

Item 3.3

Millers Point Social Housing Crisis

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

It has been four years since the NSW Minister for Family and Community Services (FACS) Pru Goward MP announced the sale of 293 properties in Millers Point, Gloucester Street and the Sirius building in The Rocks affecting around 590 residents.

Of the 293 properties to be sold, 26 are still to be sold and sitting vacant and 28 were retained by the previous Minister Brad Hazzard to be used for accommodating tenants that were unable to be relocated.

Proceeds from the sale of 180 properties passed the \$570 million mark in May (plus stamp duty of \$30.8 million) and others are due to be sold this year, including the Sirius building.

The Government claims that it is “delivering a significant boost (from the sales) for social housing across the State”, yet figures show that the new properties are having little impact on NSW’s massive social housing waitlist.

And despite the fact that the cost of housing is at crisis point in inner Sydney, with less than one per cent of total housing here classed as “affordable”, the Government is using the funds from their sale to build properties in western Sydney rather than in our area.

It is a social and economic disaster. In 2013-14 alone, the price of homes in the city grew by 11.6 per cent – or *nine times* the average increase in earnings. For essential workers like teachers, nurses and police, it is an effective “lock-out”.

And tragically the sales program has had lasting negative impacts on many of the most vulnerable members of our community.

The Social Impact Assessments undertaken before the announcement cautioned that relocating social housing tenants could negatively impact on their health and wellbeing, particularly older people who identified strong connections with the area and their neighbours. Many tenants talked about not having other friends or family support systems and the high dependence they had on the relationships they had in Millers Point.

The studies warned of ongoing negative impacts with poor outcomes and difficulties establishing connections with a new community.

These Social Impact Assessments were largely ignored by the NSW Government.

Four years on, these impacts have been sadly realised. Sydney MP Alex Greenwich and staff in the City have kept in contact with many former tenants and have heard them speak of the stress and intimidation they experienced during the relocation - separated from their homes, history and community.

Some relocated tenants have told us they feel extremely lonely and isolated. They no longer feel a sense of connection and belonging to the area they are living in which has reduced their sense of safety and quality of life.

The City has supported tenants directly and indirectly throughout the relocation process as there's been a clear need for personal support and counselling. We also provided ongoing funding to the Redfern Legal Centre which tenants say has been invaluable.

Redfern Legal Centre supported residents with one-on-one legal advice, attended meetings between tenants and FACS, developed information kits and advocated on their behalf to FACS and other government agencies.

Last week Sally Parslow, a tenant in Millers Point, was given twenty-eight days to vacate her home of over 40 years. Redfern Legal Centre had appealed her case in the Supreme Court but the appeal was sadly unsuccessful.

Of the 28 properties retained by the Government for social housing, seven remain vacant. I urge the Government to investigate modifying the design of these properties to suit high priority tenants who have relocated from Millers Point and who would like to return. These tenants are some of the most vulnerable and require properties with more than one bedroom for carers or partners.

At the very least, the seven properties should be retained for social housing and not rolled into the sales program.

I also urge the Government to suspend the sales process for the remaining 26 homes currently sitting vacant and to urgently use them to also house high priority tenants forced out of Millers Point.

The fate of these tenants should give everyone pause for thought. Do we really want to live in a city that cannot make space for people on low incomes?

Sydney must never become a city only for the very wealthy. We need more social and affordable housing in the inner city, not less.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) note the negative impact the Millers Point public housing sales program has had on tenants' health, mental health and wellbeing, as predicted by the Government's own social impact assessment;
- (B) call on the Government to implement a moratorium on public housing property sales, including the Sirius building; and
- (C) call on the Government to relocate high priority tenants evicted from their community to vacant properties in Millers Point and The Rocks.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor