

ISSUE 1917

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

Date: 26 June 2019

What we do – a PS

Housing

Health

What we do – a Postscript

Following on from last Friday's newsletter, some further commentary is warranted.

On Housing

Last week radio listeners during the morning of the housing conference would have heard from people that had left the meeting to be interviewed. Strange behaviour indeed. Apparently it was more important for them to report their attendance to a broader radio audience than it was to actually be in attendance, to listen to and maybe even contribute to the discussion. Very poor form I thought.

The State Housing Minister was present, and presumably he provided some view as to the government's position. Which I must say, from actions taken in recent times, is somewhat confusing.

A day before the conference, the Housing Division placed an advertisement in the local paper seeking proposals from Community Housing Providers, not-for-profit organisations and Local Councils "to deliver new social and affordable housing dwellings in rural and regional areas". What a coincidence, after all the build-up, that it would advertise this the day before the conference.

Apart from the bleeding obvious comment regarding this extraordinary approach to communicating with known groups, (ever heard of the phone, email even?, don't you do this as a matter of course? etc)), what an extraordinary admittance that the division has no ideas of its own, no planning in place, no view as to what needs to be done. no previous communication with such groups.

And yet, at the same time, it has transpired public housing stock is being sold off. Why, at this particular time? It needs the money? it doesn't want to manage the maintenance program? It's all too hard? Or is there some other "unknown" reason?

This state of unpreparedness suggests a different agenda altogether, which is that the government wants to get out of public housing. Leave it to the private sector and the not-for profits. Not our responsibility! And if this is the case, and past actions would suggest strongly that it is, then why not say so?

Trying to unpick this has not been easy, and everyone seems to have a different perspective on how this has all come about. "Very complex", they say. Here goes:

In brief, a policy was implemented by the federal government, with endorsement from the states, to encourage the transfer of public housing (ownership and/or management and maintenance) to the not-for-profit sector. Incentives (inducements) were offered to enable this to occur. Tenants in the not-for-profit sector were provided with a rental subsidy, a subsidy that was not available to tenants in public housing.

At the same time, and for a short period, monies were made available to the states to build more public housing, subject to compliant bids being made. Unfortunately, bids from Tasmania were deemed to be non-compliant and those monies were not forthcoming.

As the scheme was winding down, the University submitted a bid which was deemed to be compliant for student accommodation, and this enabled it to gain access to those funds. Uni 1, State 0.

As an aside, another Commonwealth body - Infrastructure Australia - had also offered funds for projects in a competitive bidding process for infrastructure projects that were compliant with guidelines, and Tasmania it seems never submitted a compliant bid. Again, it was the University that finally submitted a bid - to build the Menzies Centre - and this was approved as being the only Tasmanian project. Uni 2, State 0.

It seems the government agencies have not handled these processes well, and the present housing crisis could simply be a result of failed process.

A separate question needs to be asked regarding state government policy. It is understood that a not-for-profit had offered to take over (or pay-out) the State's housing debt to the Commonwealth in exchange for the transfer of much of the remaining public housing stock, but after initially supporting the idea, this offer was eventually rejected. Why?

Maybe it would leave the Housing Division with nothing to do! Certainly the workload is not what it used to be. What would se do with the people?
Maybe there is no policy framework and the department is simply free-wheeling!
Mixed messages indeed

A Parliamentary Select Committee has now been established with broad terms of reference, and is due to report back mid- October, which is a very tight time frame indeed. Let's hope they can report back with answers to these and other questions.

The RHH

A lift has broken down in the Royal. In fact it did so some 7 months ago. It was used to move patients between floors, including those in critical care. It is still out of operation. Why?

Politicians and journalists have been asking questions, but no explanation has been given, other than it was due for a service anyway. It seems an awfully long time to wait to get a lift back in operation – even, if a larger refurbishment is required. It be done on a temporary basis.

Getting back to the fundamentals.

Maybe this story might be of assistance to those in the community services business. It's a story that has had currency in management training circles.

Back in 1961, 38 members of the Green Bay Packers, an American Gridiron team, met their new coach, Vince Lombardi. The GBP were professional footballers, and good ones. They were in the grand final the previous year but had lost after having squandered a lead in the final quarter.

At that first gathering, Lombardi held up a football in his right hand and said: "Gentlemen, this is a football!" From that moment on, he went back to the very basics with the players. He created a new and fundamental focus, a clarity of thinking. They went on to win 5 of the next 7 grand-finals.

It is time for someone in our hospital system to say: "Folks, this is a patient – this is why we are here. It is the patient that matters. A patient needs our help 24/7, and that is how we are now going to run this place". 24/7. Patients first.
It might just work.