

HOUSING TARGETS

30/9/20 SMH

Planning Minister threatens to intervene in council approvals

Angus Thompson

NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes has accused a council on Sydney's north shore of "throwing its toys out of the cot" and warned he could intervene if it tries to abandon housing targets.

Mr Stokes said Ku-ring-gai Council had a "shared commitment to meet the requirements of a growing city" in achieving projections for dwellings in the area previously agreed with the Greater Sydney Commission, which a developer lobby group recently described as "relatively modest".

Mr Stokes said if the council did not want local planning responsibilities, "I can appoint a planning administrator to do it for them."

"My preference is they do what they're elected to do, because I think their community feels passionately about local planning, so

I'd encourage them not to hand over their powers but if they want to, we'll help them," he said.

His comments came after Ku-ring-gai mayor Jennifer Anderson seized on a letter from Mr Stokes, which stated targets weren't a legal requirement, to amend the council's draft housing strategy. Liberal MPs Jonathan O'Dea, who represents Davidson, and member for Ku-ring-gai Alister Henskens had previously criticised the strategy for allowing buildings up to 15 to 20 storeys high in some areas.

Mr Stokes' letter of September 8 said councils were responsible for deciding the number of dwellings in their targets but encouraged them to work with the commission to meet the needs of Greater Sydney.

In a newsletter last week Cr Anderson said that in March the commission set a target of 3000 to 3600 new homes in Ku-ring-gai

within the next six to 10 years, equating to a projected population increase of 10,000 residents. "The council put together a housing strategy based on that target."

In her mayoral minute put to a council meeting last week to reject the target, Cr Anderson quoted from submissions written by the pair of Liberal MPs regarding the draft strategy that said the targets weren't binding. "It is clear from the correspondence that I and my councillor colleagues have been receiving in recent weeks that the overwhelming majority of our community does not want more development beyond that already existing in current zonings."

She said in her newsletter of that week that the council initially voted to adopt an amended strategy that would result in new housing built to the year 2036 from its existing capacity and within existing

planning controls, but a majority of councillors then moved to rescind it. It will be debated again at the next council meeting.

Mr Stokes sent an open letter to all councils the next day saying the matter was not just about independence, "it's about responsibility too".

"If councils don't want to lead planning for growth at a local level, it will simply mean the government will need to take more direct action. If Ku-ring-gai Council doesn't want to take on that responsibility, they are welcome to ask the government to do the work for them."

In a newsletter on Monday, Cr Anderson said Mr Stokes' letter appeared to threaten government intervention.

Asked by the *Herald* whether she had responded to the open letter, Cr Anderson replied, "I never respond to anything that even remotely appears to be a threat."