

**Submission
No 56**

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Forest Lodge & Glebe Area Co-ordination Group

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Submission to the
Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing
NSW Legislative Council

The Forest Lodge & Glebe Co-ordination Group (FLAG) welcomes the Legislative Council's inquiry into social, public and affordable 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.

In our view the social disadvantages facing residents living in public housing properties are well known. In Glebe and Camperdown these particularly relate to maintenance of ageing housing stock, loss of properties through sales, stigma and poor access to social services. Feedbacks from resident groups suggest that there have been serious problems with Spotless as major tenderer and the devolution of sub-contractors. The issues include poor communication, rudeness and lack of respect for tenants. The call centre for managing maintenance is a source of considerable frustration from tenants as are delays in essential repairs.

In this submission however we would like to focus on an example of a social housing complex that appears to have avoided some of these difficulties. We believe this case study provides an example of public housing provision that maximizes the opportunities for disadvantaged residents and enhances their quality of life.

During 2013 research was undertaken by the University of Sydney exploring the health and wellbeing of social housing tenants living in a small (approximately 90 units) housing complex in Minogue Crescent, Camperdown (Rawsthorne, Sheldrick & Purdie, 2012). The research was based on the Buckner Neighbourhood Cohesion Index, which has been widely used in a range of environments across Australia over recent years. This research found that residents in Minogue Crescent enjoyed greater social cohesion and safety than residents in Rosemedown/Ambervale, the North Gold Coast, Bently Park/Edmonton and Bankstown (Benevolent Society, 2012). Many of the residents in these other communities were not social housing tenants. This was a surprising finding given previous research (Donoghue & Tranter, 2012) had found social housing tenants had lower levels of trust than other tenants. The research suggested a number of factors that influenced the positive experiences of residents in Minogue Crescent, including:

- Length of tenure – long term tenure creates a stable and secure environment where community connections are not disrupted
- Due to the length of tenure an accidental ‘social mix’ has arisen with people across the age spectrum and a broader social economic base living in the complex (including those working part time).
- The design and location of the dwelling provided many opportunities for participation in the broader community as well as lessening the stigma associated with more ‘iconic’ department of housing estates. The complex is located on a regular bus route, is close to shops and key services.

The research suggests there is much to learn from the Minogue Crescent complex in terms of the provision of social and affordable housing. We would encourage the Inquiry to focus not only on what is wrong with social housing provision in New South Wales but also to look for examples of developments that achieve good quality housing options for disadvantaged members of our community.

In addition, successful communities need access to quality services and facilities. The retention of buildings owned by Land & Housing Corporation NSW for community facilities is an important component of creating health communities. At present some concern exists about the future commitment to community use in buildings at 84 Glebe Point Road and the Old Fire Station in Mitchell Street. We strongly urge that the Committee include in its inquiry consideration of assets sales on community infrastructure, not only housing tenancies.

Yours

Dr. Margot Rawsthorne

On behalf of FLAG