



Queensland Housing Strategy 2021–2025

Local Housing Action Plan

Flinders Shire Council

www.flinders.qld.gov.au

February 2023



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Introduction

Introduction

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government*, Flinders Shire Council (Council) and the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) to respond to a range of immediate, emerging, and longer-term housing challenges in the Flinders Shire.

This is an iterative process that does not intend to duplicate existing actions of Council or the actions under The Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025. It seeks to identify opportunities, consider an agreed response, develop targeted actions on key priorities and enable ongoing review of effort to adapt and respond to changing need.

The Plan aims to:

1. **develop agreed priority actions** to respond to housing need,
2. **establish strong foundations for longer-term housing responses** to assist housing and homelessness outcomes in the Flinders Shire into the future.
3. **incorporate existing information and plans** that assist with developing responses to housing need and acknowledge work already completed by the Council, State Agencies, private and not-for-profit organisations.
4. **facilitate targeted interaction between all parties through agreed actions** to ensure a focus on deliverables and projects that can improve housing responses in the short and longer-term.



Approach and methodology

The plan provides an overview of key community and housing characteristics, and emerging issues related to housing in the community and identifies a targeted initial set of priority actions to respond to housing need. It has been developed through a review of a range of supporting documentation including:

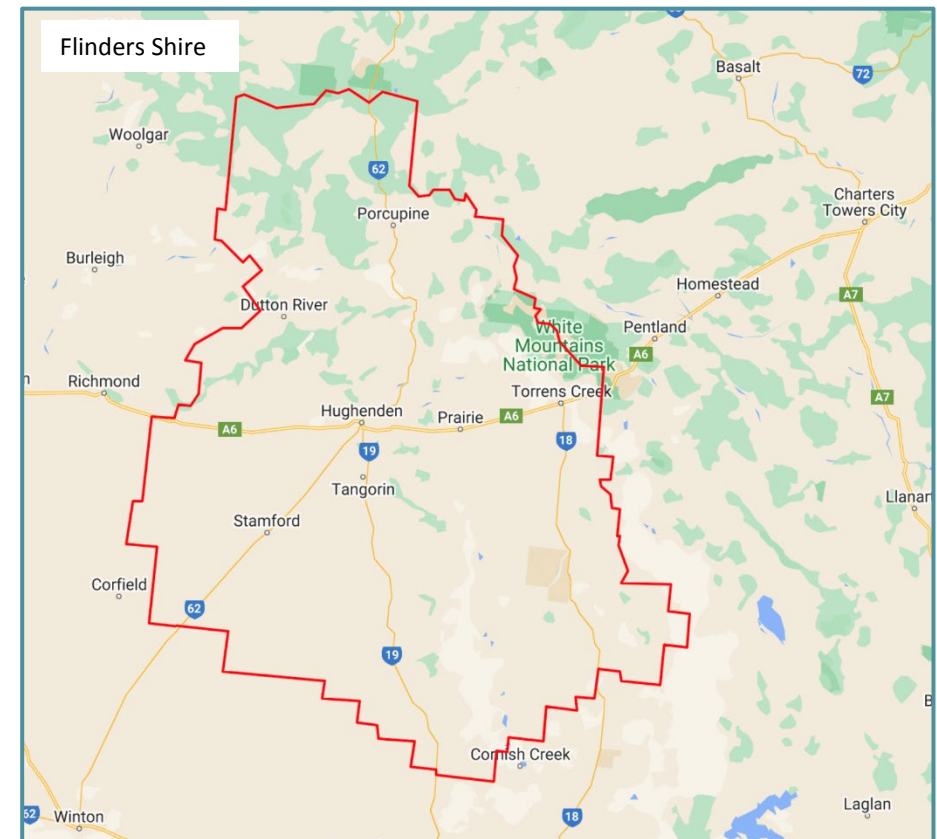
- Regional Infrastructure plans
- Flinders Shire Council Planning Scheme
- Relevant Council strategy reports and plans
- Statistical data via the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, including Census and other data sets such as building approvals, rental market data, housing approvals
- Housing needs data from the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and other state agencies as required
- *The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* and the *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025*.
- Other local data and information such as RAI reports

Emerging issues and opportunities, key challenges, and potential responses have been developed from review of a range of data sets, anecdotal feedback, and preceding engagement opportunities with Council and other stakeholders.

* The Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025

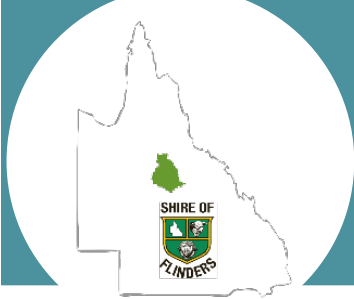
Flinders Shire Council key details

- Flinders Local Government Area (LGA) has a total land area of 41,200km².
- Hughenden is the main population centre and is located approximately 1,430km north-west of Brisbane and 380km west of Townsville.
- The shire also has smaller communities at Prairie, Torrens Creek and Stamford.
- The community supports a mix of industries with agriculture being a primary focus through beef production, wool and an emerging horticulture sector.
- The region also has a growing tourism trade, with visitors drawn to National Parks, scenic landscapes and vistas, and paleo-tourism (dinosaur) experiences.





Key Community Characteristics

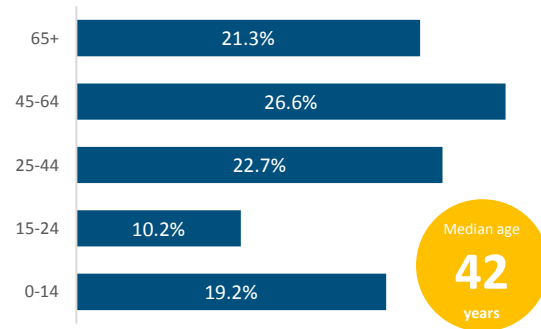


Key Demographic Characteristics

Estimated resident population is **1500** and is projected to reduce to **1319** by 2041 (-7.26 %)*

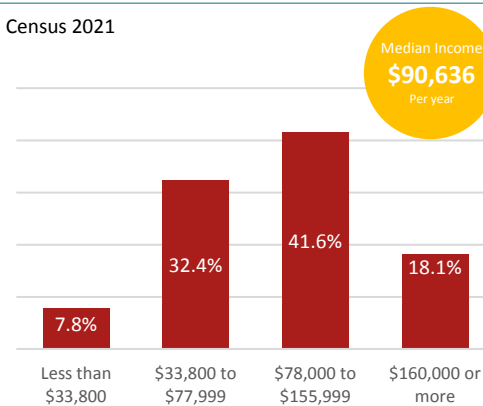
Age

Census 2021



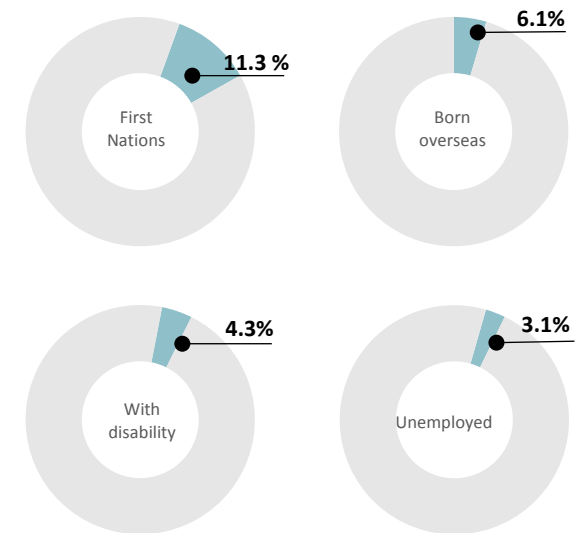
Family Income

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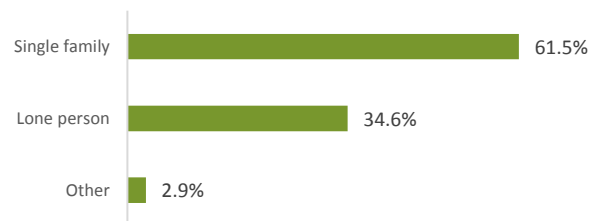
Other characteristics

Census 2021



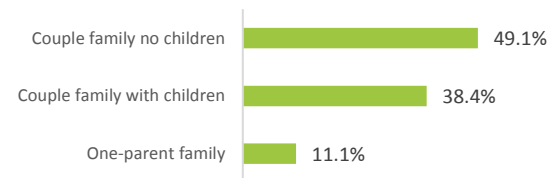
Household composition

Census 2021

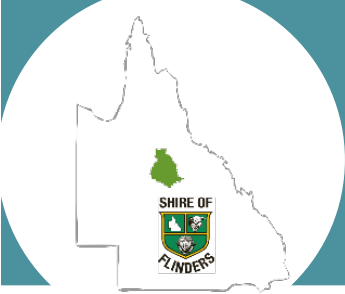


Family composition

Census 2021



*Note: Flinders Shire Council disputes the reduced population projection to 2041 as significant expansion of the existing renewable energy infrastructure in the Shire is about to commence as well as expansion of the horticultural sector currently underway.

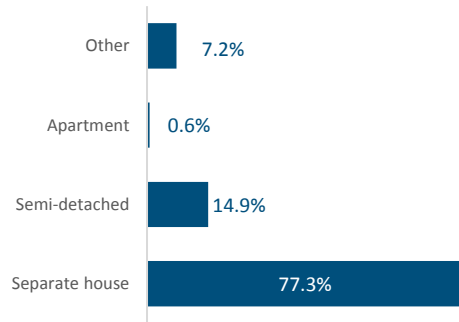


Key Housing Characteristics

Total Occupied dwellings (2021) 545

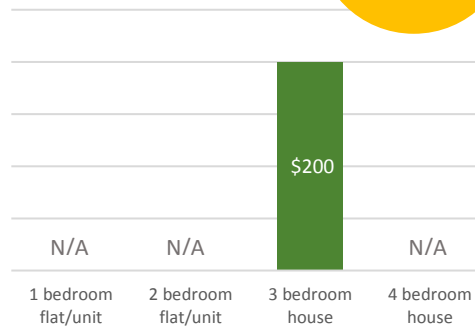
Dwellings by Structure

Census 2021



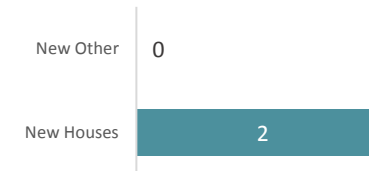
Median rent

Census 2021 / QHPW



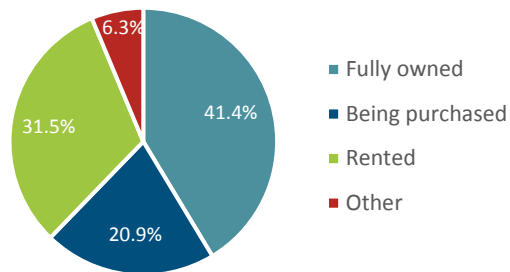
Building approvals

12 months to 30/09/22 - QHPW



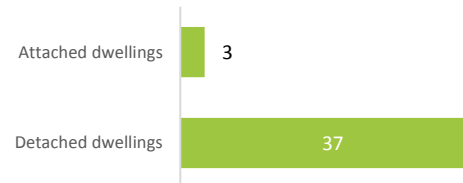
Dwellings by Tenure

Census 2021



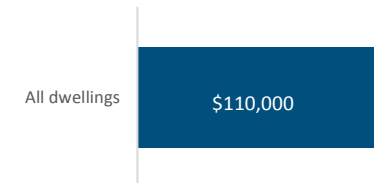
Number of sales

12 months to 30/06/22 - QHPW



Median Sales Price

12 months to 30/06/22 - QHPW





Key focus areas identified

Areas of emerging concern have been determined through a review of existing data and engagement with stakeholders as identified in the methodology. These concerns will be considered when identifying and prioritising shared actions.

1. Housing Availability

This Local Housing Action Plan (LHAP) focuses on Hughenden – there are other small centres, but they are not relevant to the scope of this study. Currently there is little available housing or land for purchase or rent in Hughenden. In particular, there are few options for 1 and 2-bedroom dwellings. The cabins being provided by Council are for short-term worker accommodation on major new projects e.g., the horticultural facility. Accommodation for visitors is also at a premium for most of the year but is particularly limited during the high tourist season from May to September – this is exacerbated by the need for tradesperson and contractor accommodation year-round due to Hughenden’s role as a regional service centre.

In the past few years there has been 21 houses for sale. There is no serviced land currently for sale, but Council has more than 250 lots available in the Hughenden township. Approximately, 100 lots are fully serviced, out of which Council is releasing around 40 lots for sale through an auction process scheduled for February 2023.

It is understood that Government Employee Housing (GEH) have 4 lots available for their future needs but currently there is no demand recorded hence no construction is planned. There are some 836 dwellings in Hughenden and 80% of these are owner-occupied. Sale prices are in the range of \$120,000 to \$180,000.

Major housing property owners in Hughenden are Council – 124 and the State Government – Social, 20 (6 on waiting list) and GEH, 25 (14 houses and 11 units).

Council is planning to build 18, fit for purpose houses to attract executive and key technical staff. Any excess stock of Council’s older houses will be repurposed and made available for rent or sale once the new houses are occupied.

Council also provides 8 aged person/pensioner houses and units – all being 1 bed.

Little data exists regarding movements in the median house price, but it is believed to have risen by around 8 percent. The more recent peak may have been influenced by drought recovery and the COVID pandemic which may have influenced a trend of relocations to regional areas.

The housing stock has aged, and its standard has not been maintained to attract investment and capital return other than from rental income. While land prices are relatively low, costs of construction are substantial due to the material supply logistics and limited local house construction contractors in the region. There have been very few private houses constructed in the shire between 2016 and 2021.

Response opportunities

- Focus on immediate housing responses to the current housing shortage and develop longer-term resilient and sustainable housing options that can underpin the economic development of the region.
- Council is releasing around 40 lots for sale through an auction process scheduled for February 2023.
- Council is planning to build 18, fit for purpose houses to attract executive and key technical staff. Any excess stock of Council’s older houses will be repurposed and made available for rent or sale once the new houses are occupied.
- Council encourage more short-term accommodation options in unit blocks, motels, and caravan/cabin type accommodation.
- The Western Queensland Alliance of Councils (WQAC) and State Government consider development of a major marketing strategy to highlight the housing affordability advantages and other lifestyle and employment opportunities offered by the regions.

2. Rental Market

Almost all Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Queensland are considered to have 'tight' rental markets (characterised by a vacancy rate under 2.5%). Over three quarters of Queensland LGAs (77%) have vacancy rates under 1% as at March 2022. The current vacancy rate (as of August 2022) in the Flinders Shire is near 0.0%. Census data shows that 25% of dwellings are unoccupied – this level of vacancy needs further investigation.

Owner occupiers are 57% and 43% of residential properties are rented.

Anecdotally, the rental market in Hughenden is strong – with properties being tightly held and being rented out immediately. Rents range from around \$160 per week to 200 per week. New construction for private rental stock to increase the market availability is likely to be financially difficult due to the low rental return and the current challenges with material supply and construction cost increases and limited number of builders and tradespersons.

In addition, the low rental return and increasing construction costs limits the viability of private investors undertaking major renovations of existing stock to improve the housing standards.

Council age pensioner units are rented for a subsidised rent. Low income and supported individuals and families have limited to entry into the private rental market. Their only option is to seek access to social housing alternative. Social housing development provides additional options for those most susceptible to private market challenges and reduces demand on lower-priced private properties.

Increasing accessibility of social housing through increasing availability by reduction in vacant periods and increasing the number and type of supply is an option to reduce rental stress for the vulnerable communities. Opportunities in management through local oversight has been raised in the community interviews.

As the demand for employee rentals increases for transient fixed contract staff, local community rental demand is challenged. Anecdotally, it was noted this situation results in increased rental prices for houses with reasonable liveability quality. The cost of delivery of employee housing adds to the cost of delivering services which is difficult to pass on to already financially struggling communities. Federal Government assistance to support employers in these situations maybe one of the options for consideration.

Opportunities are becoming evident that as current industries grow and new industries in the pipeline commence, then these will support a number of higher paid jobs. If new and better-quality housing is available, they will attract market rents at a higher premium than currently exists in Hughenden. To cater for the FIFO/DIDO workforce, there will be an increased demand for 1 and 2 bedroom units. As the new stock is created, there should be opportunities for existing housing stock to also become available for rent or buy.

Response opportunities

- Consideration be given to bringing forward any proposed social housing projects to increase the rental stock and free up lower cost rentals for market availability.
- Council proceed to facilitate development options as discussed previously in the Housing availability section.
- Support for service provider employers to construct employee housing to free up transient employee monopolising higher quality housing at higher rental which limits community rental access.
- Investigate the reasons for the 25% vacancy rate stated in the Census 2021 data.

3. Social Housing Supply

There is a high demand for social housing across Queensland and allocations are focussed on supporting households with the highest need. Median household incomes in Flinders are \$1343 compared to the Queensland median of \$1,675. As a consequence, it is understood that the social housing demand is high with a long-term waiting list of 6 (3 - 1 bed, 2 - 2 bed, and 1 - 3 bed) with the current stock being 20 (1 - 1 bed, 5 - 2 bed, 15 - 3 bed) with the majority of dwellings being aged between 50 and 70 years old.

Interviews with local stakeholders indicates that some community members may have withdrawn from making applications for social housing until they are aware of houses becoming available.

There are issues with problems of overcrowding and lack of care and maintenance of the housing stock owned and managed by the Yumba Cooperative Society Ltd. There needs to be an assessment of options to better manage and utilise this stock.

Overcrowding and “couch surfing” has been raised in a number of interviews. The interviewees consider that these situations aggravate social issues that cause other unintended consequences such as family and domestic violence. Also, the limited availability of housing may be resulting in persons relocating from the region.

Response opportunities

- Investigate options to urgently address the short fall such as provision of temporary single/double units. Consider alternatives to tenancy management and engaging local management partnerships with focus on tenancy performance in order to minimising costs of repairs.
- Investigate partnerships with social housing providers for development of private facilities on Council land.
- Council and Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE) review Yumba Cooperative Society Ltd housing stock and ownership issues to ascertain any options to use the stock.
- Research what type of product is best for Indigenous housing - i.e., more of a community style development with sleeping separate from outdoor cooking and meeting areas.

4. Aged Housing and Care

Council provides aged pensioner housing in Hughenden. A total of 18 - 6 independent single bedroom houses, and 12 single bed independent living units at a Council owned aged care facility. With the aged population increasing there is likely to be a need for additional accommodation. More research is needed in this area as it is estimated an additional 14 units are required.

Response opportunities

- Undertake a needs assessment to determine the future needs for aged accommodation.
-

5. Employee Housing

In order to employ appropriately skilled and suitable employees, employers are required to prioritise attraction and retention incentives such as housing when housing stock is limited, and the standards do not match accommodation expectation.

Relocating employee's family away from more populated areas creates stress, therefore availability of good standard of housing assists in the transition and performance. Council provides houses for 17 staff. These are leased with a variety of subsidy levels, generally depending on the negotiations to attract the right staff at a reasonable cost. Increasingly, the need is to provide free or heavily subsidised arrangements.

The State Government supplies housing for its employees under 2 systems. GEH provides a range of housing types for government employees in government owned dwellings. The majority are provided for Police, Health and Education. In addition, these departments provide "operational housing" for staff located on operational sites e.g., police stations, hospitals and schools. They also rent housing in the private market.

There are currently 25 GEH dwellings in Hughenden - 14 houses and 11 units. It is understood private rental for employee housing is also in operation throughout the town but to a limited extent - no precise details are available.

GEH have advised they do not have any demand for additional housing in Hughenden although Council believes there is demand for 1 additional dwelling.

Response opportunities

- Council is awaiting the outcomes of its funding application to build a further 18 dwellings – 8 - 2 bed and 10 - 3 bed (6 for staff and 12 for community access).
- Investigate the supply and demand of government employee housing and consider opportunities for additional rental housing if any government employees are currently utilising private rentals that are able to re-enter general community rental market.

6. Cohort Specific Housing

The following cohort specific housing has been identified as requiring to be addressed in Hughenden.

- Domestic and family violence
- Disability
- Youth homelessness
- Family homelessness

There are 2 existing facilities in Hughenden for those needing assistance as a result of domestic and family violence needs. An additional facility is needed.

Disabled needs are met by 12 dwellings and a further 5 are needed.

No facilities currently exist for the other needs although it is estimated that one facility is required for each of those needs. Further assessments are required to determine those needs.

There are limited sleeping rough problems. Homelessness does not appear to be an issue generally but there would be overcrowding problems instead.

Response opportunities

- Undertake investigation into crisis housing for victims of domestic and family violence to identify the need for such housing.
- NDIS housing requirements should also be investigated.
- Evidence of the extent of family and youth homelessness that results in couch surfing and overcrowding should be qualified to test the social housing demand estimates.



Response Opportunities

Response opportunities

A local housing action plan enables engagement across all levels of government, and benefits from partnerships between private and not-for-profit organisations.

An initial set of tactical actions has been developed, enabling refinement through an ongoing iterative process. These actions provide for a targeted response and outcomes that will seek to either create immediate benefit or establish a foundation for the next phase of actions. More specific responses can then be determined that provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.



Actions

The Flinders Shire Council with the support of the Queensland Government through the Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 is committed to engage in the delivery of its initial Local Housing Action Plan through this set of actions, developed to target immediate to longer term housing responses. This is an iterative process, and these actions and target outcomes will seek to either create immediate benefit or to establish foundations that help respond to ongoing housing need.

1	Land and Development	Timeline Starting in March 2023 (months)
1.1	Conduct a detailed assessment of current Council and State-owned residential land and buildings to support immediate development of temporary housing provision including repurposing of existing buildings to address the present housing crisis.	6
1.2	Review other land holdings (vacant or disused buildings) to identify lots that would be suitable for permanent development and/or redevelopment/repurposing to support short and longer-term housing outcomes.	12
1.3	Council is planning to build 18, fit for purpose houses to attract executive and key technical staff. Any excess stock of Council's older houses will be repurposed and made available for rent or sale once the new houses are occupied.	12-36
1.4	Council is releasing around 40 lots for sale through an auction process scheduled for February 2023.	12
1.5	Council encourage more short-term accommodation options in unit blocks, motels, and caravan/cabin type accommodation.	Ongoing
1.6	Council and DCHDE review Yumba Cooperative Society Ltd housing stock and ownership issues to ascertain any options to use the stock.	6-12
1.7	Council discuss with GEH their assessed housing demand in Hughenden.	Immediate
1.8	As new stock is developed, WQAC and State Government consider development of a major marketing strategy to highlight the housing affordability advantages and other lifestyle and employment opportunities offered by the regions.	12
1.9	Investigate the reasons for the 25% vacancy rate stated in the Census 2021 data.	Immediate

2	Planning	
2.1	Undertake, in conjunction with the Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC) and WQAC, an analysis of the LHAP Data Collection for Flinders Shire to assist in the assessment of housing needs and the identification of opportunities in relation to local density aspirations, opportunities for secondary dwellings on existing blocks, mixed use development options, repurposing unused commercial space, types of construction permitted and any other specific initiatives to address future housing need for both public and private sectors.	6
2.2	Prepare a draft Flinders Shire Council Housing Strategy with targeted action for the next 10 years in consultation with the community, business sector and government agencies and informed by other policy settings such as, infrastructure and servicing, transport, economic development, and environmental management.	12
2.3	Undertake planning work and prepare required DA's for proposed developments in McLay Street.	6-12

3	Optimisation	
3.1	Council and the State Government investigate and coordinate options to develop under-utilised sites in partnership with the not-for-profit sector, private sector including employer housing providers and with Federal Government assistance, having regard to the assessment of underutilised land and buildings and the housing needs assessment.	12
3.2	Assess use of possible lease, purchase, new for old land exchange, redevelopment, change of use or renovation of existing buildings to optimise community outcomes that support housing need.	12

4	Master planning	
4.1	Consider master planning of identified options to ensure resilient development meets community expectation of how its town acknowledges its heritage. The planning may be at allotment, street, or locality level.	12-24

5 Supports		
5.1	Federal Governments provide programs/funding/incentives to encourage and assist local youth to take on trades in the local building industry.	12-24
5.2	State and Federal Governments provide financial assistance in grants for rural and remote LGA's to support provision of employee housing to reduce the financial burden on communities of meeting these additional costs and obtaining equitable access to essential services.	12
5.3	State Government to consider providing interest free loans to councils for the development of serviced land for sale.	12
5.4	State Government ensure there is sufficient housing of an acceptable standard in rural and remote LGA's for State Government agency and service staff to minimise the impact on the general housing markets.	5 years

6 People in need		
6.1	Consider how Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) can be incorporated into existing where required and future developments.	12-24
6.2	Undertake a detailed needs assessment, having regard to the Data Collection for Flinders Shire, and identify necessary actions of any specific cohorts such young people, individuals, and households in response to domestic and family violence situations by way of immediate support for crisis housing on a temporary or more permanent basis.	12-24

7 Construction		
7.1	Identify opportunities to enable housing construction in private market and social housing including the use of non-traditional housing options in response to emergent need however, in the longer-term the built form needs be reflective of the traditional housing character but using more sustainable and resilient materials.	12-24
7.2	Encourage housing development which may repurpose existing commercial property for specific cohorts to address emerging needs.	12



8	Capital solutions	
8.1	Develop capital solutions in partnership with the State and Federal Governments through land provision and funding partnerships to construct and manage delivery of current and future housing needs having regard to the recommendations of the RAI-WQAC Western Queensland Housing Solutions Report – September 2021.	12-24
8.2	Develop funding partnerships with not-for-profit social housing providers to deliver short term outcomes for specific cohorts in the interim with longer term arrangements being incorporated in the arrangements.	12-24
8.3	Engage with private land owners and developers with land opportunities to maximise use of existing underutilised land.	12-24
8.4	Consider incentives to encourage rent to buy options for housing sales.	12-24

Next steps

Establish a Local Housing Action Plan Working Group of key representatives from Council, relevant State agencies and community organisations, to oversee and progress actions, review findings, report quarterly on progress and further develop the LHAP in an open partnership to address and ultimately resolve the housing challenge.