

**INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**

Organisation: Inner West Tenant Group

Date received: 11/03/2014

Inner West Tenant Group

*A group of tenants and agencies working together
auspiced by Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre*



28 February 2014

The Director

Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing

Email: socialhousing@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Social, Public and Affordable Housing by Inner West Tenant Group

The Inner West Tenant Group (IWTG) is a group of social housing tenants who meet monthly to share stories and advocate for all social housing tenants in the inner west area of Sydney. To provide feedback into the inquiry on 14 February 2012 a group of tenants came together to discuss the terms of reference of the inquiry; the following information was gathered from these discussions:

Projections of future social, public and affordable housing supply demand to 2020:

- The extent of homelessness, including rough sleepers and those inadequately housed in overcrowded environments, in the Inner West indicates the supply of social, public and affordable housing in the area needs to be increased. This is further exacerbated by low availability of rental properties and high rental costs of accommodation in the Inner West.
- People with disability, migrants and refugees are among the disadvantaged groups in our community who require the provision of safe, affordable housing.
- With regard to redevelopment of existing housing, providers need to consult with and listen to tenants. Past and proposed redevelopments, e.g. Minto and Waterloo, include only a minority of housing returned as social housing and this leads to the diminution of housing stock.
- Planning of developments must include affordable housing supported by State and Federal Governments.

Housing design approaches and social service integration necessary to support tenant livelihoods and wellbeing:

- The NSW Government should investigate local government initiatives to manage social housing properties, with good parameters and safeguards in place to keep out

corruption. This would result in housing management and social services provision within the same governmental structure and promote integration.

- Mandatory consultations by NSW Housing with social housing tenants would result in a collaborative approach to housing design and more appropriate integration of social services.
- Rainwater tanks and solar energy panelling should be mandatory in all new developments.

Maintenance and capital improvement costs and delivery requirements:

- Decentralisation of maintenance and capital improvement by awarding contracts within local areas would result in a more cohesive community, with contractors living in the same areas as the housing they are working on.
- Interaction between social housing tenants and NSW Housing, where NSW Housing listens to the actual issues and responds appropriately, that is by doing what needs doing.
- Social housing tenants and NSW Housing have different perspectives: NSW Housing may perceive the buildings as assets and social housing tenants see their homes. NSW Housing's perception of "assets" leads to the downgrading of some housing stock, with the buildings being seen as not worth investing maintenance dollars.
- This downgrading leads to sell-offs instead of maintenance of social housing tenants' homes. Maintenance should be proactive maintenance rather than reactive. The establishment of a volunteer handyperson for each community to provide an immediate response to small maintenance requests would alleviate the pressure on NSW Housing and the frustration of social housing tenants waiting for repairs.
- Service agreement transparency is needed with regard to the contract of service between contractors and social housing providers. There is a history of incompetence and high maintenance costs and unnecessary repairs being carried out while more urgent repairs are not attended to.
- Accountability of contractors, including penalties for non-compliance with contractual agreement and accepted standards of work need to be adopted by social housing providers. Limits should be set on the number of levels a maintenance contract can be sub-contracted.
- Social housing tenants to have provision to 'call back' contractors if work is unsatisfactory.
- Simpler ways to get approval for things that need to be done to assist the ability of the tenant to live life as independently as possible, i.e. removal of red tape from simpler maintenance requests to the property.
- Urgent matters are often put in planned maintenance: there needs to be some accountability and transparency for this and a time limit in order of priority/urgency. Also, respect for the duty of care that is required by Housing NSW.

- There also needs to be regular maintenance carried out, maybe once or twice a year, where the tenant is visited at a time prearranged with the tenant who is able to show what needs to be done. Action could then be taken in order of priority, determined in consultation with the tenant.
- Failure to maintain outside common areas leads to social exclusion and isolation because tenants do not utilise the common areas provided. Tenants want peaceful, clean environments but have no avenues to remove offenders who vandalise common property.
- Proper procedures need to be put in place to deal with bullying and aggressive or antisocial behaviour in the premises so that tenants are free to utilise their homes and their grounds as the legislation intends, i.e. to have "reasonable peace, comfort or privacy".

Recommendations on State reform options that may increase social, public and affordable housing supply, improve social service integration and encourage more effective management of existing stock including, but not limited to: Policy initiatives and legislative change:

- Regular meetings with tenants and/or tenant representative groups to be included in legislation.
- A 'body corporate' model, similar to strata title provisions, to be investigated to promote decentralisation of social housing management.
- With the extensive waiting list for Housing NSW (15-20 years in Inner West), cease selling Housing NSW properties in Inner West
- A policy of medium to large scale redevelopments to include a percentage of affordable housing. This initiative would not mean a developer would be able to comply by building a "studio apartment" to meet the criteria for affordable housing.
- This policy initiative would mandate a developer partner with social housing providers to ensure access to affordable housing properties. Example large scale development of Harold Park only a small percentage of dwellings will be managed by a housing provider.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair, IWTG

Susan Hawkeswood
Secretary, IWTG