



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

Paroo Shire Council

www.paroo.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*, Paroo 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 Paroo 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 Paroo 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:

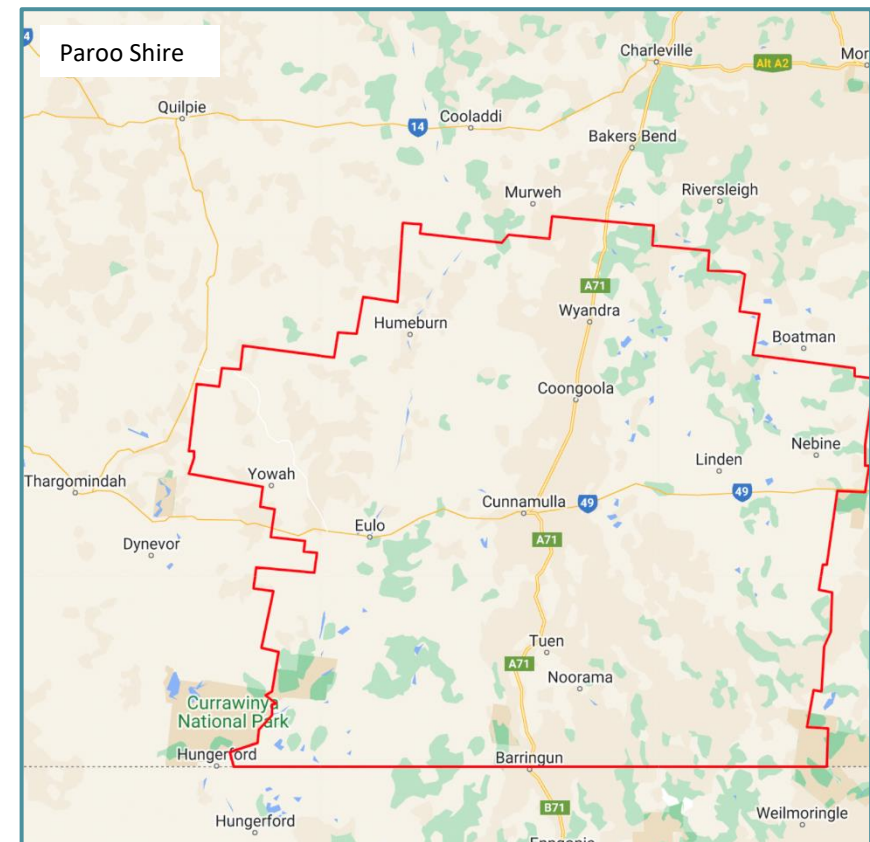
- Regional Infrastructure plans
- Paroo Shire Council Planning Scheme
- Relevant Council strategy reports and plans
- Statistical data via the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, including Census and other data sets such as building approvals, rental market data, housing approvals
- Housing needs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

Paroo Shire Council key details

- Paroo Local Government Area (LGA) has a total land area of 47,828 km².
- Cunnamulla is the main population centre and is located approximately 786km, or 9-hours' drive, west of Brisbane. It is also 200 km south of Charleville.
- The shire also has smaller localities of Wyandra, Eulo and Yowah.
- The agriculture industry is the primary focus through beef production.
- The region also has a growing tourism trade, with visitors drawn to scenic landscapes, opals and cultural experiences.





Key Community Characteristics

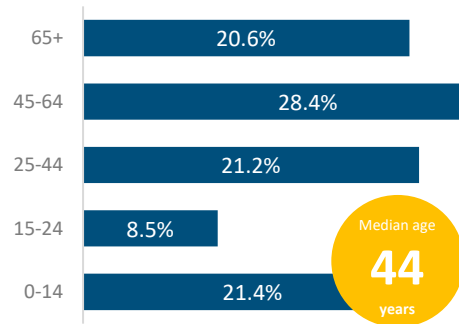


Key Demographic Characteristics

Estimated resident population is **1679** and is projected to decrease to **1451** by 2041 (-13.6%)

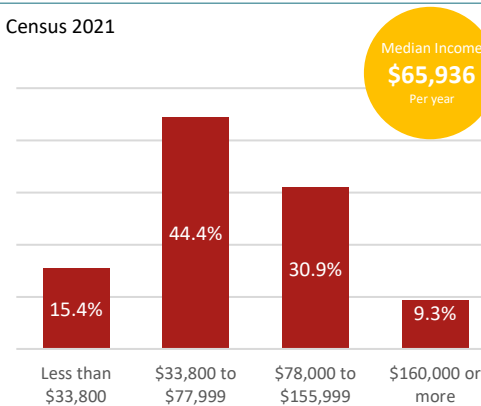
Age

Census 2021



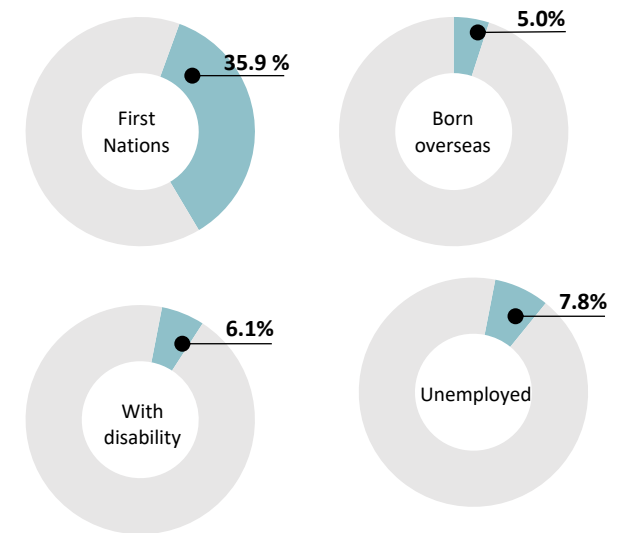
Family Income

Census 2021



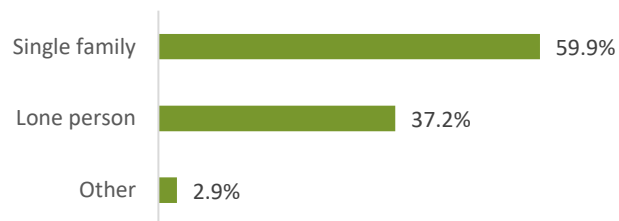
Other characteristics

Census 2021



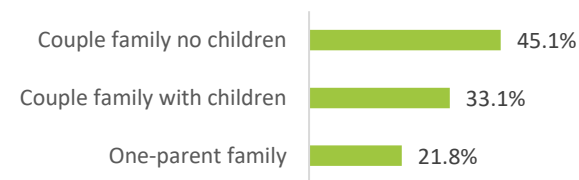
Household composition

Census 2021



Family composition

Census 2021



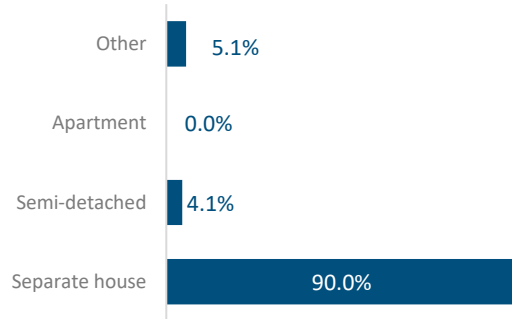


Key Housing Characteristics

Total Occupied dwellings (2021) **694**

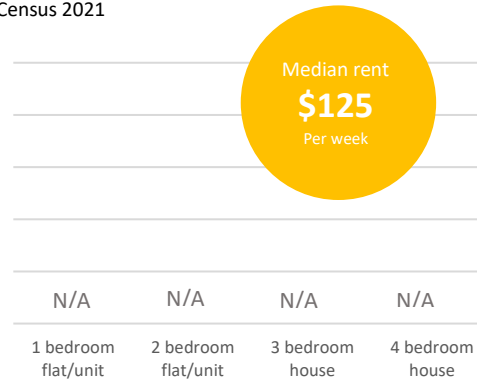
Dwellings by Structure

Census 2021



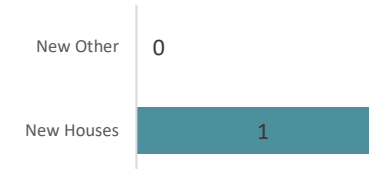
Median rent

Census 2021



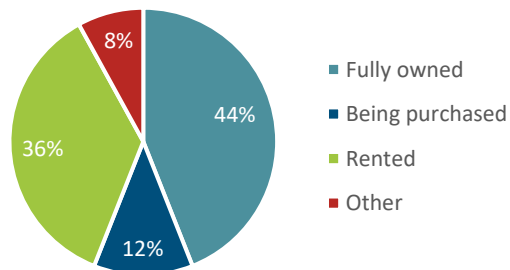
Building approvals

12 months to 30/06/22 - ABS



Dwellings by Tenure

Census 2021



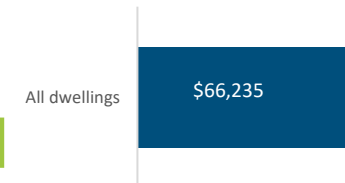
Number of sales

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 Paroo Shire is based on growth of government and Council employees as well as social and affordable housing. In the region 54.9% of private occupied dwellings are owned compared to 63.5% in Queensland and of these properties 12.2% are owned with a mortgage.

Occupied dwellings at the 2021 census represented 71.8% of the housing stock while unoccupied dwellings were 27.9% (ABS). While this represents a single point 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 (ABS) was as follows:

- Households with families represented 59.7% of the households
- Single-person households made up 37%
- Detached houses made up 90.5% of the dwellings
- Semi-detached dwellings were 4%
- There were no units available
- The average number of bedrooms per dwelling was 2.8
- The average number of people per household was 2.2.

The ratio of availability of beds to persons per dwelling indicates sufficient capacity if dwelling mix aligned with demand structure. There is opportunity to increase the number of semi-detached houses and units in the housing stock as the number of single residents makes up a sizable portion of the demand.


Dwellings for sale in Cunnamulla are very limited and currently there is only two houses advertised as available for purchase. The current asking sale price is in the range of \$220,000 and \$260,000. House sales over the past decade have been between 10 and 20 houses annually and median sale prices are between \$30,000 and \$70,000(RAI). Only five (5) houses have been sold since January 2020. The sale price varied from \$40,000 to \$160,000. The current median sales price is \$60,000 (Census 2021).

Unlike the rest of Queensland in the current economic climate, Paroo has not experienced the same levels of increased house prices. There have been two (2) price spikes in the last five (5) years. The more recent increase may have been influenced by the COVID pandemic which resulted in a trend of relocations to regional areas.

The housing stock has aged, and its standard has not been maintained to attract investment and capital return other than for rental income. While land prices are very low, costs of construction are substantial due to material supply logistics and no local house construction contractors available in the region. There was only one (1) private house constructed between 2016 and 2021.

The liveability standards of the housing stock have decreased over many decades mainly due to the lack of building trades and the cost of renovation with the lack of capital return on the cost of improvements. Some of the housing stock appears not to meet current expectations of liveability standards and the risk of asbestos being present in local buildings is also an impediment to their improvement with the added costs of removal given the lack of trained removal specialists and local disposal facilities.

The removal of these uninhabitable buildings would free up lots for replacement by new dwellings if it could be achieved at a minimal cost. Options to encourage existing owners to enter into arrangements such as a new unit for old may provide savings as an alternative to undertaking expensive new residential subdivision.



Housing affordability is also a major concern even if there was healthy competition in the housing market. With financial institutions requiring upwards of 50 percent deposit and mortgage insurance as security there is little local capacity to invest in new residential development.

There are currently no lots advertised for sale in Cunnamulla and there was only one (1) lot sold since July 2020. There is, however, sufficient vacant land capable of being developed for residential lots.

Additionally, there is no real estate agent in Cunnamulla, however Ray White Real Estate (which operates in Charleville) assists purchaser and vendor contracts. The majority of sales seem to occur through local knowledge of availability and private negotiations.

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
- State and Federal Government review of financial support to provide options that are more attractive to home buyers and local housing investors.

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 Cunnamulla is 0.0%. Rented dwellings represent 34.7% of the total dwellings which compares well with Queensland's level of 33% in 2021 (ABS).

Cunnamulla's rental market has virtually collapsed with no advertised private rentals available in town. As there is no real estate agency in Cunnamulla, any available rentals are sourced through local community knowledge. Local private property owners have taken advantage of the tight rental market by increasing their property portfolio as houses become available for sale. However, new construction for private rental to increase the market and housing quality is unlikely to be financially viable for the foreseeable future.

Renovation of existing rental stock to improve the standards is costly and unattractive for private investors looking for reasonable returns. Examples of high cost of renovation to meet tenancy requirements and the lack of capital return to breakeven has resulted in some landlords exiting the rental market. Concerns were also expressed about changes to tenancy laws which appear to have influenced decisions on property management, with some unoccupied houses excluded from the rental market.

The "hidden" market has resulted where word of mouth local knowledge is one of the only opportunities to source rental housing. These arrangements have secured higher rental prices and longer-term rentals, however, those attempting relocation for employment in the region ("not in the know") may be unable to accept the offer of employment.

Current rental prices vary from around \$200 to \$350 per week. Low income 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 properties.



Vacant disused commercial buildings may also provide opportunities for repurposing into managed single bed facilities with shared facilities. There are a limited opportunities for these in Cunnamulla.

As the demand for rentals increase for transient fixed contract staff, local community demand is challenged. Anecdotally, it was noted this situation results in increased rental prices for houses with reasonable liveability quality. The recent example of Catholic Education constructing quality employee housing in Cunnamulla provides a solution to the rental crisis and provides a lead for other employers. The costs 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 may be a possible solution.

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 in Cunnamulla to look at opportunities that bring additional rental supply into the market could be also considered.
- Investigation of vacant disused commercial buildings could also be considered to repurpose their use for single bed accommodation with shared facilities, reducing the instances of single renters utilising multi-bed dwellings.
- Provision of support to service provider employers could be offered for the construction of employee housing, in order to free up transient employees monopolising higher quality housing at higher rental, which in turn displaces community rental access.

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 weekly household income in Cunnamulla is \$920, compared to the Queensland median of \$1,675. The total income for 35.2% of households was less than \$650 per week compared to the Queensland figure of 16.4% (ABS) and the income for 7.5% 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 social housing demand in Cunnamulla is high with a long-term waiting list.

Interviews conducted 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. It is noted that these applications 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” have been raised in numerous interviews with one housing provider describing an instance of discovering up to seven (7) beds in a three (3) bedroom house. It is considered by the interviewees that these situations aggravate social issues causing other unintended consequences, such as family and domestic violence. This limited availability of housing may also be resulting in persons relocating from the region.



Social housing is managed by the State Government in Paroo with a stock of 82 dwellings located in Cunnamulla and two (2) of these are located in Wyandra. Council manages 14 dwellings in Cunnamulla.

Increasing supply and reducing vacancy time, rather than reducing demand, is one of the main avenues to rectifying the current social housing shortfall. The number and type of dwellings will also impact on housing as many persons as possible. Suggestions were received that the provision of more single and double units (or combination units) will avoid tying up larger numbers of three-bedroom dwellings being occupied by sole inhabitants.

Council has been investigating a proposed partnership with the St Vincent De Paul social housing provider to develop a private social housing estate on Council land. Details of the proposal are documented in the Cunnamulla Housing Development Report provided in the *Cunnamulla Housing Development Report*: <<https://bit.ly/Cunnamulla-Housing-Development-Report>>.

Solutions proposed in community interviews conducted are as follows:

- Increased rental stock through partnerships with social housing providers
- Review tenancy management including increased frequency of inspections
- Possible use of local housing provider services
- Create partnership with lessee to look after the dwelling
- Construct single temporary accommodation with support services on site
- Repurposing commercial buildings for residential purposes e.g., former Oxford Hotel on the corner of Railway Street and Bowra Street
- Persons moving away but retaining leases for possible return requires monitoring and management
- Lease agreements to be in both partner's names to avoid a single person retaining the house in 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 focus on tenancy performance in order to minimise repair costs.
- Promote the Housing Buy Back Schemes to reduce the financial burden of renovations to aging housing infrastructure and investigate other proposals suggested during the consultation process.
- Investigation of partnerships with social housing providers for development of private facilities on Council land, as proposed by Councils' Cunnamulla Housing Development Report.

- Investigation of opportunities to repurpose unused former commercial buildings.
-

4. Aged Housing and Care

Aged housing and care are currently in a state of transition in Cunnamulla. Council provides aged pensioner housing and there is a vacant 12-unit aged care facility (Yapunyah Lodge) previously operated in partnership with Churches of Christ as the registered provider.

Council manages two (2) aged pensioner duplexes in conjunction with duplexes constructed by the State on Council land on Francis and Louise Streets. This situation is an anomaly, in that Council also funds maintenance costs of the entire facility but has no input with tenancy arrangements.

Yapunyah Lodge has been closed for two (2) years following the withdrawal of the registered provider (Churches of Christ). Council has sought alternative providers for the facility however, this has not been successful, and the facility remains vacant.

Queensland Health is soon to construct a facility located at the hospital and Council will have to consider alternative utilisation. Incorporation of the vacant Yapunyah Lodge as a facility focussed on the aged would utilise current capacity.

Response opportunities

- Investigations to be conducted regarding opportunities for the unused aged care facility (Yapunyah Lodge) in conjunction with services that are to be provided with the facility being developed at the hospital.
 - Resolution to be sought regarding the anomaly created with Council currently managing the State facility co-located on Council land with Council's age pensioner duplexes.
-

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 standards do not match accommodation expectations from where they are relocating.

Relocating employee families away from more populated areas creates stress and therefore availability of good standard housing assists in this transition and performance. Council provides eight (8) houses and one (1) duplex for staff accommodation. Currently, there are four (4) vacant Council positions, and the appointees will be housed in the existing dwellings. However, Council is considering adding another three (3) dwellings to its housing stock for employees.

The State Government supplies housing for its employees under two (2) schemes. The Government Employee Housing arrangement (GEH) provide a range of housing types for government employees in government owned dwellings. The majority are provided to 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 houses in the private market.. Table 1 provides current supply and demand within Paroo Shire.

GEH have provided a current list of housing demand in Western Queensland local governments. It is proposed that two (2) additional houses be constructed in Cunnamulla. 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 does 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 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.

Catholic Education recently constructed a four (4) bed housing facility and three (3) two-bed units for its teaching staff. These facilities cost in the order of \$500,000 each and provide an example of construction that may fit with the amenity of the area.

Response opportunities

- Investigate the supply and demand of government employee housing and including the opportunity 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 being required to be addressed in Paroo Shire.

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

Currently, there is no specific crisis housing made available in Cunnamulla for any of the above cohorts. One of the higher demands recognised as requiring crisis housing is for domestic and family violence victims or perpetrators. These persons are currently housed with other family members or friends, in motels; or transported to Roma or Toowoomba where no alternative option is available. None of these options provide satisfactory outcomes. There are examples in other Western Queensland towns where crisis housing is supplied and managed by a not-for-profit organisation which is funded by the Federal Government.

There appears to be low demand for disability, with only one (1) person with disability housed in one (1) of Council's aged pensioner duplexes. It is understood NDIS funding allocation is not fully subscribed at this time in Cunnamulla and disability needs will require analysis.

Homelessness does not appear to be a major factor impacting on the Cunnamulla community. Only one example was raised during interviews, and this person was housed in Council's aged pensioner units. "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.

Response opportunities

- Investigation to be completed into crisis housing in Cunnamulla for cohorts of domestic and family violence in order to identify the need for such housing.
- Evidence of the extent of family and youth homelessness that results in couch surfing and overcrowding should be qualified to test social housing demand estimates.
- Demand for disability housing requires further detailed assessment.



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



Actions

Paroo 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 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	Undertake an assessment of Council land in William St / Florence St for housing development as proposed in the attached Cunnamulla Housing Development report in conjunction with a housing provider partnership.	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 Paroo 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	Continue to investigate the Cunnamulla Housing Development proposal to partner with a nominated social housing provider to develop social housing.	12

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 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
4.2	Continue to investigate master planning on the lots of William Street and Florence Street, Cunnamulla as a partnership approach with the nominated social housing provider.	12

5 Supports		
5.1	Federal Government to re-allocate the 12 aged/disabled care accommodation packages to Yapunyah Lodge at Cunnamulla (which was formerly an aged care facility) and, with the support of the State Government, consider additional assistance from registered providers to participate in the repurposing of Yapunyah Lodge, or alternatively, incorporate the facility with the Queensland Health redevelopment of the hospital precinct.	12-24
5.2	State Government and Council consider additional actions to support and address aged pensioner housing needs through resolution of management of the Francis and Louise Streets facility subject to the resolution of the cohort's needs.	12
5.3	Investigate what the Federal Government programs/funding/incentives are available to encourage and assist local youth to take on trades in the local building industry.	12-24
5.4	Jointly promote with WQAC and other local governments State and Federal Governments provision of financial assistance in grants for rural and remote LGA's to support delivery of employee housing to reduce the financial burden on communities in funding these additional costs and obtaining equitable access to essential services.	12
5.5	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 to 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 to determine necessary actions in response to domestic and family violence situations for any specific identified cohorts such as young people, rough sleepers, individuals and households; with the view to providing immediate support in regard to crisis housing on a temporary or more permanent basis.	12-24
6.3	Undertake an assessment of aged housing demand and resolve the roles of aged pension housing delivery.	12-24

7 Construction		
7.1	Identify opportunities to enable housing construction in 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
7.1	Identify opportunities to enable housing construction in 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

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 of the housing stock quality.	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.