



CONSUMER FORUM REPORT

TO

ACT MINISTERIAL HOUSING SUMMIT

Tuesday 28 February 2006

ISSUES FROM HOUSING CONSUMER FORUM

Access to Public Housing

- Overall shortage of public housing, creates significant and lengthy waiting times
- Access to crisis accommodation for women with sons
- For separating families that may own house
- Waiting list management needs to improve – all groups
- Need for more funds for public housing

Rents in Public and Private sector

- Process for setting rents in public housing not clear. Including overseas pension and war widows pension. Difficulties are created when rents fluctuate
- Fair rent as opposed to market rent
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance doesn't reflect high rents in private housing

Security of tenure

- Strong support to maintain security of tenure across all groups
- Also a view that those that can afford to, should move out.
- Debate on security tenure can detract from the need to improve supply

Maintenance

- Poor levels of maintenance
- Outsourcing of maintenance creates difficulties - no clear guidelines on timing and quality

Communication

- Needs to be clear in plain English, timely and consistent
- People need information on their position on the waiting list

Policy and Procedures

- Needs to be clear
- Needs to be apply flexibly e.g. need of large families

Affordability

- Private rent too high
- Lack of affordable houses to buy
- Fair rent
- Reinstigate possibility of housing ownership via rent payments
- Tenants need assistance into home ownership

Vacant Stock

- Needs to be better utilised

Training / Continuity / Skills

- Expectations of public housing managers is very high
- Housing managers need training and support
- Public housing strategies should be implemented over a reasonable length of time, not changed too often

Loss of stock

- Concern about loss of public housing stock in redevelopment of complexes

Lack of supported accommodation

- Lack of supported accommodation for people with complex needs

Discrimination

- Against complex tenants (e.g. bins and recycle bins)
- Between complexes (e.g. air conditioners)
- Within complexes

Ghetto Isolation

- Need to work against the concentration of public housing tenants in ghettos
- All public housing flats together
- Drug addicts together
- Homeless together

Security

- The physical and personal needs of tenants need improving

Dissatisfaction with commercialisation

- Community housing

Public and Private Partnerships

- Not supported. Evidence from other jurisdiction does not support private investment in public housing
- Not always transparent

Community and individual needs

- Aged care units now have younger people living there due to change in age limits, clash of needs / lifestyle

Neighbourhood disputes

- Neighbours living in squalor
- Poor security of vehicles
- Substance abuse
- Acknowledge as a problem

Customer service

- Need to focus on individual with individual needs

Disabilities

- Needs to improve housing and support services for people with disabilities across a number of groups

SOLUTIONS / ACTIONS

FROM HOUSING CONSUMER FORUM

Home Ownership

- Government finance (low interest loans) should be provided to tenants to purchase rented property.
- Rent credited toward purchase price.
- Assist tenants with financial planning to facilitate home ownership.

Maintenance

- Regular inspections of properties
- Support given to tenants to form tenant maintenance self-help groups
- Computer tracking system with job numbers to monitor progress
- Caretakers allocated to public housing complexes
- Upgrading program to bring public houses up to agreed energy efficient standards
- Tenants trained to check quality of maintenance

Security

- Install security lighting/locks/sound proofing
- Back to base surveillance in clusters/complexes
- No tolerance policy for drug dealers and repeat offenders
- Parking permit system for residents

Neighbourliness

- Train tenants in conflict resolution
- Introduce good neighbour training
- Establish community management groups in complexes and public housing areas
- Maintain diverse and viable social mix

Customer Focus

- All public housing staff need to be trained in customer service focus and skills
- Department needs to stabilise tenure of housing managers and improve continuity of service
- Improve two way communication and coordination in following up in tenancy and maintenance requests. Provide tenants with information on how to access housing officers for specific purposes
- Housing managers need more decision making powers at local level
- Mutual respect needs to be enhanced

- Tenants needs and issues must be addressed holistically and flexibly – particularly to meet the needs of changes within families and households

Disability

- Increase housing stock suitable to be allocated to disabled people
- Improve co-ordination of support services to disabled and mentally ill people living in public housing

Public Housing Stock

- All new private sector developments to include capacity for 10-15% public housing stock
- Government to increase public housing stock 10% per annum
- Redevelopments of existing public housing complexes need to retain significant proportion for public housing.

Community Housing

- Need to value contribution of community housing
- Need to increase resources allocated to community housing

Financial Viability

- ACT Government should allocate to public housing the \$10 million it receives annually from the Commonwealth for public housing

Bill of Rights

- ACT Bill of Rights should include right to access affordable housing