

## ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### QUESTION 82-18(2): CONSTRUCTION OF RCMP STAFF HOUSING UNITS

February 29, 2016

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I have some additional questions for the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation. I appreciate her offer to brief this side of the House on the plan with respect to housing the members of the RCMP and in which communities. I guess my more general question on this, at this point, is: What is the benefit to the NWT Housing Corporation of taking on the provision of housing to members of the RCMP? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Mahsi. Minister NWT Housing Corporation.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As previously stated in my answers, the benefit of the Housing Corporation taking on this initiative is that we will retain RCMP officers within the communities and we can use the market rent that we will be charging them to subsidize the operating maintenance costs to the public housing considering that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) funding will be dissolving. Thank you.

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that. Could the Minister elaborate on the additional revenue that will be realized through the provision of this housing? To what extent will it subsidize public housing in those same communities?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently, it costs about \$18,000 to \$20,000 a year to provide the operating and maintenance provision for public housing. For every unit that we rent out, we would be able to support that cost. Thank you.

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I am looking forward to some additional detail on that, especially as it relates to which communities the housing is going to be provided in. The Housing Corporation staff have said that there will be absolutely no effect of the provision of housing to the RCMP on the current waiting list for social housing. Can she confirm that that is the case? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As stated earlier, the initiative is not to displace public housing. It is a revenue source to be able to supplement the public housing. I also can give you some information on the federal units that the RCMP had. At this point, the federal government is saying that they're beyond repair for them to make them financially viable. They will be offering them out to market. If they are not taken up by the market within the communities, then they'll send them to negotiations with the Housing Corporation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

on the number of beds or other variables, and as a result, shelter funding varies outside of Yellowknife and puts those shelters at a disadvantage. I'll give you a concrete example: The Fort Smith shelter has eight beds and has a budget of \$515,000, whereas Hay River has 11 beds and gets \$2,000 less per year.

My question today is whether the Minister of Health and Social Services can make a commitment to review shelter funding and establish a formula that levels the playing field?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Mahsi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** We currently spend about \$2.7 million on shelters in the Northwest Territories as well as an additional \$200,000 that's available to communities or regions that don't

have shelters. There is, as the Member said, no set formula for determining the allocation authorities, and there certainly isn't a formula to provide for forced growth to the shelters or to the NGOs. This is something that we certainly are happy to look at and would be happy to have more discussions with the Member in committee.

We have looked at various ways to address inflationary increases in shelter costs. Personally, I think once we move to one authority, we'll actually be in a much better position to have meaningful discussion around this particular topic, when we have a coordinated and consolidated budgeting process, because right now every authority is running a different financial system and different budgeting process. We'll be in a much better position to have meaningful discussion on this once we move to a single authority.

**MS. GREEN:** Can I take that as a commitment that the Minister will review shelter funding and establish a formula that levels the playing field for all the family violence shelters?

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Once we move into a single authority I'd be happy to work with committee on that to determine the scope and nature. and how we can actually work to improve the process of providing funding to the shelters.

**MS. GREEN:** Shelter funding hasn't increased since 2011, and shelters are feeling the effects with buildings that are in need of repair and a high staff turnover because the wages paid are low. I'm wondering if the Minister can make a commitment to increase the funding to the shelters to support the valuable work they do on an annual basis until all the shelters are funded equally.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** As the Minister of Finance has indicated we are in a difficult financial situation. We do need to be very careful with the money that we're spending. We also have to look within to make sure that the dollars that we're spending are getting maximum effect and maximum benefit.

I will commit to working with Members through the business planning process to identify where our dollars are being spent, and as I indicated, once we have actually moved forward to one authority and we have a more consolidated budgeting process, we'll be in a better position to have a discussion with the Member and committee on the funding for the different shelters in the Northwest Territories.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Mahsi. Item 7, oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

**MS. GREEN:** It's hard to imagine a priority that is larger than keeping women and children safe from violence, given the number of incidents here and the number of deaths. If shelters are forced to close because they don't have the funds to keep their buildings open and pay their staff, a very real possibility at this point, who will respond to the needs of women and children in danger?

**HON. GLENN ABERNETHY:** I think we're saying the same thing. We both believe this is a priority and we want to continue to move forward, but we have to do it light of the fiscal realities that we're facing. I've committed to doing the review once we move to a single authority, and to having continued discussions on this particular topic during business planning.

We want the same thing. We just have to find a way of getting there.