



2000

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

ROYAL DERWENT HOSPITAL/ WILLOW COURT CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

Presented to His Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1914

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Mr Wing (Chairman)
Mr Harriss

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Mr Green
Mr Hidding
Mr Kons

By Authority: Government Printer, Tasmania

To His Excellency the Honourable Sir Guy Stephen Montague Green, Companion of the Order of Australia, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

The Committee has investigated the following proposal:—

ROYAL DERWENT HOSPITAL/WILLOW COURT CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the Public Works Committee Act 1914.

INTRODUCTION

This reference to the Committee sought approval for the provision of new group homes on four sites for clients who currently reside at the Willow Court Centre in New Norfolk.

These developments form one part of the wider Royal Derwent Hospital/ Willow Court Centre (RDH/WCC) Redevelopment Project. Such project entails the full redevelopment of facilities that are currently on the Royal Derwent Hospital (RDH) and the Willow Court Centre (WCC) sites. The redevelopment includes new purpose-built facilities and the upgrading of premises on the Millbrook Rise site, purpose designed new buildings and refurbishment of existing properties at other locations in the State. The RDH/WCC site will become surplus to requirements and the Government will dispose of it.

This redevelopment project will result in construction on 16 sites across the State. Seven of these sites are Mental Health facilities and are being financed by the private sector. The capital costs of all the Disability Services new group homes will be financed from the Consolidated Fund, using State Housing finance. Of the nine Disability Services group home sites, four will each cost in excess of \$1 million on completion. It is these four property developments that were the subject of this inquiry.

BACKGROUND

The combined RDH/WCC complex is the oldest continually operating institution of its kind on the same site in Australia. The site is therefore of considerable State and national social and historical interest as it has been used since the late 1820s. The oldest building was constructed in 1830 and occupation pre-dates Port Arthur.

While previously operated as a combined service, as the Lachlan Park Hospital, the RDH and the WCC are now operated as two distinct services. This separation has been progressively pursued since the mid-1950s and reflects contemporary practice that recognises the distinct clinical needs of the two client groups being supported.

The RDH is the State psychiatric hospital and supports people with a mental illness, which may be of an acute, episodic or chronic nature. The WCC by contrast is an institution that supports people with an intellectual disability, which is a life-long and untreatable condition.

While most of the buildings at WCC are old and there are more recent buildings at RDH, few of them are suitable for client use. The standard of accommodation in the current facilities does not match client needs, contemporary or best practice standards, occupational health and safety standards or meet efficient work practices.

The combined RDH/WCC complex now accommodates fewer than 140 individuals compared with its peak occupancy of over 1,000 people in the early to mid 1970s.

DISABILITY SERVICES

Disability Services is responsible for co-ordinating the provision of services to people with disabilities and their carers in Tasmania. It does this by working with a range of Government, non-government and private service providers to support people with disabilities and their carers in local communities across the State.

Until the mid-1960s there were only limited community based services for people with disabilities and the WCC was a main service provider and accommodation service. It was a key support service for people with a disability and families who could no longer care for their family-member with a disability.

Like other comparable institutions elsewhere, WCC operated as a large centralised and isolated institutional facility, used a medical model of care and was removed from the wider community and established social networks. These features alienated many families and as a result many clients lost contact with their families following admission.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, State Governments implemented a policy of community integration and the development of a more integrated network of community based support services. This has led to the reduction in the number of clients accommodated at the WCC from over 300 in 1989 to fewer than 60 in 1999.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Since 1989 more than 190 adults and children have left the WCC and moved into new accommodation services in major population or regional centres throughout the State. The majority of these clients are supported by non-government organisations funded by the Community Integration Program (CIP).

The emergence of the CIP followed worldwide trends. It was influenced by requests from clients, their families and advocates to close WCC and so enable clients to live closer to their families or as part of a local community of their choice. This has also led to the emergence of a wider range of services across the State and has received bipartisan support.

The focus of the CIP was originally on opening new community-based group homes that were spot-purchased (that is, existing houses were purchased in suitable locations). These houses were then modified, using public housing funds, to meet the needs of clients. In recent years greater emphasis has been given to developing purpose-built accommodation in order to better respond to the specific needs of the clients and staff.

While some homes are still spot-purchased, others are purpose built. This blend of new and older stock maximises the flexibility of options for clients accommodated by Disability Services. This has also ensured greater coverage of accommodation across the State and offers better opportunities to align facilities with individual needs.

Research undertaken during the demand analysis phase of the project highlights the need for this new accommodation to be limited in size and designed to cater for the needs of people with a range of disabilities and ages. This approach aims to meet the needs of current and future clients, and maximise the viability of the new services.

This project finalises community integration initiatives at WCC, by continuing the move away from large outdated institutions, providing clients with smaller more personalised accommodation, while adopting the least restrictive response available.

TARGET GROUP

Disability Services at a State level has responsibility for supporting people with a range of disabilities, including intellectual, physical, sensory and acquired disabilities. While the WCC has primarily responsibility for accommodating people with an intellectual disability, many also have physical or sensory disabilities.

An intellectual disability is a life-long condition that limits intellectual and social functioning, and has emerged before a person turns 18 years. It may be acquired during pregnancy, at birth, during childhood or adolescence. Down Syndrome, inadequate oxygen at birth, head injuries and motor vehicle accidents are common causes.

People with an intellectual disability have the same needs as other members of the community, but they often require additional support, training or assistance to have these needs met. Although not a medical condition that can be treated, the impact or side effects can be ameliorated with appropriate support, training, and resources.

Research into current and anticipated demand for services in Tasmania has highlighted the importance of developing a range of new accommodation services that are highly flexible and able to cater for the needs of clients with high levels of physical and/or multiple disabilities and challenging behaviours. The design and operational planning of these new services reflect this need.

PROPOSAL

In approaching the design of these facilities the architects have implemented their strong conviction that first and foremost each unit is planned and detailed to meet the specific needs of each client.

This approach has been governed by the recognition of the potential of the designed physical environment to play an active and developmental role in supporting, improving and maintaining the quality of human life and social interface. This is important particularly for people with a disability, a loss of function, sensory perception difficulties or restricted mobility.

The adopted design approach therefore is strongly based on the awareness of the condition, capability and special needs of the clients, their visitors, and the staff. This has enabled a response that provides opportunities, amenities and other features, within a sensitive, innovative, appropriate, unpretentious, comfortable and safe environment designed to achieve optimised outcomes in daily living, social and physical rehabilitation, safe and easy care, privacy and choice.

Equally, appropriate safe efficient and pleasant environments for support staff are vital to encouraging optimised quality in the provision and administration of support. Innovative planning and design has achieved functional, flexible efficiency by encouraging economic operational performance within the domestic setting.

The design of each facility has achieved a thoroughly domestic scale and environment incorporating the specific requirements of the functional and design brief, within efficient high quality facilities offering a good sense of 'home', of light, air and solar orientation, landscaping and urban design.

Living and activity areas are central to daily experience of living in the home. Special attention has been paid to meal preparation, dining areas and an associated activity focus, and to sun orientation to engender warmth and well being within the daily cycle.

Outdoor areas offer safe, private, secure and pleasant backyards for relaxation and recreation within a landscaped environment. Discreet all-weather shaded activity areas are incorporated as in the outdoor areas.

These group homes have an urban image that is consistent with the spirit and detail of the brief. They have a sense of normality, address, and integration within the street and respond to the specific residential requirements for these clients living within the suburban context.

In all, the design for these homes provides architecture that is homelike, domestic in scale and presentation, and residential, which addresses individual needs in safe, secure and pleasant environments, within the prescribed requirements.

COSTING

Group Home Reference	Estimated Cost on Completion
DS 3 – Glenorchy	\$1,037,250
DS 4 – Glenorchy	\$1,027,000
DS 7 – New Norfolk	\$1,118,700
DS 9 – Newnham	\$1,007,250

EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Tuesday, 7 March 2000. The submission of the department of Health and Human Services was received and taken into evidence. The Committee inspected the Willow Court Centre; the sites of the proposed facilities at New Norfolk (DS 7) and Glenorchy (DS 3 & DS 4); and the Southern respite Centre at Lutana. Following such inspections, the Committee commenced hearing evidence. The following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:

- Mary Bent, Director – Community and Rural Health, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS);
- Scott Harvey, State Manager – Disability Services, DHHS;
- Jane Blake, Independent Resident Advocate, Advocacy Tasmania Inc.;
- Peter Hutchinson, Project Manager, Hansen Yuncken; and
- Peter Smith, Project Co-ordinator, Disability Services, DHHS.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Director of the Division of Community and Rural Health of the Department of Health and Human Services, Mary Bent gave an overview of the project for the benefit of the Committee and submitted:—

“... This project aims to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, relocate them to be closer to their families or friends and improve their opportunities to access the community...

The buildings (at the Willow Court Centre) are not suitable for future use and their standard is low. They do not match client needs, contemporary best practice, occupational health and safety standards, neither do they promote efficient work practices.

Royal Derwent Hospital Willow Court Centre is heated by a coal-fired boiler and most of the buildings are old, vacant, unsafe or in poor condition. These two factors mean that large amounts of funds are spent on maintaining the site which would be better spent if redirected into service delivery. It is also anticipated that the full closure and sale of the complex will lead to much needed employment opportunities and economic growth in the Derwent Valley.

This project is the final of three community integration phases involving Willow Court and entails the completion of the integration program and full closure and sale of the Royal Derwent Hospital Willow Court site. The first phase focused on purchasing and modifying existing houses across Tasmania with client support arrangements contracted out to a range of non-government agencies. The second phase involved the development of purpose-built accommodation on two sites in Hobart and a selective use of new and existing housing stock. The committee today saw one example of a purpose-built accommodation at Lutana.

The third phase is now being planned and entails the full development of the services provided at the Royal Derwent Hospital Willow Court complex into new residential facilities for both disability clients and mental health clients... ”

The Independent Advocate, Jane Blake, followed with a statement from the perspective of the of the Willow Court residents and their families. She explained that Advocacy Tasmania Incorporated had been appointed to provide the residents access to an independent advocate to enable them to speak up and receive support or representation for their grievances. In relation to the project, Ms Blake submitted:—

“... with the announcement of the Willow Court redevelopment and the closure of the institution, residents have been planning to move. All of the residents have participated in a formal personal planning process facilitated by their case managers. This enabled them, their families or the advocate to indicate where they wanted to live, such as north, north west or southern Tasmania, Hobart or New Norfolk, who they would like or not like to live with and what personal belongings they would like to purchase for their new homes, such as a comfortable armchair. These discussions about change and moving have been stressful for some of the residents, their families and staff and the advocate has tried to address this with regular information and their continued involvement with the process. However to have personalised and individually tailored purpose-built accommodation is an exciting goal that most of the residents keenly await.

Information sessions detailing the redevelopment process from client plans to site purchases, building of the homes and furnishing them, to packing up and moving, have been regularly and regionally held for the residents and their families. With the support of the advocate, six Willow Court residents have been elected, supported, educated and informed as client representatives and are an integral part of the planning meetings for the new day services, transition needs forum and the northern establishment team...”

GROUP HOME LOCATION

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the rationale behind the chosen sites for construction of the group homes, specifically the siting of the majority of the homes in the south of the State. Ms Bent submitted:—

“The majority of people at Willow Court have lived in Willow Court for some considerable time and many of them have chosen to remain in the New Norfolk and southern areas because that is where their community is now. However, there are two developments occurring in Launceston, one of which is part of the committee's hearing today and the other one which is underneath the financial limit. Clients are moving to the north west of the State as well but we have been able to accommodate them within our existing infrastructure.”

Mr Harvey added:—

“What we have done with the north west is recognise that there needs to be additional accommodation in the north west and we are putting in the funding for six places in the north west.”

GROUP HOME DESIGN

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the comparative advantages of accommodation in group homes over the existing accommodation available at the W.C.C., specifically in relation to the area of bedrooms and living areas. Ms Bent submitted:—

“I think you will find that the bedrooms are actually quite substantial compared to the bedrooms of a normal house. Certainly the bathrooms are larger and you will understand that is because of the need for equipment et cetera ... we did recognise in our development the need for larger areas than would normally occur within a domestic home and also for areas that can provide a separate loungeroom to a kitchen and dining room area and you will see those reflected in the design. The other element is that these homes have been designed with the client's needs most and some houses will provide a larger living space than others because some clients with higher support needs will need larger areas...

It is certainly my advice from Disability Services that the space that we have here will provide sufficient space to meet the needs of the clients and that the location of the facilities within the community will provide them with access to a much broader range of activities than would be available on the Willow Court...”

The Project Co-ordinator, Peter Smith added:—

“... the environments of the larger scale houses at Willow Court mean that people have lots of room but in many ways the rooms there are excessive in terms of space because I think people tend to get lost in a bit of a vacuum in some ways. So given the environment that people presently live in at Willow Court, one of our considerations in looking at design was first and foremost to develop a homely environment that is domestic in scale but sufficient to meet the individual needs of clients.

In terms of the designs of the houses, the four-bed units particularly, given that there are so many people living under the confines under one roof, have been designed to make provision for family and lounge rooms as distinct areas, as we were discussing earlier. But with those units, in the same way, the two-bedroom units have been designed so that there is a sheltered verandah area that is additional living space to residents in the house, marked on the site as outdoor area. The kitchen/dining area we know from experience elsewhere that those sorts of areas tend to be the hub of the house, as they do for many people in the family home, and the provision of a separate lounge room is also public living space."

The Committee sought some indication as to what, if any, provision had been made for storage and/or hobby work, such as might occur in a garden shed. Mr Smith submitted:—

"... the development of purpose-built accommodation in 1996 and 1997 and the prior movement of people from Willow Court into group homes has given us the opportunity to review what we've done over the last ten years and to maximise the opportunities, to learn from the experiences that we've had of what works really well and what doesn't. We know that storage for instance is a particular difficulty, we know that we've had tremendous difficulties with carports and the like, where quite expensive carports from time to time have been added and still haven't been sufficient for wheelchair vehicles.

I am extremely confident that the designs that we have come up with will meet those needs in the vast majority of cases. However, there are certain circumstances where we know that we are going to need to do some additional work, whether it is to work with individual clients who have a particular interest to have a garden shed to themselves—and certainly the size of the sites will allow for that.

In terms of storage space, there is a considerable area given in the laundry to storage. There is a large storeroom in each of the larger units, smaller storage areas in each of the smaller units, inside under the main roof line; each site has a shed on site. I think one of the sites, DS 9, which is subject to this submission, has two sheds allocated to that site. But it is certainly our intention to be able to add that sort of infrastructure at a time when we need that in the future but we would certainly be looking at tailoring that to the needs of individuals, as individuals assist us to personalise these sites and enable us to work with them to makes these sites work better for them."

GROUP HOME ORIENTATION

The Committee questioned the witnesses in relation to the orientation of the homes. Citing DS3, the Committee sought information on what attention, if any, had been paid to maximising solar gain to enhance the living quality of the house. The Project Manager, Peter Hutchinson submitted:—

“With regards to DS 3, that's special ... the sewer main ... places quite a few restrictions on us. The other restriction which I must point out is that the brief asked for specific needs, one is that the entrance faced the front of the block, or the entrance to the block itself, that the rear area - the kitchen-dining room - had a covered in private space. So from our perspective what we have needed to do is, obviously the entrance is facing towards the front, the outdoor area must be both at the rear of the house, at the opposite side to the loungeroom, in the private open space, and trying to cater for all those needs you do have the odd occasions where your sun orientation starts to suffer as a consequence. If you try to have the living room and the family room on opposite sides of the house, one is the private open space and one obviously facing the front, it would be difficult to accommodate on this site.”

Mr Smith added:—

“... of the nine straight four-bed houses, three of them we have arranged so that the bedrooms are at either end of the house, so you would have two bedrooms at one end of the house and two bedrooms at the other end of the house. The four bedroom house on DS 3 is an example of that, where originally the loungeroom, the kitchen-dining and the family room were designed in terms of layout to maximise north facing, however because of a desire for flexibility, three of those four bedroom houses were altered out of the nine to ensure that we had some degree of bedroom separation. Whilst some clients prefer to live with a large number of people, the practicalities of spending large periods of time living so close together sometimes means for us it is advisable or desirable for us to try to create some separate living areas and some separate private areas, that is, bedroom and bathroom areas, whilst still ensuring that we can support four people under the same roof line. And so in those sorts of instances there have been some areas where we have had to compromise on one principle to uphold another and that is one of the difficulties that we have had. Wherever possible we are making provisions for natural light and trying to ensure that there are user-friendly outdoor areas and covered verandah areas, especially to protect clients from the harshness of the Tasmanian sun.”

FUTURE NEEDS

The Committee sought advice as to how future needs would be accommodated. Ms Bent submitted:—

“The designers have been very conscious that while we are designing to meet the specific needs of specific people at the moment, that we needed to keep enough flexibility so that we could address the needs of other people, particularly people with high support needs and with a broader range of disabilities in the future. So many of the design features around the physical disability needs we have already commented on in terms of the layout of the bathrooms and the broader hallways, the actual robustness of the materials. As well as that we have put in place, in terms of the construction of the ceilings, that they are of sufficient strength for us to be able to introduce a tracking system that would allow clients to be moved along tracks between the bathroom and bedroom rather than use the equipment that we are using now. So that gives us extra cost in relation to using stronger materials but it does give us that flexibility in the future without having to introduce that at a later date.”

COST OF OPERATION

The Committee questioned the witnesses in relation to the cost of the group homes, particularly in comparison to the W.C.C. Ms Bent submitted:—

“The project has been developed on the basis that the recurrent costs associated with the maintenance and operation of Willow Court Centre shall be transferred to the operation of the disability group homes across the nine sites. Now that we have sign off in terms of the staffing levels and industrial negotiations with the unions, we can confirm that the costings in relation to the operation across the nine sites of the accommodation and of the day support and case management facilities, means that we will be able to operate within the existing budget of the Willow Court Centre for recurrent purposes.”

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The evidence presented to the Committee clearly demonstrated the need for the construction of new group homes for clients of Disability Services. Most of the buildings at the Willow Court Centre are old and whilst there are more recent buildings at the Royal Derwent Hospital, few of them are suitable for client use. The standard of accommodation in the current facilities does not match client needs, contemporary or best practice standards, occupational health and safety standards or meet efficient work practices.

The new group homes will provide a residential appearance to integrate with surrounding properties while also meeting the functional requirements for the support of clients. The new facilities will provide an environment in which clients will feel secure and comfortable whilst also providing a character in keeping with the surrounding neighbourhood.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, at an estimated total cost of \$4 190 000.

Parliament House
HOBART
17 March 2000

Hon D. G. WING MLC,
CHAIRMAN