

**Submission
No 22**

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Organisation: Narrabri Shire Council

Date Received: 11 August 2021

Partially
Confidential

Our Reference: 1873834
Your Reference: Housing Inquiry
Contact Name: Donna Ausling

Attention: Mr Leon Last
Committee Manager – NSW Legislative Assembly

Via Email: communityservices@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Wednesday, 11 August 2021

Re: Potential Inquiry into Options to Improve Access to Existing and Alternate Accommodation to Address the Social Housing Shortage in New South Wales (NSW) – Narrabri Shire Council Submission

Dear Sir

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the Inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage. It is understood that the following terms of reference (ToRs) are applicable to this particular Inquiry:

"That the Committee inquire into and report on options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation in order to help address the social housing shortage in NSW, with particular reference to:

- (a) Options to better support 'meanwhile use' (temporary supporting accommodation), and the current major planning barriers to 'meanwhile use'.*
- (b) Options to improve access to existing accommodation to provide community housing;*
- (c) Options for crisis, key-worker and other short term accommodation models;*
- (d) Barriers to additional supply across NSW, including for smaller non-CHP housing providers; and*
- (e) Support for and accountability of registered community housing providers."*

The following information is submitted for the Committee's consideration:

1. Additional Financial Support for Homelessness

Provision of additional funding for homelessness support to Community Housing Service Providers (CHSPs), particularly in regard to women, and women and children affected by domestic and family violence. Such homelessness support services should also effectively augment to mental health and community wellbeing programs.

2. Review of Current Planning Controls & Social Housing Guidelines

Under the current legislative framework, limited opportunity would appear to be available for the repurposing of existing vacant buildings without significant capital investment to ensure compliance with fire safety and disabled access standards. The lack of appropriate community support systems, frameworks and financial resourcing, particularly in rural and regional areas, is also an inhibiting factor to such adaptive reuse initiatives.




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Consideration should be given to reviewing *State Environmental Planning Policy (Affordable Rental Housing) 2009* to incorporate provisions to facilitate CHSPs to provide temporary supportive accommodation within a wide range of residential settings without the need for development consent. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is also needed in order to provide greater housing choice for low-income households.

An increase in affordable housing stock is likely to lessen demand for social housing as a greater number of individuals or families will be able to sustain a tenancy before reaching crisis point. Such measures to improve housing affordability may include the lowering of stamp duty, increasing the overall supply of public housing, and taxation incentives and rebates.

A review of the *National Community Housing Standards Manual (2010)* is also recommended to ensure that the Guidelines reflect contemporary standards and community needs. It is acknowledged that the New South Wales accreditation system is operated by a non-government provider (Global-Mark) wherein community housing providers apply for accreditation on a fee-for-service basis. There is no direct relationship between regulation and accreditation in NSW. Consideration should also be given to more detailed accreditation evaluations being undertaken by appropriately skilled and experienced staff, as supported by a peer evaluator against the benchmarked standards.

3. Improving Accountability

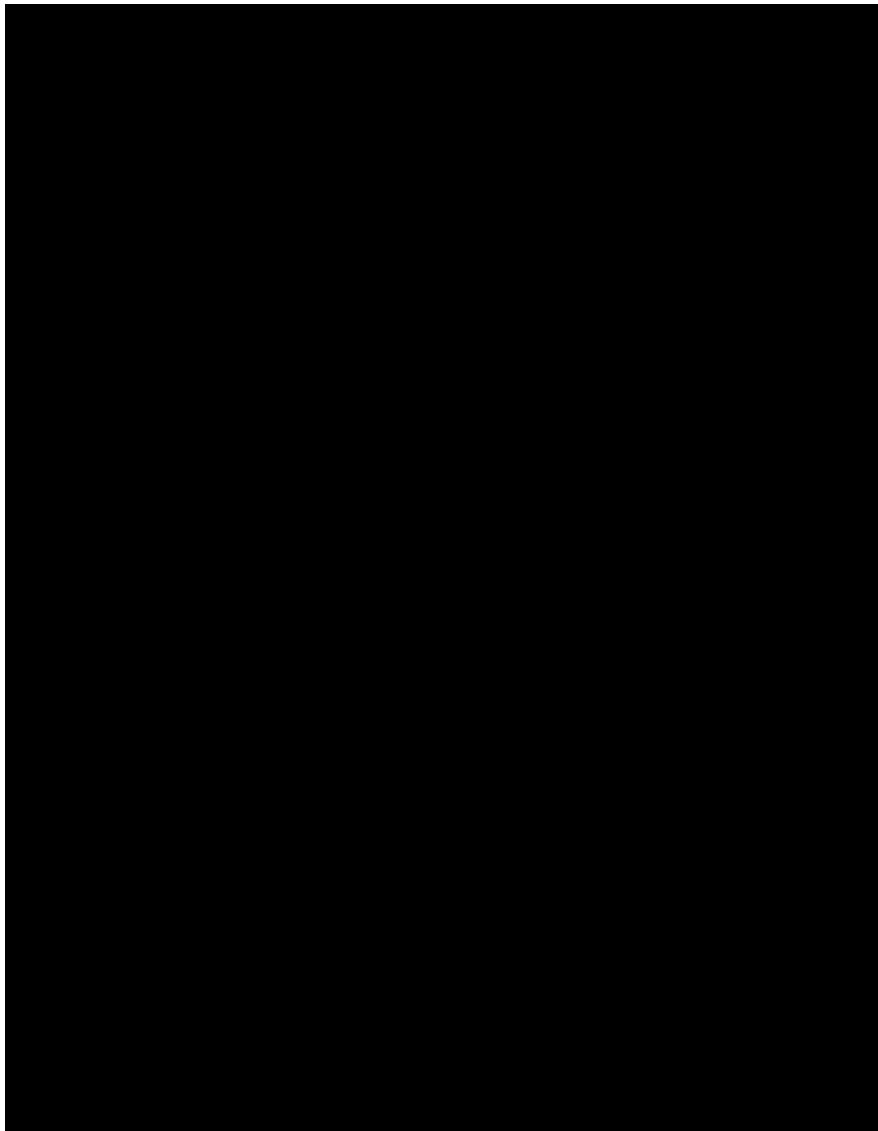
Limited accountability appears to exist in relation to CHSPs beyond the activities of the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT). Council is increasingly faced with impediments to managing regulatory and compliance-related matters as pertaining to social housing properties. A recent case study highlighting current challenges in relation to two (2) adjoining social housing premises is provided for the information of the Committee. This case study is not intended to level any direct criticism towards any local CHSPs, rather, it endeavours to illustrate the collective barriers experienced in this space and the lack of resourcing and financial support to address complex issues.

4. Case Study – Local Social Housing Properties

Council began receiving ongoing community complaints regarding the condition of two (2) separately tenanted single-storey dwellings located within an urban area of a Narrabri Shire settlement.

In relation to the first dwelling, a series of representations had been received regarding the accumulation of waste on the property with commensurate concerns regarding public health risk, vermin harbourage, odour, fire risk and companion animal welfare. An image of the affected property is detailed in Plate 1 overleaf.

This issue remains largely unresolved.



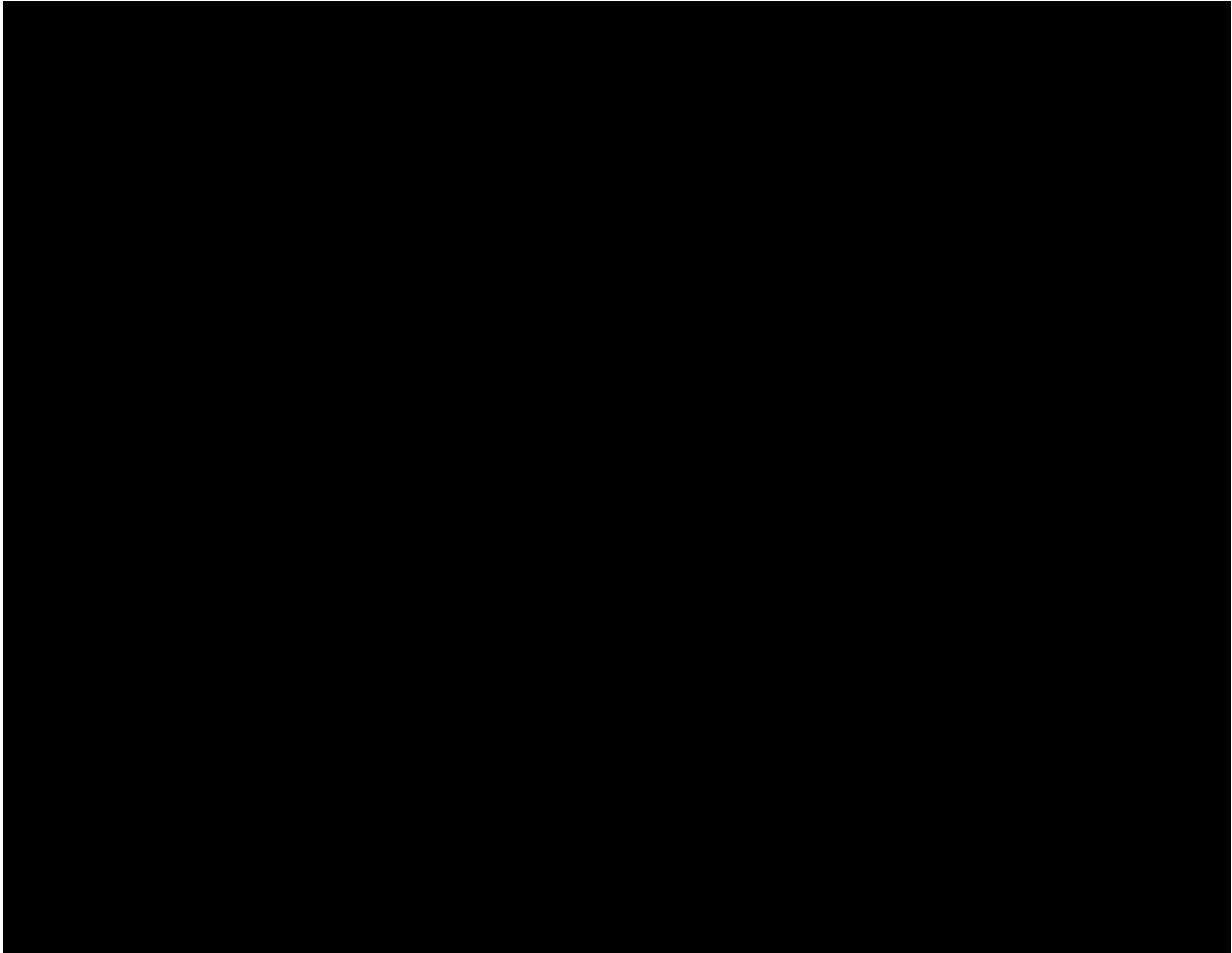
In relation to the second property, Council is concurrently receiving community complaints regarding the condition of this property along with associated companion animal health and welfare concerns. The most recent inspection of the property by Council's Regulatory Services Team revealed that there was again a large number of cats accumulated at the property; approximately 40 adult cats, plus kittens, in varying health conditions. On inspection, Council also noted that many of the cats were displaying symptoms of Feline Respiratory Disease (Cat Flu), a highly contagious virus that affects the cat for the duration of its life.

As a result of the large number of animals being hoarded in the establishment, significant faecal contamination of the premises is present and has resulted in a permanent offensive odour that can be detected from outside of the property. There are also significant associated public health concerns due to the current state of the property including potential for contraction of salmonella, campylobacteriosis, toxoplasmosis, cat scratch fever, worms, fungal infections (ringworm), worms and fleas.

The CHSP subsequently requested Council's assistance with capture and removal of the animals, which was initially agreed to. There was a corresponding expectation by the CHSP that Council would cover all costs for the companion animal component, including all veterinary expenses, staff costs and rehoming activities. Given the financial impact, the recurring nature of these complaints, and the fact that this type of support is outside of Council's remit, Council was unable to reach final agreement on the support arrangements.

To date this issue remains unresolved and the companion animals remain in the dwelling. It should be noted that this is the third occasion that the tenant in question, who has a mental health condition, has required an intervention due to companion animal hoarding. Council is continuing to receive ongoing

complaints regarding the condition of the property but is hamstrung in its compliance activities given the personal and individual social challenges with regard to this matter. A photograph of the subject property is contained in Plate 2 below.



In respect of both of the subject dwellings, property condition(s) have escalated to the 'severe' category. An absence of early intervention exists, and it is abundantly clear that the CHSPs lack the appropriate skills, support and local networks to effectively deal with tenant non-conformances and/or associated community support needs (such as mental health services, for example).

5. *Improving Community-Based Support*

For the reasons detailed in this submission, and as articulated in the preceding case study, it is recommended that a local framework be established to better support local stakeholders in the form of a Social Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC). The SHAC would be coordinated by the Department of Communities and Justice at a local level (by LGA or sub-region) and consist of representatives including, but not limited to local government practitioners, NSW Police, Fire + Rescue NSW (FRNSW), NSW Health, RSPCA, CHSPs and LALCs.

The SHAC activities can be effectively embedded into the relevant LGAs Housing Strategy and may be structured to address both strategic (i.e. future housing needs) as well as operational matters (site/issues specific) on a more holistic basis by local participants that have an intimate knowledge of their communities. Council would be willing to participate in a pilot of such a program.

A comprehensive assessment of social housing needs across each LGA is required to accurately assess the extent of homelessness, and establish the level of demand and supply of suitable accommodation. This information should then be utilised to underpin and assist in the development of associated local and regional housing strategies.

The case study detailed in this submission is, unfortunately, not in isolation. Due to legacy social housing policies, social housing enclave-allied issues exist in most rural and regional communities. The cumulative impacts are becoming significant as systems are not adequately geared towards managing these issues proactively.

I trust that the above submission provides the necessary assistance for the Committee's decision making. Should you require any additional information in this regard you are invited to contact

[REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

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Andrew Brown
Director Planning, Strategy and People