



Queensland Housing Strategy 2021–2025

Local Housing Action Plan

Blackall-Tambo Regional Council

www.btrc.qld.gov.au

February 2022



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Introduction

Introduction

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government*, Blackall-Tambo Regional 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 Blackall-Tambo region.

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 Blackall-Tambo region 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
- Blackall-Tambo Regional 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

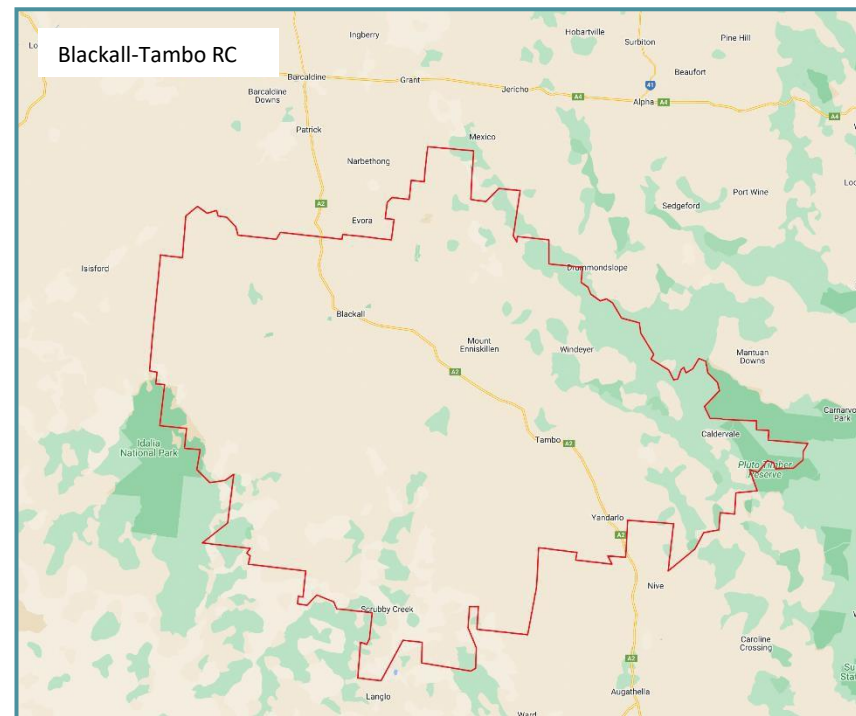
Emerging issues and opportunities, key challenges, and potential responses have been developed from review of a range of data sets, anecdotal feedback and preceding engagement opportunities with Council and other stakeholders.

* The Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025

Blackall–Tambo Regional Council

key details

- Blackall-Tambo Local Government Area (LGA) has a total land area of 30,502 km².
- Blackall is the main population centre and is located approximately 962km, or 10.5-hours' drive, north-west of Brisbane Central Business District.
- Tambo is a smaller community centre to the south of Blackall.
- The community supports a mix of industries with agriculture being a primary focus through beef and sheep/wool production.
- The region also has a growing tourism trade, with visitors drawn to National Parks, scenic landscapes, historic sites and cultural experiences.





Key Community Characteristics

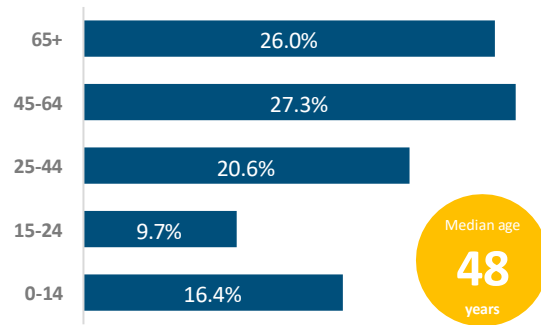


Key Demographic Characteristics

Estimated resident population is **1,905** and is projected to reduce to **1,816** by 2041 (-4.67%)

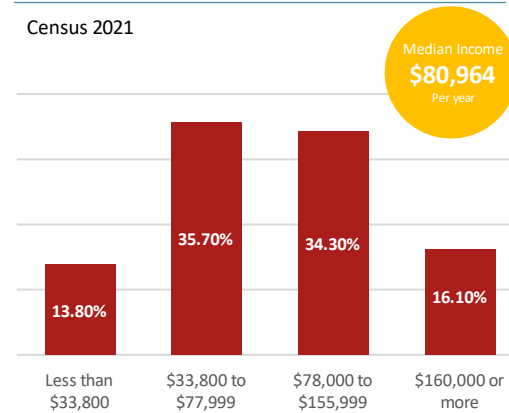
Age

Census 2021



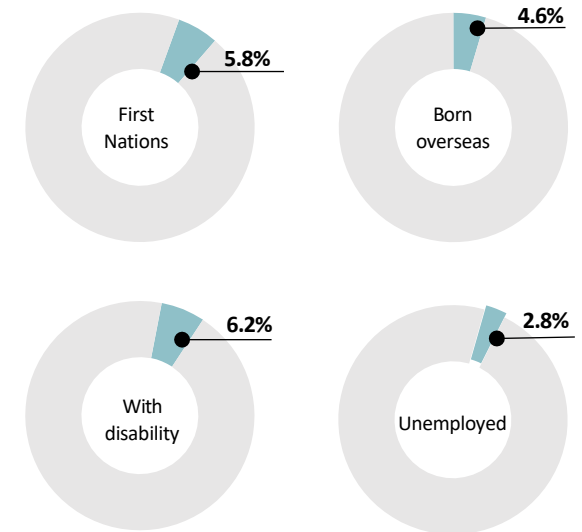
Family Income

Census 2021



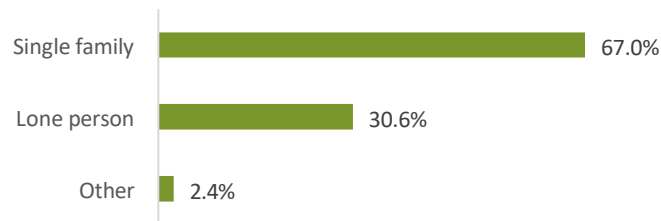
Other characteristics

Census 2021



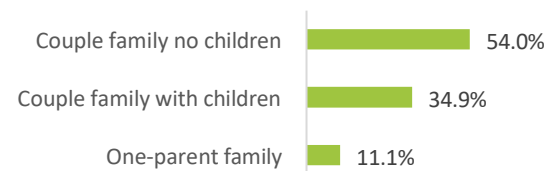
Household composition

Census 2021



Family composition

Census 2021



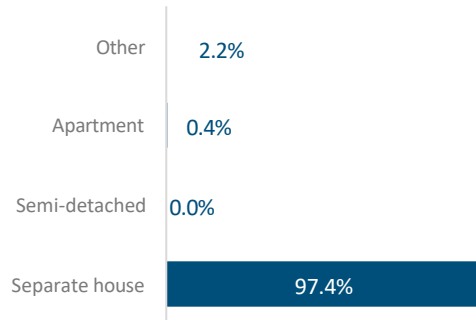


Key Housing Characteristics

Total Occupied dwellings (2021) **759**

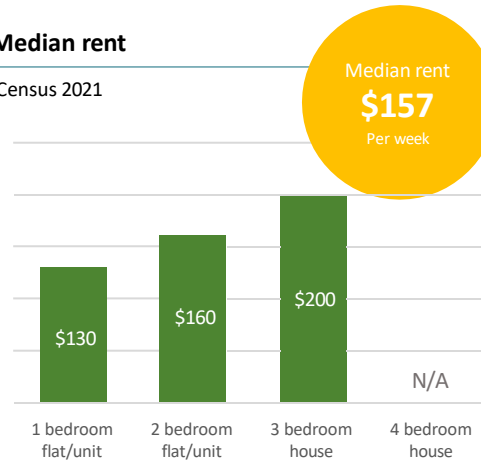
Dwellings by Structure

Census 2021



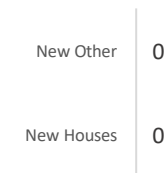
Median rent

Census 2021



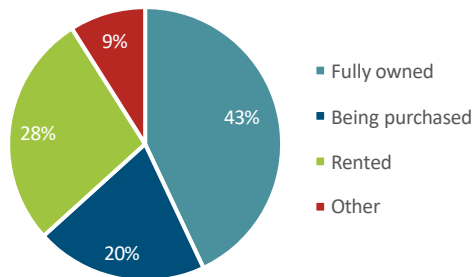
Building approvals

12 months to 30/06/22 - ABS



Dwellings by Tenure

Census 2021



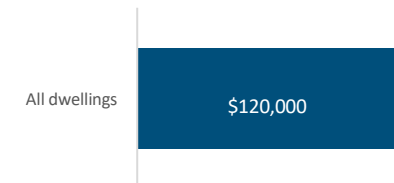
Number of sales

12 months to 30/06/22



Median Sales Price

12 months to 30/06/22





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

Housing demand in Blackall Tambo is based on growth of government and Council employees as well as social and affordable housing. Blackall is the centre for a large, aged pensioner independent housing facility which supports its growth. In the region 62.1% of private occupied dwellings are owned compared to 63.5% in Queensland and of these properties 19.9% are owned with a mortgage.

Occupied dwellings at the 2021 census represented 76.9% of the housing stock while unoccupied dwellings were 23.4% (ABS). While this represents a single point of time it may continue to be representative of the current position, however, the percentage of unoccupied dwellings is likely to be lower. This figure needs to be further investigated as it is not the experience on the ground.

The breakdown of the housing situation in terms of detail of utilisation and supply in 2021 was as follows:

- Households with families represented 67.6% of the households
- Single-person households made up 30.9%
- Detached houses made up 97% of the dwellings
- There were no semi-detached dwellings
- Units were only 0.4%
- The average number of bedrooms per dwelling was 3.1
- The average number of people per household was 2.3.


The ratio of availability of beds to persons per dwelling indicates sufficient capacity if the dwelling mix aligns with the demand structure. This situation would indicate a focus on the provision of smaller two-bed semi-detached dwellings and units for future housing stock supply.

Dwellings for sale in Blackall are limited and there are currently in the order of 20 properties available for purchase. Tambo has very limited available properties for sale and currently there are only four (4) houses for sale with one (1) under offer. Annual house sales over the past decade have been typically between 20 and 30 houses, with median sale prices ranging between \$70,000 and \$160,000(RAI). Current house sale prices in Blackall vary from \$60,000 to \$460,000.

Real estate agents in the region suggest the market is driven by two (2) types of buyers. The first is younger buyers who have saved during the pandemic and want to establish themselves in the region, while the other type is aged between 55 to 65 years old who are relocating from Brisbane or Toowoomba. Sale numbers in Blackall during the financial year 2021/22 totaled 76 properties and in the same period five (5) properties were sold in Tambo.

There are four (4) residential lots for sale in Blackall with prices ranging from \$20,000 to \$75,000. Both Council and State government have vacant lots available to develop for residential purposes. There are larger lots available to suit semi-detached dwellings which would meet current needs.

Unlike the rest of Queensland in the current economic climate, the Blackall-Tambo region has not experienced anywhere near the same levels of house price rises. There have been two (2) price spikes in the last five (5) years. The more recent may have been influenced by the COVID pandemic which has seen persons relocating who are prepared to pay a higher price in a tighter market.



Housing stock has aged, and standards have not been maintained to attract investment and/or capital return other than from rental income. While land prices are very low, costs of construction are substantial due to material supply logistics. There are three (3) local house construction contractors available in the region, and they all have significant waiting lists. There has only been a total of seven (7) houses constructed between 2016 and 2021.

Response opportunities

Focus on immediate housing responses to the current housing shortage through:

- Identification and repurposing of underutilised properties for accommodation
- Construction of temporary accommodation
- Leasing properties as they may come available; while developing longer-term resilient and sustainable housing options that can underpin the economic development of the region.
- Review demand for dwelling type to match the population mix.

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 (3) quarters of Queensland LGAs (77%) have vacancy rates under 1% as at December 2021. The current vacancy rate (as at August 2022) in the region is 0.0%. Rented dwellings represent 27.1% of the total dwellings which compares with Queensland's figure of 33% in 2021 (ABS).


There are a total of 127 rental properties managed by real estate agents in Blackall and nine (9) rental properties in Tambo. It is estimated by agents that there may be another ten (10) dwellings privately rented in Blackall. Three (3) construction companies have purchased six (6) houses in Blackall for rental to their employees.

Blackall's rental market has collapsed with only two (2) private rentals available, and Tambo has no current rental availability.

Renovation of existing rental stock to improve standards is costly and may not be financially viable for private investors given the lower rental return on investment. Concern was expressed by agents regarding changes to tenancy laws which appears to have influenced decisions on property management and may influence investment decisions.

Rental prices vary from \$120 per week for a one-bed unit to \$400 per week for a four-bed house. Low income and supported individuals and families are limited entry into the private rental market. Their only option is to seek access to social housing alternatives. Social housing development increases options for those most susceptible to private market challenges and reduces demand on lower-priced properties..

Vacant disused commercial buildings may also provide opportunities to repurpose into managed single bed accommodation with shared facilities. There are a limited number of these opportunities in Blackall and none in Tambo, however, Council is looking at these as possibilities.



As the demand for employee rentals increases for transient fixed contract staff, local community demand is also challenged. Anecdotally, it was noted that this situation results in increased rental prices for houses with reasonable liveability quality.

Response opportunities

- Consideration be made to bringing forward any proposed social housing projects to increase rental stock and free up lower cost rentals for market availability.
 - Investigation of the current rental supply market and the currently unoccupied dwellings in the region to look at opportunities that bring additional rental supply into the market could also be considered.
 - Investigation of vacant disused commercial buildings could also be considered to repurpose their use for single bed facilities reducing the instances of single renters utilising multi bed dwellings.
 - Provision of support to service provider employers for the construction of employee housing in order to free up transient employees monopolising higher quality housing at higher rental prices.
-

3. Social Housing Supply

It is understood that the social housing demand in Blackall and Tambo is low compared to other towns in Western Queensland. The State government supplies 15 social housing dwellings made up of 4 x 1-bed, 6 x 2-bed, and 5 x 3-bed dwellings. Eight (8) are located in Blackall and three (3) are in Tambo. Emerald Housing Service Centre manages 11 of these dwellings and Barcoo Retirement Village manage four (4) of the Blackall dwellings. There appears to be low demand for social housing in the region. This situation could be influenced by supply levels of aged housing.

However, regardless of the lack of demand, the transferal of low-cost rental demand in the private housing market to social housing, may open up access for more competition in the private sector and therefore, offer an improvement in the quality of housing in the region.

The Churches of Christ which operates the aged care facility is looking to provide additional social housing in Blackall subject to negotiations on available land.

Response opportunities

- Consideration be given to investigating the demand for social housing in both Blackall and Tambo to provide the basis for discussions with the State government about its proposals for investment in the current round of social housing funding.
- Consideration be given to expanding social housing provision through partnering with community housing providers involving the provision of council land.

4. Aged Housing and Care

The Churches of Christ currently operates a 38-bed residential aged care facility in Blackall. The site has limitations for expansion, and there are no immediate plans for any additional beds.

Barcoo Retirement Village has 34 units consisting of one (1) and two (2)-bed detached dwellings. The village is operated by a not-for-profit organisation which employs two (2) full time and three (3) casual staff members. There are no plans for expansion due to site limitations and funding which was used to assist establishment of the residential care facility. Observation was made at the interviews that services for aged at home seems to have also lessened the demand for additional dwellings.

Council manages six (6) 1-bedroom detached dwellings in Blackall and seven (7) 2-bedroom and two (2) 1-bedroom detached dwellings in Tambo, which are generally rented to aged pensioners but may also allow other tenants on a case-by-case basis in accordance with Council's Housing Policy. There is currently one (1) available for rent in Tambo with only one (1) application pending. Council has no plans to expand the current aged housing supply.

Response opportunities


- Continue to monitor demand for aged pensioner housing needs.

5. Employee Housing

In order to employ appropriately skilled and suitable job applicants, employers are required to prioritise attraction and retention incentives such as housing when housing stock is limited, and standards do not match accommodation expectations from where they are relocating.

Relocating employee families away from more populated areas creates stress and, therefore availability of a good standard of housing assists in this transition and performance. Council has six (6) houses in Blackall and five (5) houses in Tambo used by staff in either employment arrangements or leased. Currently, there are no vacant positions with Council which would require any additional housing.

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



GEH have advised Council that it has 15 residences in Blackall and five (5) residences in Tambo. With additional funding released in the recent budget, it is anticipated that up to 11 new residences will be delivered in Blackall-Tambo LGA (consisting of eight (8) in Blackall and three (3) in Tambo).

The Churches of Christ which operates the residential aged care facility is looking for land to build staff accommodation and they intend to provide seven (7) 2-bedroom dwellings for current and future staff. As with other employers, they have experience in renting existing houses and will soon need additional staff and associated housing.

Catholic Education recently constructed a multi-unit development on one of the larger lots in Blackall for its teaching staff residing in the area. These facilities provide an example of construction that may fit with the amenity of the region.

Response opportunities

- GEH be encouraged to fast track delivery of employee housing in the region for early release of the private rental housing which is currently being utilised by government staff.
 - Churches of Christ to be encouraged to also fast track the provision of staff accommodation in Blackall.
-


6. Cohort Specific Housing

The following cohort specific housing has been identified as requiring to be addressed in Blackall and Tambo:

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

Currently, there is no specific crisis housing available in Blackall for any of the above cohorts. One of the higher demands areas for crisis housing is domestic and family violence victims and perpetrators. These persons are currently housed with family or friends; in motels; or transported to other towns, such as Longreach. None of these options provide suitable outcomes. There are examples in other Western Queensland towns where crisis housing is supplied and managed by a non-for-profit organisation which is mainly funded by the Federal Government.

There is one State Government house in Tambo that is controlled by the Queensland Police for a range of emergency needs and there appears to be no additional demand for crisis housing.



Homelessness does not appear to be a factor impacting on Blackall and Tambo communities, nor has there been any evidence raised in regard to sleeping rough however, this should be monitored over time.

Response opportunities

- Investigation to be undertaken into crisis housing in Blackall for cohorts of domestic and family violence in order to identify the need for such housing. Additionally, ongoing monitoring of homelessness within the towns need to be undertaken.

7. Future Housing Demand

Queensland Wool Processors Pty Ltd are proposing to establish a wool processing plant in Blackall to value add to the current wool industry. When operational, the plant will deliver 812 FTE jobs (270 directly), and \$116 million Gross Regional Product (\$35.6 million directly). This investment will have a considerable impact on the region's housing situation.

This proposal will require a separate management process given its development size and potential impact on the region's social and economic structures. State Government support through the approval process should be provided to Council.

Response opportunities

- The proposed development of a wool scour near Blackall will have significant social and economic impact on the region and State Government support will be required in managing the process. Housing requirements to service this development should be subject to special development approval process.



Image: Tourism and Events Queensland

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 then can be determined that provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.

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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

Blackall-Tambo Regional 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 detailed assessment of current 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 land holdings (vacant or disused buildings) to identify lots that would be suitable for development and/or redevelopment/repurposing to support short and longer-term housing outcomes.	12
1.3	Subject to the progress of the proposed construction of Queensland Wool Processing Pty. Ltd.'s wool processing facility near Blackall, Council requests the State Government to provide support to investigate land requirements to meet the housing needs for the proposed 270-direct jobs and the supporting service jobs yet to be defined in Blackall.	12
2	Planning	
2.1	Undertake, in conjunction with the Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC) and WQAC, an analysis of the LHAP Data Collection for Blackall-Tambo Region to assist in the assessment of housing needs and the identification of opportunities for regional collaboration in addressing housing needs across both public and private sectors.	6
2.2	Review regional and local planning schemes to meet housing needs objectives while acknowledging the town character, through review of 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 needs.	12
2.3	Investigate partnerships approaches with not-for-profit social housing providers to plan for future social housing.	12-24
2.4	Prepare a draft Blackall-Tambo Regional 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

3 Optimisation		
3.1	Council and the State Government to investigate and coordinate the options for development of under-utilised sites in partnership with the not-for-profit sector, private sector (including employer housing providers), and 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
3.3	Council to consider innovative means to repurpose unused commercial space for dwelling conversion.	12

4 Master planning		
4.1	Consider master planning of identified options to ensure resilient development meets community expectations of how each town acknowledges its heritage. The planning may be at allotment, street or locality level.	12-24
4.2	Subject to the progress of the proposal of Queensland Wool Processing Pty. Ltd. to construct a wool processing facility near Blackall, undertake master planning for the expansion of the township boundaries to allow for the potential growth in population. Secure land where necessary to achieve managed approach to any future town expansion.	12-24

5 Supports		
5.1	The State Government provide support to the Council should the proposal of Queensland Wool Processing Pty. Ltd progress to approval stages.	6-24
5.2	Federal Government introduce programs/funding/incentives to encourage and assist local youth to take on trades in the local building industry.	12-24
5.3	WQAC make representations to the State and Federal Governments for financial assistance in grants for rural and remote LGA's to support delivery of employee housing to reduce the financial burden on communities in funding these additional costs and obtaining equitable access to essential service roles.	6-24
5.4	State Government to 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 to 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 and necessary actions of any specific identified cohorts such young people, rough sleepers and individuals and households in response to domestic and family violence situations requiring 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 to be reflective of the traditional housing character in the towns but using more sustainable and resilient materials.	12-24
7.2	Encourage housing development which may repurpose existing commercial properties 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.	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 plans being incorporated in the arrangements.	12-24
8.3	Engage with private land owners and developers with land opportunities to maximise the use of existing underutilised land without having to develop costly green field sites and promoting a gradual improvement of the housing stock quality.	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.