

Strathfield By-election 2022 Interview Questions

Responses from Courtney Buckley - Greens

1. Housing and Homelessness

Housing costs in the Strathfield electorate have long been out of reach of ordinary families. Specialist homelessness services cannot meet demand and there is a shortage of social housing in the electorate. Secure, safe and healthy housing is the bedrock of mental and physical wellbeing, especially in the middle of a pandemic.

How do you think we can support local communities in the Strathfield electorate to access affordable housing and prevent homelessness?

Answer

There are diverse and partnered actions the government should take to effectively ensure accessible housing and prevent homelessness, ranging from immediate initiatives to longer-term and more indirect measures.

To start, we need to strengthen tenant's rights, such as preventing no-grounds evictions and providing methods for accessing mortgage relief when needed.

As a stop-gap measure to secure short-term physical shelter, the government should collaborate with hotels to secure a portion of rooms for crisis accommodation. Another idea to explore could be a financial disincentive regarding long-term unoccupied homes, as a method of increasing housing stock.

Building upon preventative measures, we need proper investment in mental health services and safe drug-use / drug rehabilitation centres, so people can more effectively care for their physical and mental health as well as fulfil their employment responsibilities that consequently provide them with financial stability including the ability to pay rent.

Longer-term, the government needs to commit to build more public housing and crisis accommodation. The industry should be provided increased funding also, including a pay increase for social workers as a means of showing respect to workers and also making the profession attractive to help increase the workforce and thus have more trained personnel available to aid the community and distribute the casework.

Services themselves need to be partnered with general awareness of them too, which requires collaborations with local established community groups such as churches, schools, medical centres, and youth centres.

2. A Strong Social Sector

Over the continuing COVID-19 crisis, the social services sector has risen to the challenge and continued to support vulnerable children, young people, families, and communities across the state. But the sector is stretched to capacity, under-funded and experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining staff because of low pay, poor conditions, a lack of affordable rental housing, and the stressful nature of the work.

If elected, how will you champion the work of the sector in the Strathfield electorate, and ensure they get the resources, recognition and support required to meet demand?

Answer

We need to make caring community-enriching professions attractive, which looks like competitive high wages, a bolstered workforce so casework can be distributed for effective care of both community members and at a level sustainable for staff, and increased funding for the industry so workers can fulfil their roles and provide the necessary care.

We need to ensure adequate accessible housing stock is available, and this starts with a commitment to more public housing with affordable rent caps and integrated into neighbourhoods to ensure accessible opportunities to good jobs, quality healthcare, and well-resourced neighbourhoods.

To achieve this I will collaborate with other MPs to develop a holistic plan, including making not only the moral case for prioritising housing accessibility but also the economic case that those with a stable home and firm foundations are better positioned to contribute to their communities and help foster common prosperity.

Specific policies include:

- *reforming the property development approval requirements to ensure all medium to high density projects ensure a reasonable percentage to be dedicated to affordable/public housing.*
- *ensure new property developments are ecologically-sound (in accordance with Ecologically Sustainable Development principles) and are wheelchair accessible and appropriate for older people*
- *ensuring new properties are paired with adequate public services crucial for work and wellbeing including public transport, green spaces, schools, healthcare, and grocery stores.*
- *advocate for diverse housing models including co-operative housing and community land trusts*
- *stronger tenants rights and an end to no-grounds evictions*
- *prompt maintenance servicing for public housing*

More informative regarding the NSW Greens housing policy can be read here:
<https://greens.org.au/nsw/policies/housing-and-homelessness>

3. Building Women's Economic Security and Safety

The Strathfield electorate has a reliance on female dominated industries such as retail, health and social services, yet women continue to suffer greater impacts from Covid including job loss and a spike in domestic violence of 9.8% (across NSW).

What measures would you put in place to build women's economic security and independence? What will you advocate for to better support women and children in the electorate and prevent tragic outcomes for women and children escaping domestic violence?

Answer

Women's and children's economic security, independence, and housing security is multifaceted.

Directly, we need to provide more funding towards women's shelters and crisis accommodation as well as build more of these facilities. We also need to collaborate with local established community organisations such as churches, schools, and medical centres, as well as police, to educate and inform people of the services available and how to effectively and safely access these services.

As preventative measures, we need to promote women's sustained engagement in the workforce, such as providing free childcare and supporting businesses in providing maternity leave. A more cultural solution is to change narratives of gender roles and expectations so we can empower and enable women to engage in the workforce, in public life, and to seek financial autonomy. This looks like school-based programs, elevating diverse women into public leadership positions, and celebrating women role models in our community. Another initiative is to fund support groups for men to help them access professional guidance regarding how to respond to life's challenges in a healthy and effective way.

More informative regarding the NSW Greens policy for women and children can be read here:

<https://greens.org.au/nsw/policies/women>

<https://greens.org.au/nsw/policies/children-and-young-people>

4. Supporting Families

There is a large proportion of children growing up in poverty in this electorate – in some areas (Burwood, Homebush, Strathfield South) more than one in five. Children growing up in families experiencing financial hardship are more likely to miss out on effective parenting and to be at risk of abuse and neglect.

What are your/your party's policies to support parents and promote children's wellbeing and keep them safe from harm?

Answer

We need to ensure the security, stability and support of the parents so they are equipped and empowered to provide care to their children. This looks like ensuring they have access to secure housing, as well as secure and reasonably-waged employment. The former I have spoken to in previous questions, as for the latter - we need to advocate for and reinforce workers' rights to consistent and safe work with wages that maintain their practical worth as inflation occurs. It also includes ensuring adequate public infrastructure for getting to and from employment, such as affordable and reliable public transport, as well as affordable and accessible nutritious food. In regards to public transport, the Greens have a policy to increase the frequency of key services, expand routes, and have a \$1 fare maximum.

The government also has a role investing in youth centres and parent support programs to provide additional access to professional assistance and resources.

5. Emergency Responses

Research is showing more and more that emergency responses built from the top down suffer from a lack of local knowledge and collaboration; and from inappropriate funding and resourcing. LGA's of concern struggled in the lockdowns last year and diverse local communities and their leaders were not involved in emergency responses.

What do you think are the key issues in developing disaster preparedness and emergency management systems that work?

Answer

Local MPs should prioritise developing strong relationships with community leaders, established community groups, and social service organisations to assist in coordinating collaboration, knowledge sharing, and diversified services provision. (And the MPs should encourage local councils to do the same also.) By doing so, the MPs office can support co-ordinated action and communication to enhance quick and effective support for residents in need.

6. Responding to Covid

As the world approaches its limit to growth we are seeing more and more natural disasters including this current pandemic. Strathfield has one of the highest rates of Covid infection in the state; the health workforce is largely exhausted; and health translation systems are breaking down...

What needs to happen to ensure that our local health systems including translation services, and mental health programs are better able to cope with these challenges?

Answer

We need direct funding into healthcare providers and support for their staff in the ways outlined in earlier questions regarding wages and workload.

We need to ensure local manufacturing capabilities of primary supplies such as PPE.

And we need preventative measures, from genuine and extensive climate action to help reduce the effects of climate-exacerbated disasters and diseases, public education initiatives regarding hygiene and health partnered with the real provision of related resources - whether that's access to housing where individual rooms for each resident are affordable for all, access to public and soap-stocked bathrooms, and access to green spaces and nature-infused residential areas to encourage walks and enable sport.

And, as climate change enhances the danger of natural weather events, we need public knowledge regarding insurance coverage so people aren't losing their home and primary asset due to unknowingly having inappropriate home insurance - as was extensively (and unfortunately) demonstrated through the 2020 bushfires.