

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 358-18(2): ADDRESSING CORE HOUSING NEEDS

October 19, 2016

MS. GREEN: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during the sitting in June, Members on this side of the House moved a housing motion in which we requested that the Minister take action on the level of core need, which is at 20 per cent for the NWT, including investing, coming up with a fully costed comprehensive plan and so on. We received her response last week and it doesn't address the questions we asked. So my first question is: how is the NWT Housing Corporation going to reduce core housing need? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of NWT Housing Corporation.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion that was put forward was that I would provide a comprehensive response to the motion and then a comprehensive and fully costed strategic plan at the earliest opportunity. So it's a little bit early to give a fully costed comprehensive plan at this point. We're in the process of negotiations with the federal government. We've made some serious progress within that. The federal government has agreed to look at a northern component to the national housing strategy, and they've also -- the three areas of the core need, the federal core need, have always been suitability, adequacy and affordability. The last meeting that I went down to I really stressed the lack of housing within the Northwest Territories and the reliance of many communities as the GNWT being the major and sometimes only housing provider. So the federal government has also agreed to incorporate accessibility within the core needs, which is a huge issue for us and I think that will actually hopefully see some revenue coming forward with that. The other thing that we're doing is part of that, so that is one piece we're doing.

The other major thing we're doing is our engagement survey which we're putting out to every single user of Housing services, hopefully within this next coming up month, and then we'll be doing a cost analysis based on what people say. I've been hearing in the communities that home ownership is a big need within the communities, and so while we're in the process of looking at cost analysis between home ownership and public housing. So once we've done the engagement process, we've gotten some kind of contribution, we find out what the federal government is doing within a national strategy at that point then we'll be able to provide a cost analysis and a comprehensive plan. Thank you.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to you, Minister, for that response. In the response to the motion the government writes: "The GNWT has made affordable, adequate and suitable housing one of its highest priorities, spending approximately 8 per cent of its budget on social and affordable housing compared to a national average of 1 per cent." Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me whether she thinks that's an adequate amount of spending for the condition and availability of housing in the territory?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I do recognize that the Government of the Northwest Territories is spending eight times the amount of funding that is provided across the other jurisdictions. So I think that we have to recognize that we are spending a lot more than other jurisdictions. We also have to recognize that we have a small population base and our federal funding is really limited. So the fact that the GNWT is spending that amount on housing shows

our commitment that we do care about housing within the Northwest Territories and it is a priority for our government.

MS. GREEN: Again, thank you to the Minister for that. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that 8 per cent is not making a difference to the core housing need in the territory, and the availability of housing especially here in Yellowknife where the waiting list is about 180, across the whole NWT about 600. So I would like to hear from the Minister whether there is a plan to increase the amount of spending on social housing.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: At this point, like I had said previously, we are in the process of just rolling out our engagement strategy. After that is all received back, we will be doing a cross-analysis, so it's a little bit premature of me to actually approach my colleagues and ask for additional monies when I don't know if we're using the monies that we are providing at the moment appropriately.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral question. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally today, a couple of timing questions. The first is, when does the Minister expect to conclude the negotiations with the federal government for more money? The second is, when does she expect to report to the House on the information she's collected from Stakeholders? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. There's two questions, but it's up to the Minister if she wants to answer one or two questions.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try to attempt both. So the federal negotiations is not up to me actually, it is a federal government ruling, and so we are advocating very strongly and, as soon as the federal government lets us know when they've developed their strategy, at that point I will know what the timing is. I'm not sure that they know at this point either. The engagement survey that we're putting out, we are allowing two months to people within the communities to actually provide their feedback because we do want as many people to answer the survey as possible. So we are recognizing that we need to need to provide them a little bit of time. Once the survey results are compiled, we will provide an interim report to the MLAs and we will continue to provide reports to the MLAs on the progress of that engagement survey process.