



INTRODUCTION

An inquiry into the Joint Use and Co-location of Public Buildings is being conducted by the NSW Standing Committee on Public Works and will examine the design, regulatory arrangements, and cost implications of the joint use and co-location of state and local government public buildings.

This submission provides information on the Department's activities in relation to the planning of facilities that are or could be jointly used and managed by different agencies or State and Local Government in the context of the inquiry's term of reference. Also provided is information on the Department's property policies associated with community facilities development.

The first section outlines the current practices of the Department and policies associated with the planning of facilities. The second section describes the strategic direction of the Department. The third section concludes by explaining the restrictions and limitations of the government body types that the Department would be able to co-locate with.

CURRENT PRACTICES

Office Premises

The Department has offices spread across the state of New South Wales. The table below shows the number of offices and the type of use.

Type of Office	Number of Offices
Offices where joint use occurs	1
Offices where co-location exists ¹	6
Offices in towns / regional centres where other Government offices exist ²	45
Offices in towns / regional centres where no other Government offices exist	20
Total Offices	72

The Department's corporate office at Ashfield is the only office that has joint use. The training rooms on the ground floor are made available to the Department of Community Services and *NSW businesslink*. The function of the corporate office is administration and there is over 500 staff and six working in this area. There are also four major regional administration centres, which are located at Newcastle, Parramatta, Sydney and Queanbeyan. The major function of the Department's other offices is client services.

¹ Offices that are co-located are in Cootamundra, Dubbo, Lismore, Queanbeyan, Shellharbour and Wagga Wagga.

² Potential for co-location and joint-use exists in the towns where these offices are located.

The Department has six offices that are co-located with the Department of Community Services, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, and *NSW businesslink*.

Offices of the Department that are located in towns / regional centres (45 offices) where there are other Government agencies have the potential for co-location or joint use. These offices are covered by current leasing arrangements and available office space for co-locations has not been investigated. The Department uses the Government Leasing Service in procuring office space in excess of 1,000 m². The Department has had a policy of divesting itself of office property and at the date of writing owns five of its office buildings. The Department also applies the office accommodation initiatives from the Office Accommodation Reform Program.

The Department has eight Intensive Tenancy Management (ITM) offices, which are located in vacant townhouses in a Public Housing Estate. These offices are part of a project that involves on-site housing management teams, flexible strategies for allocating housing to tenants, a higher ratio of staff to residents and local handypersons hired for minor maintenance work.

Policies on Office Requirements

The Department is a human service agency and has a charter to assist people in finding housing solutions. The Department is in the process of confirming accommodation policy to meet our business needs. The Department's image should be both welcoming and supportive for clients. Some important considerations in terms of office accommodation for the Department are set out below.

The office environment and security is a critical component of the Department's policy on client-initiated violence. The Department is committed to minimising the risk of client-initiated violence through all practical means. The Department's first concern is the safety of staff in relation to clients and other visitors to the Department's premises.

The Department's business objectives in relation to office accommodation are to

- Provide a safe and comfortable working environment for staff.
- Provide a safe, welcoming, comfortable and functional environment for visitors and clients.
- Be recognised as the Department of Housing.
- Promote a professional but welcoming image.

Well designed office accommodation and public contact areas together with the provision of professional services will promote a relationship of mutual respect with our clients. This is achieved by utilising the philosophy of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED explores the relationship between operational requirements of the business, the nature of interactions with clients and the physical design of both working and public space. It reduces the opportunity for security breaches through careful consideration of use of space and how this will impact on behaviour. It is complemented by appropriate security treatments and safety procedures. These procedures are communicated to staff through training and induction programs, which are regularly refreshed.

CPTED provides an integrated solution to security and safety for staff and clients. The Department has chosen CPTED because it provides an effective method for minimisation

of client aggression and allows flexibility of application for individual sites and business purposes. CPTED provides layers of security by carefully designing the layout to take advantage of the physical space.

There are some common elements of design, which must be applied as far as the physical site constraints allow. These are:

- Private and public spaces should be clearly defined so that opportunities for unauthorised persons to loiter are reduced. This includes access and egress points.
- Layers of security be provided so that there is opportunity for staff to retreat when necessary. For example, behind the counter area in case of breach.
- Traffic flow needs to be facilitated by the design so that there is no conflict with usage of space which might cause discomfort or aggravation for clients.
- The reception area should be clearly visible. In offices where there is a large volume of traffic it may be useful to provide a fixed queuing device. In smaller offices this would not be desirable but could be achieved through floor treatments, for example a change in the colour of the floor covering.
- Where possible it is preferable that the reception area and semi private interview booths allow clients to sit, even for short transactions, as this creates a more comfortable environment for the client and allows better and more consistent security treatments.
- Furniture in the public area needs to be heavy enough to ensure it cannot be thrown however allows for some personalisation of space so the client can achieve a level of comfort.
- There should be no loose objects of any kind which might be used as weapons within reach of the client.
- Visibility throughout the office needs to be achieved without intruding on privacy requirements. This might be assisted by CCTV.
- Noise transfer should be minimised to allow private conversations however should also enable hearing raised voices to ensure nearby staff are alerted to potential conflicts.
- A horizontal element at 1600 height at reception, interview booths is mandatory to inhibit ability for downward or direct striking. This can be achieved using a range of treatments. Some options are described below.
- Counters height and width should also be used to limit the reach of customers and enable withdrawal by staff if needed.
- Duress alarms should be located at each point of public contact ie the front counter, each booth and interview rooms.

Accessibility by clients to the Department's office is another major consideration of the office environment. This includes:

- access to the office and amenities by clients with disabilities; and
- the proximity of the office to public transport.

Other issues that the Department considers when acquiring new office premises, regardless of whether the offices are co-located or joint-use with another local or state government department are:

- Privacy of client records
- Cultural considerations of clients

- Public toilets for clients
- Interview rooms
- Security
- Duress alarms
- Comfort of clients with surroundings

POSITION

The Department has responded to various initiatives of the Department of Commerce to co-locate in purpose built government buildings when the co-location meets the Department's office requirements. The Department and two other government agencies are currently negotiating with the Department of Commerce for co-location of office space in Goulbourn.

The Department would carefully consider any proposed co-location or joint-use with another state or local government department with the main issue being the consideration of the Department's clients. This includes access, privacy, transport and comfort. The impact of adjacent businesses on the Department's staff and clients would also need to be considered.

The Department sees value in being co-located in office buildings with other *NSW businesslink* clients. This co-location would improve service efficiency and potentially reduce operating costs associated with shared services.

Since the Department is a human service agency, there would appear to be a synergy for co-locating the Department with other human service agencies both at the State and Commonwealth levels. These agencies may include community housing organisations, welfare organisations and local government service units. The Department would consider any co-location or joint-use for its offices, however, negotiations would need to occur in order to determine the processes and procedures around the use of common areas in light of the above considerations. These considerations would be different between the administrative and client-service offices.