# Members dumbfounded by GROH rent rises



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Disbelief, disappointment and fears for the future of rural teaching are amongst the main themes in feedback the SSTUWA is receiving from members on the increase in rents for government housing in regional WA.

Members teaching in regional areas are perplexed on rental increases at a time when rates are falling across WA, while rent rises compound the problem of the added cost of living in towns that are isolated from major infrastructure and services.

Here are some examples of what you have told us. Some responses have been edited to preserve members' privacy.

"After nine months of waiting for the availability of GROH housing, I moved into one of eight brand new GROH houses in September 2014 and the amount of teething issues I have experienced has been endless. The beginning of the 2016 school year saw water leakage somewhere unknown in the house and after numerous online maintenance reports and phone calls, the water leakage was only recently located and repaired.

In the meantime, I persevered with ongoing mould, water damage to carpet, walls and even my personal belongings. GROH have reassured me on several occasions that they were going to attend to the damage but have failed to do so. I currently have an issue with my electric water heater booster that GROH have been notified of on several occasions and yet again have failed to attend to. I have had to endure cold showers in the heart of the winter months. I have a house in Perth where the mortgage payments are less than the rent that I will be paying for my GROH house (once the increase starts) and in a town with very limited facilities."

*-Regional member*

"It is just terrible for us already struggling with the high cost of living in regional areas."

*-Regional member*

“The plumbing in my house consistently causes havoc for me and my family. There are tree roots throughout the drains, which, following heavy rain, grow and cause the drains to block and septic water to flood our bathroom and backyard. It often takes three days for the problem to be fixed. This is because instead of hiring local contractors, they get ones in from Geraldton or Port Hedland. While this is probably the cheaper option for them, it is a severe health risk for my young son being around septic water for three days. Who would want to move to the middle of nowhere and pay the same amount of rent as they would in Perth, but with no access to shopping centres or entertainment? My family and I moved here originally to save money for a house. This rent increase will make this even more difficult.”

*-Pilbara member*

“As a pre-service undergrad teacher who is thinking of going rural when I graduate, if this is the way they treat teachers who work in regional areas then I may have second thoughts. Every WA child deserves a quality education and decisions like this will only deter future teachers going regional.”

*-Pre-service teacher member*

“I first lived in a unit and had no air con for six months and it did not look like it was going to be repaired. I then moved into a house that had holes in the walls and roof of the kitchen. There were parts of door frames chewed out and a large drain out the back with no cover. These were not repaired and then our circumstances changed and we had a child and therefore the house became completely unsafe.

There were some issues with this house such as our hot water system not working properly, no retic, doors that wouldn’t stay on their rollers and blinds that were broken. We have now chosen to relocate.

Before moving, we received a letter to say the rent (at the exiting house) was increasing by $60 a fortnight. None of the above issues mentioned have actually been fixed properly and so I struggle to understand where the reasoning for increasing the rent has come from. We have heard that our rental prices are based on Perth prices but yet we don’t live in Perth.

*-Pilbara member*

“We already have distance, heat and challenging work environments to deal with. Such an increase will be detrimental to attracting and retaining staff. The key to good education for students in the north is teachers building strong relationships with them and their families and this takes several years, which is why it is imperative we have conditions that make teachers want to stay.”

*-Kimberley-Pilbara member*

“Previously in 2012 the rent was $318 per fortnight. It has been vacant for the last three years with our new graduate moving in this semester. She was sent a letter in July stating the rent was to be $496 per fortnight. Then 17 days later it jumped to $582. We have no services in our town and the closest services are a 60-75 km one-way trip. If we want to encourage our teachers to live in our town how can we do this when the rent is high, we have no services to offer and this is the only option available. Renting would be cheaper in the nearest regional centre, where there are services. But this does not help build our community or help our teachers’ well-being with the extra travel every day. The GROH housing is inadequate and unsuitable.”

*-Mid-West member*

“Most teachers already have expressed their belief that the GROH housing costs are too high, and this increase to their rent will be the decision maker for many to return to Perth and for some to return to other employment outside of the Education Department.

This is not only detrimental to their professional teaching life, but also to the education of students who clearly benefit from teachers who stay on for more than a year and form bonds with the community.

I elected to move to the region seven years ago as a single parent, particularly to teach Aboriginal students, but I was also attracted by the subsidised housing. It allowed me to not only save money but to support one child attending university and support my other child living with me.

Since that time rents have increased, in my case, three fold. While I now have a partner, the economic downturn in this area has meant them having several low paying part time jobs decreasing to no employment for over six months. The scale used

by GROH and the Education Department to determine rents seems at odds with the reality of living here.”

*-Kimberley member*

SSTUWA members should call or email their MP to let them know what they think about GROH rent increases.

Contact Education Minister Peter Collier and Housing Minister Brendon Grylls via email to tell them that this issue will have an impact on them at the state election, which will be held in five months' time.

Email minister.collier@dpc.wa.gov.au and minster.grylls@dpc.wa.gov.au

You can also sign an online petition calling for the rent increases to be stopped. Sign the petition here.



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