2009

Young People and the One Social Housing System

Introduction

This report is focused on the introduction and implementation of the One Social Housing System and its impact on homeless young people and the services that support them. It is structured into a number of sections based on components of the One Social Housing System.

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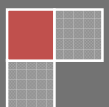
Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc.

INTRODUCTION

The QYHC is the peak advocacy body in Queensland for young people's housing issues, with a particular focus on the link between youth housing and education. The coalition provides leadership, support and a voice for the community based youth housing, youth education and related sectors.

From time to time it is necessary for QYHC to establish working parties around various policy issues, particularly if the organisation does not have a policy position. On other occasions it may be worthwhile bringing a range of stakeholders together due to their expertise in a certain area. Lastly it may be worthwhile to work together to meet a common outcome.

The aim of the *"Young people and the OSHS Action Based Working Party"* is to assess the issues of eligibility, access and tenancy management with regard to the One Social Housing System.

The paper was widely consulted with the members of QYHC and has a number of sections that form as attachments to this document.

The sections relate to specific components of the OSHS that the Working party has critiqued and contain recommendations for change in order to provide improved access to the OSHS for young people.

CONTENTS

HISTORY OF THE ONES SOCIAL HOUSING SYSTEM

The critique of the One Social Housing System ((OSHS) has been driven by the feedback from the youth housing sector in terms of the impact, as a result of the introduction of the OSHS, on young people's access to the social housing system.

The term social housing includes public and community housing.

The critique will explore our understanding of the rationale for the introduction of the OSHS, the direct impact on young people and delve into some of the specific components of the OSHS.

The aim of the report is to make recommendations for change to the OSHS to ensure improved access to, and interaction with, the OSHS by young people.

RATIONALE FOR THE OSHS

By the early 2000's the Department of Housing was facing an increasing challenge in meeting the needs of low income Queenslanders who required housing. Housing affordability decreased due to a range of supply side and demand side factors that included:

- o Rising housing prices that triggered increases in private rents;

- o Decline in boarding house and caravan accommodation;

- o Lack of building at the lower end of the private rental market coupled with increasing building costs;

- o A decline in capital funding for public housing through the CSHA and a shift to rental subsidies particularly from the Commonwealth [it must be noted that the State did not make an additional commitment to an increase in housing funding outside of these arrangements];

- o Rapid increase in term of the number of people moving to Queensland;

- o Changing household demographics to smaller households; and

- o Gentrification in the inner city areas.

As a result of these factors the waiting list for public housing started to increase and the waiting times grew longer – see Table 1 below.

Table 1

Public housing rental dwellings as 30 June (source DoH annual reports)	Tenants (source DoH annual reports unless otherwise noted)	Waiting list (source DoH annual reports unless otherwise noted)	Waiting list times (source DoH annual reports)
50,273	1998/99 57,071 households through public housing		1 year
50, 178	1999/00 57,317 households through public housing		1 year
50, 238	2000/01 56,800 households through public housing	June 2001 24,350 people on the wait list	1.3 years
49,830	2001/02 55,505 households through public housing	As at the 30 June 2002 Queensland had a public housing waiting list of 26,797 households.	1.4 years
49,214	2002/2003 54,159 households through public housing		1.3 years
48, 743	2003/04 40,742 households through public housing[1]	As at June 2004 35,430 people on the public housing wait list (AIWH)	1.5 years
48,706	2004/05 41,159 households through public housing[2]	As at June 2005 38,298 people on the public housing wait list(AIWH)	1.9 years
49, 093	2005/06 43,065 households through public housing[3]	As at June 2006 37,215 people on the public housing wait list (AIWH)	2 years
49,619	2006/2007 49,677 households through public housing[4]	As at June 2007 36,815 people on the public housing wait list (AIWH)	

[1] AIHW, CSHA National Data report Public Rental Housing 2003/2004 (please note that data source change from DoH to CSHA reports)

[2] AIHW, CSHA National Data report Public Rental Housing 2004/2005

[3] AIHW, CSHA National Data report Public Rental Housing 2005/2006

[4] AIWH CSHA National Data report Public Rental Housing 2006 – 2007 p3

In March 2000 Queensland Cabinet endorsed the Department of Housing's policy framework titled "Improving People's Lives through Housing.

This policy framework articulated:

Purpose

    o   *To improve the access of Queensland to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing and help build sustainable communities.*

Values

    1. *Integrity*

    2. *Value diversity*

    3. *Respect*

Goals

    1. *A sustainable social housing system that assists Queenslanders whose needs are not met in the broader housing system.*

    2. *A responsive housing system which meets the diverse needs of Queenslanders.*

    3. *Communities where people feel valued, safe and proud.*

    4. *A client-focussed, innovative and flexible organisation.*

In July 2001 the Department of housing released a discussion paper[5] titled "Implementing the Queensland Government's Housing Policy Objectives". This paper outlined the above housing challenges and noted that the Department of Housing needed to reconsider and broaden its role.

In particular the discussion paper was the first articulation by the department that government was going to start to focus on:

o   *Role of public housing focussing on those in need rather than a low cost housing option and targeting.*

o   *Role of ATSI housing focussing on sustainability and viability of indigenous housing and communities*

o   *Role of community housing and the regulatory framework governing it.*

o   *The other focus was the development of an affordable housing strategy, in an attempt to attract developers into private public partnerships.*

The QYHC responded to this paper outlining our concern about both the limited debate surrounding the role of public housing and the what we felt at the time would be limited positive outcomes from moving public housing from a tenure of choice to a targeted

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[5] DoH Discussion Paper Implementing the Queensland Government's Housing Policy Objectives, Presented by Housing Policy and Research July 2001

system, concern about the viability of diversity and in particular small community managed housing and the increasing reliance on an already overstretched private rental system.

Following the discussion paper the Department of Housing developed a consultation strategy on public housing[6] in which they outlined the key elements:

- o *Quality response*

- o *Targeting to people in high needs*

- o *Needs particularly relates to long term housing*

- o *Recognises the broader outcomes of housing assistance*

The consultation strategy also focussed on three key concepts

- o *Key target group – this was on people whose needs could not be met through the private rental market and match well with what public housing has to offer*

- o *Key portfolio –this was focussing on high/low demand dwellings that would assist in investment and disposal decisions and what would suit different tenants*

- o *Alternatives to public housing – this was about improving access to the private rental market, increased access and links to community housing and exploring affordable housing models*

Again the QYHC responded to this consultation that we were very concerned about the move away from public housing being tenure of choice. That we felt that the Department of Housing was managing a decline in housing not a broadening of choice of housing as they were expressing.   The QYHC felt that the process outlined would also stigmatise public housing and its tenants, decrease waiting lists for public housing but not housing need and had no scope to develop a growth strategy.   QYHC made a number of recommendations about the need to invest in public housing.

In May 2003 the Department of Housing released its Public Housing Strategy 2000 - 2008[7]. This strategy outlined the vision that:

The Queensland public housing system will provide a quality response to people for whom the wider housing system does not respond because of discrimination, design, location and cost.

The public housing system will provide long-term stable and secure housing which will improve people's quality of life and capacity to participate in their community.

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[6] DoH Draft Five Year Strategic Plan for Public Housing – Briefing with Peak organisations Thursday 24th May 2001

DoH Public Housing Consultation

[7] DoH Public Housing, A secure future, Public Housing Strategy 2000 – 2008 May 2003

To support this vision, the objectives of the public housing strategy are:

o *To improve access to public housing by people who are in high need of secure, affordable and supportive housing;*

o *To ensure the dwellings provided through the public housing system are of a community standard and support clients safety and comfort;*

o *To manage tenancies in a manner which supports people to maintain their tenancies as required; and*

o *To ensure public housing plays a positive and supportive role in local communities and contributes to good community outcomes.*

The public housing strategy has four major strategies for pursuing the vision and objectives:

1. *Improving access to public housing for people in high need*

2. *An effective public housing supply*

3. *Delivering a supportive tenancy management environment for public housing; and*

4. *Integrating public housing with communities*

The strategy also started to discuss the departmental view that there needed to be a clearer relationship between public and community housing. Unfortunately our analysis of this was that the underlying premise by the department would seem to have been that there was not much difference between government managed housing and community managed housing.

The other challenge to the State Government was the concern about the potential role that the Federal government was going to play in the housing market. This concern led to a re-examination of the State Housing Act 1945 and the need for a new housing Act to be developed to ensure that the State had a legitimate role in the provision of housing. Consultation on the new State Housing Bill was commenced.

However the Department of Housing also used the opportunity to change the Act as the vehicle to drive through a number of substantive changes to the nature of the provision of public and community housing. Many of these ideas had been started through 2001 and 2002. In particular the Housing Bill brought in regulation to the community housing sector and an increase in compliance. In April 2003 the Department of Housing released its paper "*The Regulation of organisations*" that outlined the compliance issues that the department wanted for inclusion in the Housing Act Regulations.

The Housing Act 2003 and its associated regulations were enacted on the 1st January 2004. At this point the Housing Regulations did not have a specific reference to the One Social Housing System.

A large part of 2004 to 2005 focussed on the implementation of the Housing Act and its associated Regulations. In particular, the aspects of the Housing Regulation that concerned itself with the community housing sector.

In October 2005 the Department Housing released its information paper "*Paving the Way: Housing people in need in the Smart State*". This work started to introduce the concept of a One Social Housing System (OSHS). This new concept did not have a consultation mechanism, the only feedback that was requested related to the implementation of the

One Social Housing Strategy. As of the 1st January 2006 the Department of Housing started the phased implementation of this new system. In May 2006 the Department of Housing articulated its planned reform of the community housing sector in the paper "One social Housing System, a new direction for community and local government managed housing in the Smart State.

The OSHS was an amendment to the State Housing Act Regulation passed through parliament on the 1st February 2007.

OUTLINE OF THE OSHS

In the current department strategic plan 2008 -2013 it states the visions and values of the Department of Housing being:

"Our vision

Improving people's lives through housing and community renewal.

We aim to improve the lives of Queenslanders by:

- o *improving access to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing*

- o *working with our partners in renewal areas to develop sustainable solutions to local issues and build community capacity.*

Our values

Our commitment to our vision is underpinned by the values of integrity, diversity and respect. These values support and guide our philosophy of client-focused service delivery."

The Department of Housing states in its 2008 – 2013 strategic plan that its outcomes, priorities, outputs and goals are as follows:

Community outcomes

- o *Strengthening Queensland communities*

  - o *A fair, socially cohesive and culturally vibrant society*

  - o *Safe and secure communities*

- o *Building Queensland's economy*

  - o *Improved standard of living for all Queenslanders*

Government priorities

- o *Fostering healthy individuals and communities*

- *Improving the safety and security of individuals, families and communities*

- *Strengthening Indigenous communities*

  - *Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve the range of available housing options*

- *Embracing growth in cities and regions*

  - *Improving the affordability of housing in Queensland*

Departmental outputs

- *Social rental housing*

- *Indigenous community housing*

- *Crisis housing*

- *Private market assistance*

- *Community renewal*

Departmental goals

- *Goal: We will deliver integrated social housing and housing services to low income households for the duration of their need*

- *Goal: We will provide support for low to moderate income households in the private market*

- *Goal: We will help build sustainable communities*

The OSHS is essentially the collapsing of the public housing sector with the parts of the community housing sector [only publicly funded community housing and services registered under the State Housing Act 2003 and this may include local government managed housing].

The core aspects of the OSHS includes:

- one application form

- common eligibility criteria

- streamlined allocation policies

- the provision of social housing assistance for those with the greatest need, for as long as it is needed.

- one combined waitlist

The implementation of these changes have been staged over a period of time.

The policy process in terms of the OSHS is called the Client intake and Assessment Process or CIAP.

As stated earlier the department notes that the only people who will be offered social housing are the people that they determine are in the highest need. This means that housing is no longer offered to people who are soley on low income and that there is no longer a wait turn system – this is called the housing need assessment.

The department through their assessment process then determines whether people are in:

- o Very high need

- o High need

- o Moderate need

- o Lower need

- o Ineligible

Only those deemed to be in '*very high need*' will be offered a social housing option. In terms of people who apply for housing and cannot access into social housing the Department of Housing will 'offer' them other services and resources. These could include things such as rent assistance or information about how to get a bond loan – this is called matching for success.

The Department of Housing is currently exploring how they can offer a better range of services to people who are not eligible for housing eg this could include area offices having stronger relationships with real estate agents.

It must be noted here that the changes to the Federal/State relations may have a impact on the role and function of the Department of Housing through the new proposed National Affordable Housing Agreement.

PROCESS

The Department of Housing in response to growing pressure, and due to a lack of capital infrastructure building from both the State and Federal budgets, decided to implement the OSHS.   The above rationale outlines the timeframe that has seen the increasing welfarising of public housing as the department attempted to manage decreasing stock, increasing length of people remaining in public housing and increasing numbers of people on the waitlist.

RHETORIC VS REALITY

There was an assumption by the Department of Housing in development of the OSHS that there would be an ongoing turnover in social housing and therefore the department would always have the capacity to immediately house people in 'very high' need. The critique of this is that as the department increasingly starts to house people in 'very high need' the reality will be that tenants will require housing for a longer period of time. As a result it could be that there will be a slowing down in the rate of household turnover in social housing properties.   The issue will be how the department manages this and whether access to and retention of social housing will be impacted upon. This could mean that the department may be forced to increasingly restrict their housing product as housing becomes progressively more dificult to source.

It is interesting to note that in the May 2003 paper titled the Public Housing Strategy 2000 – 2008 the Department of Housing cited a number of concerns about their priority housing policy. The concerns cited were:

- o The possibility that people in genuine high need are not assessed as 'priority' clients because the eligibility requirements for 'priority' are too stringent;

- o That people are not assessed as priority clients because guidelines are being applied too rigidly, or discretion is not being utilised;

- o The amount of 'red tape' involved in priority housing applications and the verification required;

- o Concerns about the impact on the wait-turn system, particularly in areas where there is high demand;

- o The adequacy of staff skills to assss individual client needs; and

- o Poor supply means that even with a 'priority' status, some people with high needs still wait a considerable time for public housing.

It could be surmised that the OSHS is currently operating as a "priority" housing system with the broader housing market. That in fact the concerns noted by the department of their priority housing policy in 2003 could now be the exact issues confronting them in their whole system.

By attempting to manage a declining resource in the face of increasing need, the department has placed itself in a position where they are requiring people to progressively jump through a more complex system of hoops in order to obtain housing. Further when applicants challenge or critique this process they are labelled as being "too fussy". Unfortunatley this creates a culture in the department of the deserving and undeserving poor. This can be manifiested not only in the policy of the department but as we will

demonstrate in further in this report the potential for front end staff to become very rigid in the application of the policy on the ground.

The increasing housing of people in 'very high' need also requires the department to consider the changes to the household mix in social housing. In areas where there is a high density of social housing this may mean a lack of household mix. It would seem that this would be at odds with the departments third goal of 'builiding sustainable communities', healthy communities are diverse communities with a range of households from socio economic backgrounds.

Finally the other unresolved issue is how will support be provided to social housing tenants. This issue is about being able to preserve tenancy rights for people in social housing but providing wrap around support that assists a tenant to sustain their tenancy. This includes defining roles including that of the tenancy manager in the support that is not intrusive on the privacy of the tenant.

The other assumption that underpins the OSHS is that people on low and moderate incomes who were the traditional tenants of the social housing system, and in particular public housing, could be housed in the private rental market or be in a position to buy their own homes. Both the State and Federal government are currently exploring the type of levers that they can use to influence access to the private rental market and to assist people in home ownership. It is yet to be seen how successful these mechanisms will be.

SPECIFIC FEEDBACK ON COMPONENTS OF THE OSHS

OVERVIEW

The Action Based Working Party (ABWP) was started to improve access to, and interaction with, the OSHS for young people.

The ABWP recognises that there will not be a fundamental change to the departmental policy however recognised that issues around equity, consistency in the application of the policy and key gaps in needs are required to be addressed.

The ABWP conducted a number of meetings that identified and debated key barriers for young people in terms of their access to the OSHS and prioritised their areas of concern. The group decided that most effective way forward was to address each priority area in detail and make recommendations for change.

The format of the sections that are attached to this document contains both a broad outline of the issues in a thematic form as well as providing detailed recommendations for change.