

**Submission
No 7**

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF NSW PUBLIC HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

Organisation: Housing Action Plan Now!
Name: Miss Kayleigh Ellis
Date Received: 5/02/2016



4th February, 2016

SUBMISSION TO THE legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee
Inquiry into the Management of NSW Public Housing Maintenance Contracts

ORGANISATION: Glebe Housing Action Plan Now (HAPN)

HAPN welcomes the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry into the Management of NSW Public Housing Maintenance Contracts

HAPN is a subcommittee of the Forest Lodge and Glebe (FLAG) coordination group made up of local residents and representatives from local service providers, community organisations, churches, local council and schools in the Glebe, Forest Lodge and Camperdown area. FLAG's membership includes Glebe Community Development Project (Sydney University), StJohn's Church, Glebe Youth Service, Glebe Primary School, City of Sydney, Glebe Police, Glebe Treehouse, The Glebe Society and local residents from the Aboriginal community and public housing estate. FLAG has approximately 80 members and meets monthly.

HAPN's primary aim is to build and support a resilient community that can engage and participate in processes, conversations and appropriate forums and networks regarding social housing in the Glebe Estate and other social housing properties (Minogue Crescent and Camperdown).

Glebe is an inner city village situated within the City of Sydney Local Government Area. Of the just over 11,000 individuals living in the area, there is evidence of socially polarised populations, with the two most common personal incomes being greater than \$2000 per week and between \$200 and \$299 per week. According to data from the 2011 ABS Census, approximately 19% of the Glebe population live in public or social housing, with around 19% owning their homes outright (ABS Community Profiles for Glebe based on 2001, 2006 and 2011 Census data (published in 2002, 2007, 2012); ABS Census Quickstats 2011 accessed via http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getoroducUcensus/2011/quickstaUGL_NSW1659?opendocument&navpos=220)

**HAPN –
Housing
Action
Plan
Now**

A sub-committee of Forest Lodge and Glebe Coordination Group (FLAG)
c/o Glebe Community Development Project
160-62 St Johns Road, Glebe NSW 2037
T: (02) 95716453
E: glebeHAPN@gmail.com
W: glebe.com.au/hapn

A) The current repair status and physical condition of the public housing stock managed by Housing NSW

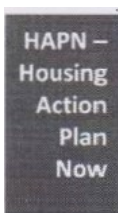
HAPN see evidenced in the Glebe estate and the Johanna O'Dea complex in Camperdown a long period of neglect to the repair and maintenance needs of these properties. They are progressively ageing unfit for purpose and in increasingly short supply. There appears to have been considerable inaction in specifically the three years prior to 2015, with tenants patiently allowing "specialists" to access their homes annually to assess required repairs. There is a sense from tenants that nothing will happen AND this has been exacerbated by the split of tenancy management and 'asset maintenance' under two separate Government departments (Housing NSW (HNSW) and Lands and Housing Corporation (LAHC)). Residents of the Johanna O'Dea complex and members of the Johanna O'Dea and Alexandria Dwelling Action Group (JAAG) have specifically advocated for major repairs to the hot water system since 2011. They complained of a lack of consistent water pressure and temperature regulation throughout the entire 150 units in the building, only very recently remedied according to their advice.

We suggest the development of "Area plans" (for tenant precincts) that include input from local tenant representatives. This will allow for progressive and responsive solutions that meet the needs of local tenants, a move away from a one size fits all approach or the picking off of two to three properties in the street. The 'tenant precincts' could come from NAB's - a HNSW approved tenant participation structure.

B) The costs of maintenance of the current public housing stock, variations in expenditure trends over the previous five years and projected expenditure for the next five years

The publicly owned flats at Cowper/Elger Streets, Glebe were demolished in early 2011 for subdivision and high rise development. The sale was finalized prior to a development application being approved for the site. Subsequently the NSW Government has privatised over 50 per cent of the Cowper/Elger Street site by selling to a Singaporean developer (Roxy Pacific) in December 2015. The redevelopment of this site will not result in an increase in the supply of social housing in Glebe or the greater Sydney area. The entire site was previously occupied by public housing. The Auditor General advised that selling properties and delaying some capital and maintenance expenditure will only impact the level of stock and is not a financially sustainable long-term (*Making the best use of public housing*, New South Wales Auditor-General's Report, Audit Office of NSW, 30 July 2013).

The drive to reduce the cost of maintenance to public housing stock is economically suspect. Delaying the commencement of works from the previous 5 years and over the next 5 years will contribute to increased cost to the LAHC in the long term given properties continue to deteriorate as a result of neglect and incomplete works or "band aid" solutions. Where once a gutter or downpipe repair would have been sufficient, now the property may require new fascia board or verandah supports, replacement of a warped door and internal painting and treatment to address internal mould issues.



A sub-committee of Forest Lodge and Glebe Coordination Group (FLAG)
 c/o Glebe Community Development Project
 160-162 St Johns Road Glebe NSW 2037
 T: (02) 95716453
 E: glebeHAPN@gmail.com
 W: glebe.com.au/hapn

C) The nature and administration of maintenance contracts, including private sector arrangements

Government contractors should be assessed against measures of providing an ethical service to the Australian community. In January 2016, the Spotless Group was awarded a further five-year contract to deliver Asset Services Maintenance for NSW LAHC. The annualized total revenue from the contract is over \$62m to contribute maintenance, capital works and restoration/heritage works to 24,000 properties across NSW including the Inner West. Last year Spotless were accused of underpaying their staff working at department store Myer, although they made \$2.2 billion they paid no tax.

Where possible, preference should be given to local contractors in the delivery of maintenance contracts.

Contractors should receive mandatory training regarding protocols of working with diverse customers and working in a culturally responsive and inclusive manner.

D) Methodologies and processes for ensuring consistent public housing maintenance standards across NSW, including quality assurance, effectiveness, efficiency and contract supervision

HAPN were advised of a current issue yesterday where a family of 3 children (including a 7 month year old) have been without showering facilities for two weeks due to bathroom maintenance. The family were unaware the job would take 2 weeks to complete and has not been placed in alternate temporary accommodation as they have 2 older Labrador dogs living as pets

in the home (who are unable to join with them in temporary accommodation). Although maintenance is welcomed by social housing tenants, tenants need to have the opportunity to shower each day and options to provide this opportunity need to be predetermined in advance through a consultative process with tenants.

HAPN suspect that in the near future there are plans for Contractors to become eligible for "bonus payments" for delivering under quota and expedient services. HAPN ask how the quality of Contractors workmanship, as well as the satisfaction of tenants' needs will be monitored? Unless regulated, Contractors will be incentivized to produce a lower quality of service and will be rewarded as a result.

HAPN are aware of countless accounts of the provision of substandard maintenance and repairs to properties and of tenants being coerced by Contractors to report a job well done. HAPN recommend a transparent process where tenants are voluntarily issued a copy of the relevant work order and job number, are aware of the details of the Contractor attending their home and are provided a formal avenue for reporting on job completion in a timely manner as a matter of process.

Social Housing tenants engaged with HAPN have suggested that tenants should be provided with the opportunity to complete a Condition Report at the commencement of their tenancy (not dissimilar to the version mandated for people renting in the private market). Subsequent property inspections should require tenants and "specialists" the opportunity to sit and review the progress of outstanding unresolved maintenance issues from the original condition report with agreed timeframes associated with the completion of works.

E) **Statutory obligations on tenants to take care of properties and report maintenance needs in a timely fashion**

LAHC need to provide a user friendly system for tenants to report and lodge a maintenance request. A direct and immediate call back system for reporting may be considered for recommendation by the Legislative Assembly. There is a hidden cost to tenants who often wait on line for up to 1 hour to lodge a maintenance request, many utilizing mobile phone services that are unaffordable when waiting on hold for such an extended period of time.

HAPN representatives know of one instance where an older man became trapped in 1 of the 2 operating lifts within the Johanna O'Dea building (these lifts are used to service all the tenants living in the 150 unit complex). The man has significant health issues and waited on hold for 45 minutes to lodge the report, in total he was in the lift for 4 hours although he had been advised the response time to his call would not exceed 1 hour. LAHC also need to be held accountable for responding to maintenance requests in a timely manner.

F) **Measures to meet the special maintenance requirements of aged and disabled tenants**

Aged and disabled tenants should be supported in maintaining their homes. As an example, uncleaned gutters can contribute considerable damp to properties, impact on external cladding and fascia, as well as access to the property in extreme cases. Aged and disabled tenants can further be inhibited in their ability to maintain their own homes due to restricted mobility and cognitive function enabling their participation in the processes involved with even regular household maintenance tasks.

Ensure all modifications to the home installed to address age or disability related factors are to Australian standards.

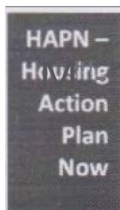
The current Government appears to push an agenda of revitalizing social housing properties in order that they are not able to be differentiated to their private counterparts. HAPN argue that the majority of social housing tenants are indeed quite house proud interested in maintaining the liveability and aesthetics of their home in the same way as a home owner or someone renting in the private rental market. They are currently inhibited in this endeavor by the maintenance contracts servicing their homes. The point is not to necessarily camouflage social housing and private housing together but to acknowledge that everyone deserves the right to safe and secure shelter that affords ease of participation in the broader community.

We look forward to hearing from you with regards to this submission.

Kind Regards,



Kayleigh Ellis (on behalf of HAPN)



A sub-committee of Forest Lodge and Glebe Coordination Group (FLAG)
 c/o Glebe Community Development Project
 160-162 St Johns Road, Glebe NSW 2037
 T: (02) 95716453
 E: glebeHAPN@gmail.com
 W: glebe.com.au/hapn