

**Submission  
No 15**

## **TENANCY MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL HOUSING**

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**Submission to the  
Public Accounts Committee  
NSW Legislative Council**

The Forest Lodge & Glebe Co-ordination Group (FLAG) welcomes the Legislative Council's inquiry into tenancy management in social housing. FLAG aims are to foster links and communication between stakeholders in Glebe and Forest Lodge; promote Forest Lodge and Glebe as a positive place to work and live; and link groups/people with skills, knowledge and expertise to support community initiatives.

Glebe is home to some 14,000 people from a diverse range of backgrounds. Whilst it has pockets of wealth the suburb also has an estimated 1,424 public housing properties. This represents 18% of all public housing in the City of Sydney. Approximately 4000 people live in public housing properties in Glebe, comprising one-third of the entire population in this suburb. Housing type varies from terraces, units and townhouses.

As a result, FLAG has particular interest in ensuring the tenancy management arrangements in NSW social housing are effective for public housing tenants, and result in positive outcomes. This submission will particularly focus on the cost effectiveness of current tenancy management arrangements in public housing and the outcomes for tenants from current tenancy management arrangements. The submission will conclude by making suggestions of possible measures to improve tenancy management services.

*The cost effectiveness of current tenancy management arrangements in public housing particularly compared to private and community housing sectors.*

We believe the current tenancy management arrangements in public housing is not as cost effective as it could be, particularly when it comes to observing the way maintenance issues are dealt with. When contractors are called to address maintenance issues their briefing for the job is very specific. Tenants often report that contractors refuse to look at other similar maintenance issues, instead insisting they are only able to look at the particular issue they have been called out for. This means Housing NSW are paying for the contractors to make numerous

trips for similar jobs. Maintenance would be more cost effective if contractors could address these similar issues in the one trip.

### *Outcomes for tenants from current tenancy management arrangements*

Tenants frequently report that they experience trouble contact Housing NSW regarding the management of their property. The Call Centre is not an effective way for tenants to report maintenance concerns, as there are often long waiting times, which is costly for those tenants using pre-paid mobile phones. Furthermore, once maintenance requests are lodged, there is a poor response time between the complaint and when the issue is attended to. There are also overwhelming reports of the substandard work that is done in fixing the issues. Tenants are often unaware of the specifications of the contract between Housing NSW and the various workers, and are therefore unable to accurately determine whether the work is being completed to the standard which is outlined in the contracts.

This accumulates to tenants feeling frustrated and disempowered. A main object of the Housing Bill 2001 was to maximise the opportunities for public housing tenants to participate in the management of their housing.<sup>1</sup> It is clear, through the reports of disempowerment and breakdown of communication between tenants and Housing NSW, that this object is not being met under the current tenancy management arrangements. FLAG is aware that these concerns are repeated across numerous communities of public housing tenants.

### *Possible measures to improve tenancy management services*

Increasing the collaboration between Housing NSW and public housing tenants in regard to the management of their housing would act to empower residents, and would result in more positive outcomes for tenants. Collaboration involves Housing NSW being approachable, as well as being easy to contact. We suggest that having easier access to a local area office would enable tenants to report maintenance issues with greater ease and reduced cost, as well as working improve the communication and engagement between Housing NSW and tenants.

Considering the negative outcomes tenants are currently experiencing as a result of the lack of transparency concerning maintenance contracts, we believe it is timely for the contracts to be reviewed. An audit of the contracts could help uncover whether the work that contractors are being paid to do is actually being done. Furthermore, allowing tenants to access information regarding the specifications of the contracts would empower them, and allow them to make

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<sup>1</sup> *Housing Bill 2001* (NSW)(Austl.).

informed complaints if the work is not at an acceptable standard. Reviewing the contracts would also allow Housing NSW to reassess whether it is more cost effective to give the contracts to local services. Tenants have suggested that building relationships with contractors would increase their ability to participate in the management of their housing. It could also work to increase their trust that the work is being done to an acceptable standard.

In summary, we believe that any measure which increases tenant engagement and collaboration between Housing NSW and public housing tenants will work to increase trust, empower tenants and improve outcomes from management arrangements.

Yours



Dr. Margot Rawsthorne

On behalf of FLAG