ranging between \$120,000 for a two-bedroom unit, up to \$217,000 for a four-bedroom house. There is no specific housing detail for Morven or Augathella, and there was no recent house construction activity evidenced.

The housing stock has aged, and its standard has not been maintained to attract investment and capital return other than from rental income. While land prices are low, costs of construction are substantial due to material supply logistics and limited local housing construction contractors in the region. There have been 16 private houses constructed in the region between 2016 and 2021.

Council has been considering future expansion of its residential land for new higher standard housing. State land adjacent to the most recent residential development has the potential to allow for expansion of the existing development and Council has already expressed its interest in future developing of this land.



Response opportunities

Focus on immediate housing responses to the current housing shortage through:

- Identification and repurposing of underutilised properties for accommodation
- Construction of temporary accommodation
- Leasing properties as they become available, while developing longer-term resilient and sustainable housing options that can underpin the economic development of the region.
- State and Federal Government review of financial support to provide financial options that are more attractive to home buyers and local house investors.
- Infrastructure planning is required to undertake greenfield development to add additional lots for housing and the development of a business case for funding support.
- Provision of a higher proportion of two-bedroom semi-detached units in the housing supply mix for singles and single parent families to be considered.

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 (3) quarters of Queensland LGAs (77%) have vacancy rates under 1% as at December 2021. The current vacancy rate (as at August 2022) in Charleville is 0.0%. Rented dwellings represent 33% of the total dwellings which aligns with the Queensland rate of 33% in 2021 (ABS).

Charleville's rental market has virtually collapsed with only one (1) unit advertised as available through private rentals in the town. The single real estate agent has a total of 228 dwellings under rental management. New construction for private rental to increase the market is unlikely to be financially viable in the immediate future.

Renovation of existing rental stock to improve the standards is costly and unattractive for private investors looking for reasonable returns. Concerns were expressed about the changes to tenancy laws which appear to have influenced decisions on property management with some unoccupied houses being excluded from the rental market.

Current rental prices vary from around \$200 to \$350 per week. Council age pensioner units are rented in the order of \$100 per week under subsidised assistance. Low income and supported individuals and families have limited entry into the private rental market. Their only option is to seek access to social housing alternatives. Social housing development increases options for those most susceptible to private market challenges and reduces demand on lower-priced private properties.

Vacant disused commercial buildings may also provide opportunities for repurposing into managed single bed accommodation with shared facilities. Council has been proactive in this area by approving the change of use of the former Charleville Hotel which has been converted into a boarding house, accommodating visa workers who are employed at the expanded meatworks. Council has also assisted in the development of flats above a commercial building in the CBD. Five employees of The Royal Flying Doctor Service are accommodated in this development and the owner is considering construction of an additional 17 flats in this building. There are numerous other commercial buildings in Charleville that could be investigated for repurposing into residential accommodation.



Recent development at Morven could be an example for other small towns. The Morven Ratepayers Association has taken over 4 houses which they rent and are gradually renovating. The Association rents 1 of the houses to Queensland Health. Due to the lack of rental accommodation in Augathella, Council also has been renting 2 aged pensioner units to Queensland Health displacing access to the intended users. This situation also occurs in Charleville where Council also rents 1 of its aged pensioner units to Queensland Health.

As the demand for employee rentals increase for transient fixed contract staff, local community rental demand is challenged. Anecdotally, it was noted that this situation results in increased rental prices for houses with reasonable liveability quality.

Response opportunities

- Consideration is to be made on bringing forward any proposed social housing projects to increase rental stock and free up lower cost rentals for market availability.
- Investigation of the current rental supply market and the currently unoccupied dwellings to identify opportunities that bring additional “hidden” rental supply into the market is to be considered.
- Investigation of vacant disused commercial buildings could also be considered to repurpose their use for single bed facilities, reducing the instances of single renters utilising multi bed dwellings.

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. Median household incomes in Charleville are \$1,294, compared to the Queensland median of \$1,675. The total income for 24.8% of households is less than \$650 per week compared to the Queensland figure of 16.4% (ABS) and the income for 12.9% of the households which exceeds \$3,000 per week is well below the State average of 21.9%. As a consequence, it is understood that the social housing demand in Charleville is very high with a long-term waiting list.

Low income, supported individuals and families find it difficult to enter the private rental market when the minimum weekly rent exceeds the target of 30% of their household income, making it unlikely that they can avoid financial stress. Details from ABS (2021 census) recorded that 71.0% of households in Murweh have rental charges of less than 30% of their total income, while there were 14.5% of households with rental costs greater than the 30% indicator of rental stress.

Social housing is managed by the state government in Murweh and has a stock 61 dwellings located in Charleville. Council operates the South-Western District Retirement Village, which has 21 dwellings (consisting of 3 houses and 18 units), being utilised for social and affordable accommodation.

Interviews conducted with local stakeholders indicate that some community members may have withdrawn from making applications for social housing until they are aware of houses becoming available. It is noted that these applications for social housing are received at the Courthouse. Concern has been raised regarding the clash of circumstances in visiting the Courthouse. Opportunities for management through local oversight and support have been raised in the community interviews.



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

Supply limitation results in unintended demand management. Increasing supply and reducing vacancy time, rather than reducing demand, is one of the main focuses to rectify the social housing shortfall. The number and type of dwellings will also impact on the ability to house as many persons as possible. Suggestions were received during the interview process that the provision of more single and double units or combination units will avoid tying up larger numbers of three-bedroom dwellings to house sole inhabitants.

Solutions to social housing issues were proposed during community interviews in a number of LGA’s and are as follows:

- Increased rental stock through partnerships with community/social housing providers.
- Review tenancy management including increased frequency of inspections.
- Possible use of local community housing provider services.
- Create partnerships with lessees to look after dwellings.
- Construct single temporary accommodation with support services on site.
- Repurposing commercial buildings for residential use.
- Tenants moving away but retaining leases for possible return needs to be monitored and managed.
- Lease agreements to be both partners names to avoid a single person retaining the house as a result of a partnership break up.
- Review of the Rental Purchase Plan Housing Scheme for increased ownership of social houses with reduced operational and damage costs.
- Consideration of mental health issues associated with lack of housing.

Response opportunities

- Investigation of options to urgently address short falls, such as the provision of temporary single/double units.
- Consider alternatives to tenancy management and the engagement of local management partnerships with a focus on tenancy performance in order to minimise repair costs.
- Review of the Rental Purchase Plan to increase ownership of social houses and reduce operational and damage costs.
- Investigate partnerships with social/community housing providers for development of private facilities on Council land.



4. Aged Housing and Care

Council provides aged pensioner housing in the area. Twelve houses are provided in Charleville, 10 units are provided in Augathella, and 2 units in Morven, which are managed by the Morven Progress Association. Council has added to its aged housing dwellings in Charleville by retaining houses acquired through the sale of properties for rate arrears of rates.

As noted above, Queensland Health currently rents 2 council owned units in Augathella and 1 house in Charleville as there is no alternative accommodation available in those towns. Notwithstanding the benefits of enabling these officers to reside in the communities this situation has reduced the availability of aged persons accommodation in these locations.

The South West Retirement Village, managed by a not-for-profit organisation, operates an 18-unit facility. Demand for additional units is currently unknown and will need to be defined. The number of aged persons residing in social housing and those in home care may provide an indication of future demand.

The South West Hospital & Health Service operates the Waroona Nursing Home which is a 45-bed facility.

Response opportunities

- Demand assessment for aged and retirement housing is to be completed, assisting in forward planning and investment in this sector.
- Construction of government employee housing in Augathella and Charleville should return government utilised aged pensioner units into the housing stock.

5. Employee Housing

In order to employ appropriately skilled and suitable job applicants, employers are required to prioritise attraction and retention incentives such as housing when housing stock is limited, and the standards do not match accommodation expectations.

Relocating employees' families away from more populated areas creates stress and therefore availability of good-standard housing assists in this transition and work performance. Council provides houses for 3 executive officers. These houses are leased following the calling of expressions of interest from the private sector to construct new houses to specified standards on land given over by the Council. Long term leases (5 plus years) provide Council with secure tenancy at a negotiated rental cost relieving councils of the Capex and Opex expenditure of property ownership. At the end of the lease period the process is repeated securing new houses for executive staff whilst releasing high quality housing stock into the private rental market.



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 where located on operational sites e.g., police stations, hospitals and schools. They also rent housing in the private market. Table 1 provides current GEH supply and demand data for Murweh Shire.

As indicated previously (Section 2. Rental Market) Queensland Health privately rents properties in Morven, Augathella and Charleville as demand has exceeded available GEH or departmental supply. Provision of accommodation by GEH and departments in this type of situation should release these properties for their original use as community or social/aged persons housing.

GEH have provided a current list of housing demand in western Queensland local governments. It is proposed that 1 additional house be constructed in Augathella; and seven 7 additional houses as well as 2 units in Charleville. It is understood that construction on the units has commenced. It is not known whether these dwellings will replace the current use of Council housing or reduce any private houses which are currently leased by Queensland Health.

Employment housing policies and practices vary across departments. It is understood Queensland Police do not have a policy obligation to house its employees, however, they do own dwellings attached to police stations which are provided to employees. Queensland Health do have a policy for housing employees and there are specific work, health and safety policies on housing employees. There are few dwellings that meet these requirements which requires Queensland Health to consider alternative arrangements to secure appropriate housing, such as entering long term leasing agreements as well as providing employee housing assistance.

Security of accommodation for these essential workers has been raised as a concern particularly for police and health workers. This issue has resulted in the establishment of shared accommodation in some circumstances.

Private employee housing was not evidenced, however as previously stated, the meat works visa employees are being housed in the repurposed Charleville Hotel.

Town	GEH Housing Supplied	GEH Housing Demand
Charleville	81	9
Augathella	1	1
Morven	4	0

Table 1: GEH housing supply and demand in the Murweh Shire

Response opportunities

- Consideration to be made on the supply and demand of government employee housing and opportunities for additional rental housing if more government employee housing is made available.



6. Cohort Specific Housing

The following cohort specific housing has been identified as requiring to be addressed in Murweh Shire.

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

There are 5 crisis housing properties available in Charleville for any of the above cohorts. These houses are managed by the Charleville Neighbour Centre, which is a not-for-profit organisation. The Centre suggests another three (3) plus houses are required. However, the Centre may not have sufficient resources to oversee any additional houses and may require additional funding.

One of the higher demands recognised as requiring crisis housing is domestic and family violence victims or perpetrators. Due to current supply and demand, some of these persons are housed with other family or friends; in motels; or transported to Roma or Toowoomba when no alternative option is available. As discussed in the interviews, none of these options provide suitable outcomes.

There appears to be low demand for disability housing with only 1 person with a disability housed in 1 of Council's aged persons duplexes in Augathella. However, a demand analysis is required to adequately determine disability housing cohort requirements.

Homelessness does not appear to be a major factor impacting on the communities in the shire. "Couch Surfing" by young singles seems to avoid the occurrence of youth homelessness, and overcrowding avoids family homelessness. There has been no evidence raised in regard to sleeping rough. Charleville and Western Areas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health (CWAATSICH) raised concern that overcrowding is causing family issues, including mental health problems.

Response opportunities

- Investigation to be completed into crisis housing in Charleville for cohorts of domestic and family violence in order to identify the need for such housing as a priority.
- Disability housing requirements should also be further investigated.
- Evidence of the extent of family and youth homelessness that results in couch surfing and overcrowding should be quantified to further validate social housing demand estimates.



7. Future Housing Demand

Growth in the existing meatworks will require additional future accommodation. The current solution of repurposing an existing closed hotel is an effective solution for current workers, and dependant on the type of workers employed other solutions may be required.

Other future developments, such as the resources sector, will also require specific solutions on how companies staff their developments such as site camps. If conventional local employment is utilised, Council will have to plan for land development in readiness for housing options. Therefore, flexibility in these housing options will make economic development in the region from future resource development more attractive.

Response opportunities

- The proposed expansion of the meatworks at Charleville may have further social and economic impact to the town. Flexible approaches to the housing requirements to service this growth will need investigation. Council should continue to encourage local innovative solutions to the housing demand.



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 Murweh 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	Timeline Starting in March 2023 (months)
1.1	Conduct detailed assessment of current Council and State 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	Investigate the provision of additional residential land in conjunction the State on unallocated state land.	12
2	Planning	
2.1	Undertake, in conjunction with the Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC) and WQAC, an analysis of the LHAP Data Collection for Murweh Shire to assist in the assessment of housing needs and the identification of opportunities in relation to regional collaboration in addressing housing needs across both public and private sectors.	6
2.2	Review regional and local planning schemes to meet housing needs objectives through review of 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 needs.	12



2.3	Prepare a draft Murweh 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
-----	--	----

3 Optimisation

3.1	Council and 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 under-utilised land and buildings and the housing needs assessment.	12-24
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
3.3	Council continue to consider innovative means to repurpose unused commercial space for conversion into residential occupancy.	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
4.2	Investigate master planning of suitable housing accommodation for the future employees of the meatworks expansion and resources sector in conjunction with the State Government.	12

5 Supports

5.1	Federal Government 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 in meeting these additional costs and obtaining equitable access to essential services.	12
5.3	State Government to 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 on the general housing markets.	5 years

6	People in need	
6.1	Consider how Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) can be incorporated into existing properties where required and future developments.	12-24
6.2	Undertake a detailed needs assessment, having regards to the Data Collection findings, to determine necessary action for any specific identified cohorts such as young people, individuals and households; in response to family and domestic violence situations by way of immediate support for crisis housing on a temporary or more permanent basis.	12-24
6.3	Undertake an assessment of aged person housing demand and resolve stakeholder roles for aged person housing delivery.	12-24

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 in the towns but using more sustainable and resilient materials.	12-24
7.2	Encourage housing development which may repurpose existing commercial properties 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 having regard to the recommendations of the RAI-WQAC Western Queensland Housing Solutions Report – September 2021.	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 plans being incorporated in the arrangements.	12-24
8.3	Engage with private land owners and developers with land opportunities to maximise use of existing underutilised land without having to develop costly green field sites thus promoting a gradual improvement in the quality of the housing stock.	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.