

## Media Release

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Day 12 March 2020

### **Sheed calls for community action to help alleviate homelessness**

Independent Member for Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed has thanked the Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee for conducting a hearing in Shepparton on Wednesday and is calling on the community to assist with combating homelessness.

“This multi-party committee chaired by Fiona Patten MP is doing valuable work in examining the causes and potential solutions to one of the most critical issues both locally and in our state,” Ms Sheed said.

Ms Sheed noted the Shepparton region frequently featured in media reporting on homelessness, driven by 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics data that indicated the area had one of the worst instances of homelessness in the state.

“Because of this reporting and borne out of my own concerns, last year my office began a wide-ranging review into the local homelessness issue,” Ms Sheed said.

The review has entered its final phase and supports representations made to the Legislative Council that homelessness in the Shepparton District is increasing, driven by worsening housing affordability.

“My office has spoken to dozens of individuals and organisations and examined many different data-sets,” Ms Sheed said.

“One of the most telling sets of data was supplied by the local water authority, identifying hundreds of unoccupied houses in our region that are sitting idle. It is a terrible state of affairs that we have unused housing stock and a growing homelessness problem – but that also implies at least one potential solution.”

The next phase of her homelessness review will involve clearly identifying unused housing stock in the Shepparton District held by both private owners and the government to the extent that that is possible.

“And this is where our community can help. We’ve reached out to the private sector and put the question to government to identify as much of this unused stock as possible with an eye to returning it to the market or onto the social housing register.

“But I’m also keen to hear from any member of the public who knows of an unoccupied dwelling. We’ve all seen them. Many of us have these types of properties on our own street and I encourage anyone to contact my office with such a location. We will add these properties to our register and investigate through whatever means necessary the ownership status and how long the property has sat idle.

“There are many potential solutions to returning these properties to use, from building on the effective head-leasing work of organisations such as Beyond Housing to lobbying the government

to properly fund the Department of Health & Human Services to renovate and maintain their unused stock.

“While such measures may not solve homelessness in our region, they will in part reduce stress on local housing affordability and offer security to some of those presently experiencing homelessness.”

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