

REGIONAL TENANT RESOURCE SERVICE SOUTH EASTERN REGION

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Inquiry into Allocation of Social Housing

Current levels of funding for the development of new housing stock:

The South East Regional Tenant Resource Service covers the Department of Housing Areas of Illawarra and South East. There is a desperate need for 1 and 2 bedroom units, villas or townhouses in most locations. There is also a significant need for modified housing to accommodate older people with limited mobility, and people with disabilities. In some locations, the older fibro cottages on large blocks have been demolished and replaced with a mix of modified housing suitable for this target group. More of this type of redevelopment would greatly enhance the range of properties available, and would give older tenants struggling to maintain tenancies in unsuitable premises more viable options. Their current choice is often to stay in an old house with a huge yard and unsuitable bathroom, or move to a tiny unit or bedsit where most tenants are younger and have significant social issues. Many people just wait until they are so frail and/or ill that they must move to a Nursing Home, when they could have maintained their independence longer had they been housed in suitable, modified premises.

The effectiveness and appropriateness of housing allocations:

Housing allocations policy is a constant discussion point at most tenant meetings. Older people, especially those with significant medical problems, have great difficulty coping in some unit complexes where the mix of tenants includes young and middle aged people with high support needs. The majority of tenants recognise that these tenants need somewhere to live, however they feel the Department of Housing Allocation Policies just

set some people up for conflict and failure in the community. Many older people feel like prisoners in their units because they are so afraid of their neighbours. These policies do not serve the interest of either group. The older people feel isolated and frightened, and the younger people feel they are constantly monitored and criticised because they like loud music and have a noisy social network. The Illawarra Housing Trust conducted research that indicated that a more considered allocations policy that takes into account the tenant's lifestyle, results in more sustainable tenancies and happier tenants.

The new "Reshaping Public Housing" policies will increase the number of tenants with high support needs, making this issue even more important for tenants in the future.

Role of Community Housing in meeting the demand of social housing :

Community Housing organisations are small players in the social housing sector. While there are plans to increase the number of dwellings allocated to community housing, it appears that the majority of those allocation will be transfers from current Department of Housing stock. This means there may be no net increase in social housing stock as a result of this policy. Community housing organisations are well respected organisations in our Areas. However they are generally small, and will require significant additional resources to manage any large scale increase in stock.

Another problem in rural areas is the availability of suitable stock for spot purchase or purpose building. In the past few years there have been significant delays in gaining new properties to tenant because there have been no suitable premises for purchase, and building approval has been delayed or denied due to community perceptions of the impact social housing may have in a street or community.

Many public housing tenants consider community housing to be less secure. However the "Reshaping Public Housing" policies will greatly reduce the number of tenants with long term tenure. Existing tenants will therefore be reluctant to transfer to community housing as they fear risking losing their long term tenure.

Social Housing allocation systems in other jurisdictions:

The tenant groups in the Illawarra and South Eastern Areas have not discussed other systems.

Other related matters:

Tenant groups are very concerned that insufficient supports are currently in place for the existing high needs clients in their communities. E.g. When family or neighbours contact agencies on behalf of family, friends and neighbours they are frequently told the health or allied service cannot assist, despite that tenant previously being a client of that service. The planned increase in high needs tenants when the "Reshaping Public Housing" policies come into operation will only exacerbate this issue. Most people are genuinely concerned about their neighbours, and try very hard to help them cope in the community. However the system is not adequately resourced, so people in need are left to flounder and fail when appropriate intervention would assist that person to remain in the tenancy and in the community.

These concerns apply to clients with mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems and frail aged people who need assistance to stay in their own home. All these services have very long waiting lists and can only help people in desperate need. Tenant groups in our Areas frequently invite service providers to meetings to ensure people understand the referral process a criteria for specific services. However this knowledge is useless if access to those services is unavailable.

Although these issues are not specifically housing issues, they will increasingly impact on tenants in public housing complexes and suburbs. Allocations policies have short and long term impacts on communities, and it is the individuals in those communities who have to cope daily with those impacts. Unless these issues are addressed now, these communities will experience significant stress and dislocation over the next few years.

Jill Coleman

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On behalf of tenants and tenant groups in Illawarra and South East Areas.

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