

Inquiry into the Management of NSW Public Housing Maintenance Contracts

Pacific Link Housing responses:

1. Can you explain the nature and administration of Pacific Link Housing's current system of maintenance contracts and how it compares to the Family and Community Services system?

As mentioned in our submission, Pacific Link Housing (PLH) has over 70 contractors ranging from sole traders to multi-traders. Each are used for different purposes. Sole traders are used more for responsive maintenance and multi-traders for work on vacant upgrades or planned works. Each contractor signs a contract with PLH, which is more of an agreement, which states our conditions and expectations of working with and around our tenants.

2. What is your preliminary assessment of the new Asset Maintenance Services contract that was introduced by Family and Community Services in April this year?

PLH has not been made of aware of the new Asset Maintenance Services contract or that it was released in April.

3. The new Asset Maintenance Service Contract was piloted in Maitland, have you received any feedback regarding the new contract system? If so, what is the nature of that feedback?

PLH has not received any feedback from the pilot.

4. What aspects of Pacific Link Housing's approach to maintenance contracts would you recommend be adopted by Family and Community Services?

PLH reviews our contracts every 5 years. PLH also regularly audits contractors to ensure:

- a. Insurances are current
- b. Licenced appropriately for the work
- c. Works are being undertaken in accordance with WHS and completed in a satisfactory manner and to the agreed value.

5. Do you have any concerns regarding your projected expenditure over the next five years for maintaining the housing properties you manage? If so, why?

PLH is always constantly checking future maintenance budgets and ensuring there are enough reserves to meet projected expenditure. To assist in achieving this goal PLH is always looking at initiatives to improve our service and increase efficiencies in expenditure without compromising quality of work.

6. Do community housing providers manage maintenance costs more efficiently than public housing providers?

Community Housing Providers (CHPs) and contractors have a closer working relationship to obtain better overall results. PLH would argue that due to limited income opportunities, CHPs are more likely to spend their money more wisely and ensure that the work is done correctly in the first instance. This may cost more in the short term, but in the long term it will reduce maintenance costs.

7. How do tenants register maintenance matters with Pacific Link Housing?

Tenants have several ways to contact PLH for maintenance repairs, namely:

- a. Phone – during office hours and after hours
- b. Reception
- c. Email – direct to maintenance team

- d. Mail/letter
- e. Website link – direct to maintenance team
- f. At routine property inspections
- g. PLH is also currently adopting a tenant portal where the tenant should be able to lodge a maintenance request directly to the maintenance team

8. How do tenants report any issues they have with maintenance contractors to Pacific Link Housing?

Tenants may register their contractor complaints in the ways mentioned in point 7. All complaints are investigated and actioned accordingly.

9. In your submission, you mention Pacific Link Housing conducts spot checks to monitor contractors' quality of work. How do you determine when and at which dwellings a spot check is conducted, and how do you measure the quality of work?

Audits by Asset staff are based on high value works – all work valued over \$5000. Any works less than this value are random. Audits may be undertaken at any time during the work and on completion. It is our expectation that work is completed in a tradesman-like manner and in accordance with the Building Code of Australia and HNSW Asset Standards.

10. What methodologies and processes could be implemented to ensure consistent social housing maintenance standards across NSW?

The methodology and processes that could be adopted for consistent maintenance standards include:

- a. Transfer more of the housing stock to CHPs
- b. Agree on a social housing standard
- c. Standardise the components that are within properties
- d. Share more information about the history of the property to make better maintenance judgements
- e. Timely release of Property Assessment Survey (PAS) data

11. We have received evidence that Family and Community Services public housing tenants report that a culture of disrespect exists among contractors leaving tenants feeling patronised, bullied, intimidated and discriminated against. Have your tenants had this experience and what measures does Pacific Link Housing take to prevent it?

A section within our contract is the 'Code of Conduct' which outlines the guidelines for contractor's behaviour with and around our tenants. It is our expectation that contractors and sub-contractors adhere to these guidelines. Any breach of these as a result from a complaint from a tenant is investigated and could be grounds for termination of their services.

12. In your submission, you state that the community housing sector's tenants satisfaction levels are well above that of public housing providers. What do you think are the reasons for this?

High tenant satisfaction due to:

- a. Closer relationship with them
- b. We genuinely care, particularly those more vulnerable
- c. Empathetic and listen to what they are saying
- d. Engage with them more – routine inspections, newsletters

13. In their submission, the NSW Federation of Housing Associations argues for title transfer of properties to community housing organisations. What is your view of this in regards to property maintenance?

Title transfer would open up many options and funding possibilities for CHPs to achieve our objective to house more people in need. Title transfer will also:

- a. enable CHPs to become totally responsible and accountable for maintenance
- b. provide an opportunity to reconfigure the CHP portfolio to meet the needs of those on the waiting list in our LGAs. Dispose of older properties and rebuild suitable properties thus reducing our maintenance costs with newer stock.
- c. Innovative ideas to increasing yield on properties – for example granny flats