

Public Bodies Review Committee

Inquiry into the Allocation of Social Housing

▪ CURRENT LEVELS OF FUNDING.

The urgent need to move away from the entrenched system of grouping all public housing tenants into the confines of one area/suburb is very apparent.

Some years ago the government had a policy that provided the opportunity for new applicants to nominate their intention/availability to purchase housing at the time of allocation. This provided families with low incomes to pursue the dream to 'own their home', an ambitious value that is worth reconsidering to support. This method not only provides permanency for low income families and community stability, it also provides the direct redistribution of public housing funding.

An additional method would be to place a realistic value on the existing aging stock with a view to offering existing tenants an attractive offer and the means to purchase, thereby achieving a similar outcome as above - permanency for low income families; community stability and the direct redistribution of relevant public housing funding. This proposal could also be extended to include those first home buyers who are outside of the public housing environment the opportunity to purchase, thereby restricting stock ownership dominated by the property investment market, further enhancing community stability.

▪ EFFECTIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS OF HOUSING ALLOCATION.

The matter regarding the Dept of Housing's policy for the location of potential residents in general, but particularly within the Windale area has been a most discussed item at the local level. The general opinion of community members focuses on the continued allocation to this area by the DOH of people from known criminal, or other non desirable, backgrounds.

The question has constantly been asked as to why the DOH does not either liaise with other authorities or vet applications for the benefit of both the DOH and those existing residents. The reply is generally along the lines that no such liaison exists and no vetting is conducted as this could have a discriminatory effect on the applicant. Such negative responses usually attract an angry response about *their rights for a peaceful existence without the anti-social and threatening behaviour of lease tenants as opposed to dwelling owners.*

Some dwellings in the vicinity have been sold by the original owners. In some cases the new owners have purchased for an investment and leased the premises. On a number of occasions the owners have been known to give their contact information to neighbours of the leased premises with a request to contact them if there are any problems. This action is seen as a protection for their investment and our peace of mind. It appears the DOH, on the contrary, doesn't want to know.

The DOH used to place very severe penalties (including eviction) for tenants who did not comply with the then Housing Commission's guidelines. When the DOH is reminded of those circumstances the response only describes the policy changes that have since occurred, which begs the question – why?

There is an awareness of cases whereby tenants have been moved from one area another because of complaints about anti-social behaviour (drug and alcohol related). How can areas of public housing already suffering from the affects of low income/single parent families, improve their lifestyle and self esteem when government authorities only pay lip service to the problem, have a negative attitude and knowingly place undesirable tenants into the area (a fact that can be substantiated)?

Residents are only striving to achieve a safe and fearless existence in their own backyard.

▪ HOUSING ALLOCATIONS.

The existing system of housing allocation is seriously flawed. It does not provide any follow up of new tenants to assess the suitability for both the government AND the community. Notwithstanding the recent changes that apply a three month 'trial' period prior to a more permanent agreement, there is no actual visitation program that could enhance the decision process. It appears that the introduction of recent changes to the tenant agreement has not in any way contributed to the assessment process as tenants are moved in to new premises without any induction into the expectation for all tenants regarding behaviour and property maintenance; dedicated on-site follow up by DoH personnel OR background regarding the broader community in so far as local support mechanism; volunteer activities; *appropriate* schools where applicable; the available social and religious connections.

A suggestion worth considering is to form an *Allocations Committee* that predominately includes DoH personnel as well as 'prominent' members of those communities that are encompassed within the relative DoH district. The role of the allocation committee would be to examine the previous history of applicants for public housing (apparently not available in the existing process) with a view to awarding housing to those considered to be most entitled. The decision would be in accordance with established terms of reference that could identify such things as repeat offenders of social justice expectations and jurisdictions, as well as those mentioned above. Such a scheme may go a long way toward improving the balance of the social mix within public housing.

▪ OTHER RELATED MATTERS

New Tenants

A proposal by DoH to introduce a "New Tennant" welcome package was met with enthusiasm by the Windale Community Group. It appeared to provide a good opportunity for both new tenants and the community group to bridge the communication gaps that may exist. This new project has not been progressed.

Mental Health.

The existing system of priority allocation for applicants with an established mental health condition should be revised. There is a need to provide alternative and more appropriate accommodation options for potential tenants who are suffering from mental illness. The broader community in general are at risk of a disruptive existence that requires constant and frustrating reporting to responsible agencies to enable the achievement of satisfactory results that is more conducive to safe and secure social interaction within any community. Accordingly, it is considered to be unacceptable practise for the DoH to continue applying a policy that provides no alternatives but to place such applicants into a demographic mix of young families; low income and aged.

Unauthorised Tenants.

There is substantial evidence of the continued practice for unauthorised persons to co-exist for long terms with authorised tenants in the public housing sector. Notwithstanding that such occurrences are subjected to credible reporting from the community, the DoH appears inadequate to address these situations. A practical reporting system should be established between the DoH and responsible community groups/members to enable a fast and effective tool to address an unacceptable and growing practice, which may in turn reduce the opportunity for threats of anti social mob behaviour which appears to be on the increase.

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