MAYORAL MINUTE NO. 8/2017

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING WITHIN THE HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL

11 July 2017

Councillors,

As you know, I am a passionate advocate for initiatives that address the circumstances and issues around domestic violence. For some time I have been developing in my mind ways in which Local Government might play its role in delivering tools to help our community respond to domestic violence even though the tools we have available can at times be fairly limited.

Leaving a relationship where there's been domestic or family violence is never an easy step. In addition to the immediate crisis, there are a number of issues to be sorted through, questions like – where am I going to live? Will my kids be OK? Will I have to change their school? What am I going to live on? How am I going to manage being an only parent and juggling children and work? How can I afford my bills? How will my family be affected? What if I have to go to Court? These are questions that often mean the person chooses not to leave.

While we have amazing women's shelters to assist with the immediate needs, the reality is for most women, the transition to a violence-free life is a journey of 2-5 years. New routines of work, school, day-to-day living and family adjustment need to be established. There are ongoing support needs, tapering as women and their families become more resilient and confident. And what do they most need while this is happening? A secure, affordable home.

An affordable home for the journey of 2-5 years post crisis is incredibly important to help prevent a return to abuse. If women can be supported to stay financially independent with an affordable roof, they go on to make significant contributions to their families, the workforce, and civil society through volunteering. Investing in affordable housing for women leaving family violence makes sense. The support in the medium term pays dividends to the community in the long term.

"Transitional housing" provides safe and temporary accommodation for vulnerable members of the community, including women and children experiencing homelessness and/or domestic violence. Transitional housing can provide refuge and protection to these people during times of crisis, as well as a safe, comfortable and secure environment in which they can recover, re-build self-esteem and make informed and empowered decisions about their lives. Transitional housing if available, provides a mechanism for people experiencing violence in their home the means to get out. We all know that without financial resources the options can be pretty limited and it becomes a barrier for a person(s) to be able to leave a violent situation.

Transitional dwellings are typically managed by community housing providers and not-for-profit organisations. I feel that my time on Council has exposed me to the tools available to us to make a difference in the supply of transitional housing at a time where our land use zones are providing significant uplift. Council also has a social responsibility to encourage and grow an inclusive and connected community and foster an environment where the provision of services like transitional housing is facilitated and encouraged.

As The Hills Shire Council experiences significant residential growth over the next 20 years, we as Councillors have a unique opportunity to encourage the delivery of transitional housing for willing developers and not-for-profit organisations.

I would like to explore through the use of incentives within our planning instruments, a system where developers can voluntarily opt to provide a small amount of transitional housing within developments (for use and management by appropriate organisations), in a way which benefits the most vulnerable members of our community in need of transitional housing.

I would like to make it quite clear that the model I would like to explore is quite different in scale and operation to other initiatives for social housing that we have become familiar. Transitional housing is not social housing as such. The model I'd like to explore is not one that results in massive development uplift, not one that is compulsory and not one where the developer does not retain ownership of the dwelling.

We know that domestic violence is an important issue within our community. Indeed, our local shelter is always at capacity and can turn away up to 8 women and their children every day. As a Council we show great leadership in many resounding ways across the Local Government sector. I would like to explore a model whereby The Hills Shire Council could lead the way in solving the short supply of transitional housing. This would be a policy that could have enormous benefit for women and children in our community, and one that Council could be enormously proud of – and one that will hopefully be adopted by other Councils across the State in the future.

MOTION

Accordingly, I move that:

1) This Mayoral Minute be received.

2) The General Manager commence investigations into potential mechanisms to encourage and incentivise the provision of transitional housing as part of new residential developments within The Hills Shire.

3) The outcomes of the review be reported to Council.

Councillor Yvonne Keane
MAYOR