



Queensland
Government
Department of **Housing**

SUMMARY REPORT
STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON PROPOSED CHANGES
TO TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

AUGUST 2008

Introduction

The Department of Housing's discussion paper, *Realigning transitional housing in one social housing system*, was distributed to transitional housing providers and key stakeholders in May 2008. It was also made available on department's website for broader community comment. A response sheet was included to capture written feedback on the proposed changes.

To directly engage providers in discussion on the proposed changes four workshops were held by the Department of Housing between 19 and 23 May 2008: two in Brisbane, one in Townsville and one in Rockhampton. Approximately 150 people attended the workshops.

Attendees included:

- Community Rent Scheme (CRS), Community-managed Housing-Studio Units (CMSU) (formerly named the Boarding House Program), Same House Different Landlord (SHDL), Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP), and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) providers
- Homeless Persons Information Queensland (HPIQ)
- Home Assist Secure providers (HAS)
- Queensland Shelter
- Tenants' Union Queensland (TUQ)
- Department of Housing area office and central office staff, and
- Community Housing Resource Workers.

The purpose of the workshops was to provide:

- information on the proposed changes to transitional housing as outlined in the discussion paper
- information on the client intake and assessment process (CIAP) scheduled for implementation in late September 2008, and
- opportunities for providers and key stakeholders to give feedback on proposed changes to transitional housing arrangements including service delivery and implementation issues.

Ten written responses were received that represented feedback from external stakeholders including transitional housing providers, Regional Community Housing Councils and peak organisations. A list of respondents is at Attachment 'A'.

Feedback received from the workshop participants and through written responses has provided important information on the views of transitional housing providers and key stakeholders on the proposed changes to transitional housing program arrangements. The department values this feedback which is assisting in the further development and implementation of proposed changes to the way in which transitional housing will be delivered over the next three years.

This report provides feedback on the five key components outlined in the discussion paper namely:

- purpose
- targeting
- integration with other key housing components
- tenancy management, and
- resourcing.

COMPONENT ONE: PURPOSE

Proposal

That a uniform purpose and set of objectives be established and outlined in the Program Specifications for transitional housing which is:

To assist eligible households with identified high and immediate needs to progress to longer-term living arrangements in the private or social housing sectors. Transitional housing will provide housing assistance for a fixed period of time based on identified client need.

Feedback

The majority of respondents¹ were in agreement with the proposed uniform purpose for transitional housing. Generally respondents agreed that under one social housing system scarce housing resources needed to be directed to clients in greatest need.

Several written responses specifically included a request that the purpose of transitional housing continue to be to assist clients who either required an interim social housing response in order to secure and sustain a private market response or who were awaiting an allocation of longer term social housing.

Duration of need and transitional housing

The discussion paper does not propose specific time limitations for the provision of transitional housing, instead promoting the concept of assistance being provided only for the time that it is needed (duration of need).

There were divergent opinions expressed around the concept of duration of need including:

- Some respondents requested that specific time limits be attached to the term 'fixed period of time' and suggested two/four years as an appropriate limit.
- Others stated that defined periods acted as a deterrent for tenants to exit transitional housing when they were able and could create the need for exceptions where longer term housing solutions for clients could not be achieved within the defined timeframe.
- One suggestion was that the term 'fixed period of time' be replaced with 'agreed period of time' to better reflect the duration of need concept.

¹ The term respondent refers to workshop participants and individuals/groups who provided written responses.

COMPONENT TWO: TARGETING

Proposal

Existing target sub sets be removed and assistance be directed to applicants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with assessed high housing need.

Feedback

There was general consensus that removing target sub sets following the implementation of the client intake and assessment process and directing assistance towards people experiencing the greatest need was appropriate. A number of providers indicated that this was consistent with their existing service practice.

There were however, a number of important issues and questions raised for further consideration.

Proposed targeting of high need tenants

Issues and concerns raised in relation to exclusively targeting high need tenants included:

- Greater levels of tenancy management (and therefore resourcing) would be required.
- Potential to exacerbate neighbourhood fatigue.
- Community Rent Scheme providers were particularly concerned that housing large numbers of high need tenants could compromise relationships with private lessors and result in the loss of rental properties. The capacity for providers to ensure appropriate tenant mix in neighbourhoods and unit blocks was requested to guard against/address neighbourhood fatigue.

Capacity to continue to offer services to specific client groups

A number of transitional housing providers target specific client groups including young people and victims of domestic violence. Issues and concerns raised in relation to removing target sub-sets included:

- The capacity for specialist services to maintain their existing client target groups. For example, will a youth specific organisation be required to accept referrals irrespective of a client's age? This will require the department's computer system to have the capacity to record provider details with respect to client target groups at the time a vacancy is notified and match these details to applicant referral lists generated from the housing register. The department's system currently only identifies providers assisting some specific client groups e.g. seniors. As the lead time for implementing systems changes can be lengthy, an interim solution may need to be developed.
- Associated with this issue were concerns around specialised skills being lost if providers are expected to broaden their target base.

Client need assessment

Issues and concerns raised in relation to client need assessment included:

- The need for client intake assessments to be undertaken by skilled departmental staff so providers can be confident that the assessment process will result in appropriate referrals.
- Housing needs assessments undertaken as part of client intake assessment process are required to capture adequate and sufficiently detailed information to allow appropriate tenant selection and allocation to occur. This was seen as being particularly important for specific client groups such as people who experience episodic mental illness.
- There is a need to ensure that groups facing significant discrimination within the private rental sector (for example young people and Indigenous people) do not 'fall through the gaps'.

Additional issues and questions raised by respondents included:

- The existing data collection system for the Community Rent Scheme includes reporting against target sub sets. Respondents requested information on what changes will occur to the existing reporting/data collection when target sub sets are removed.

COMPONENT THREE: INTEGRATION WITH OTHER KEY HOUSING COMPONENTS

Proposal

Establishment of simple and clear pathways into, across and out of crisis, transitional and longer-term social housing with three referral/access pathways. These pathways are:

1. Provider advises of a vacancy
2. Rapid/direct referral by area offices and nominated homelessness services
3. Bulk referrals

Feedback

This component generated considerable feedback. There was general consensus and appreciation for the need to direct scarce housing resources to clients experiencing the greatest need. The information provided in the workshops on the proposed client intake and assessment process was generally well received.

Relationship with area offices and other referring agencies

Issues and concerns raised in relation to relationships with area offices and referring agencies included:

- The establishment/enhancement of good communication between providers and area offices would be critical to successful applicant referral occurring.

- Presently, relationships between providers and area offices vary considerably across the state and significant effort may be required to establish productive working arrangements.
- A number of providers manage properties across several area office boundaries which could create an added level of complexity and additional demands on providers to manage these relationships.
- The introduction of consistent/uniform approaches by area offices to assessment and referral was seen as being critical in managing multiple area office relationships.
- Additional information on the process for identifying and establishing key referring agencies and entry points is needed. Limiting entry via area offices and large organisations will impact on particularly marginalised groups including young people and Indigenous people. One solution to this issue identified by several respondents was bringing additional entry points online sooner than the proposed timeframe of 2009/2010.

Information requirements for successful applicant referrals

Issues and concerns raised in relation to information requirements for successful applicant referrals included:

- The criticality of adequate and up-to-date information at the time of referral by area offices was a commonly stated viewpoint by respondents. A majority of providers requested that copies of housing needs assessments and application for housing assistance forms be provided as a minimum.
- Pre allocation checks by area office staff need to ensure that information captured through the client intake and assessment process tools (including needs assessment) is accurate.
- The importance of area office staff being adequately trained in undertaking need assessments.
- Turnover in area office staff was raised as an issue and the consequent need for ongoing training of area office staff and providers in new applicant referral procedures.
- Providers indicated that they have staff who are highly skilled in undertaking need assessments which assists in achieving good outcomes from tenant selection and allocation processes. There were concerns that assessments undertaken by area office staff would not match the quality of those presently undertaken by providers.
- It was stated that a vacancy notification form would be required to identify appropriate client referrals from the housing register. Respondents requested that the vacancy notification form make provision for providers to advise of issues which required consideration by area office staff in developing referral lists (e.g. neighbourhood fatigue issues, tenant characteristics). In addition, respondents requested that vacancy nomination forms are simple in design and efficient to use.

- Providers should have the capacity to directly interface with departmental systems to download/exchange client information.

Proposed referral processes

Issues and concerns raised in relation to referral processes included:

- Area offices will need to ensure quick turnaround times from notification of vacancy to provision of referral lists and sufficient numbers of clients on referral lists to allow for appropriate tenant selection.
- The notion of rapid referrals/response described in the discussion paper whereby applicants would be referred to providers prior to a comprehensive needs assessment being undertaken, was not widely supported. Respondents stated that referrals to transitional housing providers already occur within short timeframes and a separate referral process may be confusing and create expectations with clients that housing is guaranteed. Assisting clients ahead of applicants on the housing register was also seen as inconsistent with a fair and transparent system.
- Representatives of the Brisbane Housing Company and area office staff commented that the existing rapid referral process is not functioning as well as expected. The reasons cited for this included the difficulty in making sound allocation decisions in the absence of sufficient information on applicants' housing needs. Very few of these rapid referrals have resulted in sustainable tenancies being established.
- The capacity for tenant transfers within a provider's portfolio. Comments were also made about the need for Same House Different Landlord properties (managed by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program / Crisis Accommodation Program providers) to be subject to a more closed notification and nomination process. Under such arrangements high need clients would transition out of crisis accommodation into the Same House Different Landlord property when a vacancy occurs rather than the provider seeking a referral list which includes other applicants.
- Processes for exiting low need tenants. Clarification was requested on what will happen to existing tenants in transitional housing who are assessed under the client intake and assessment program and placed in the low need segment on the housing register.²

Additional issues and questions raised by respondents included:

- A number of providers suggested that the proposed timeframes to introduce new applicant referral and allocation policy and procedures were overly ambitious. Additional time would result in a more considered and workable system being established.
- The relationships established between providers and waitlist applicants could be lost in the transfer of waitlist management to area offices. These relationships

² Under proposed client intake and assessment program need assessment procedures, existing transitional housing tenants will need to demonstrate one accessibility or sustainability barrier to be placed in a high need category. Tenants who have no accessibility or sustainability barriers (e.g. rent affordability, listing on tenancy database) will be placed in a low need category.

assist in ensuring good allocation decisions are made and external support arrangements are in place when an applicant is able to be housed.

- Several transitional housing providers identified that they had already closed their waitlists and transferred applicants to the department's register. The benefits of this approach included significant decreases in workloads relating to intake and waitlist management and simpler, more streamlined processes for applicants. A closer working relationship with the area office has been required to achieve these good client and service outcomes.

COMPONENT FOUR: TENANCY MANAGEMENT

Proposal

Formalising and expanding existing tenancy management by implementing mandatory individual tenancy plans for all transitional housing tenants. The plans will articulate key elements of service delivery including tenancy management. It is proposed that existing tenancy practices which deliver good client outcomes be retained and enhanced.

Feedback

This component of the paper, and in particular the proposal to implement mandatory individual tenancy plans, generated considerable debate and comment.

Continued discussion with stakeholders over the purpose and intent, scope, format and reporting arrangements is required over the next 12 to 18 months to achieve an end product that is simple and assists in moving clients into, through and out of out of transitional housing into longer term social and private rental market options.

Terminology

Issues and concerns raised in relation to terminology for tenancy plans included:

- The term individual tenancy plan was seen as problematic. The term suggested Supported Accommodation Assistance Program type case management to many respondents. Respondents stated that transitional housing providers are not resourced or trained to provide services within a case management framework.
- During the workshops departmental staff clarified that individual tenancy plans were a tool for ensuring that tenancy management practice assisted in sustaining the transitional housing response. It is not expected that providers would engage in the provision of personalised support associated with case management.
- A small number of respondents were adamant they provided case management and would continue to do so.
- Suggested alternative names were Exit Plans/Service Plans/Housing Plans, Individual Support Plans, Entry2Exit Housing Plan, Progressive Lifestyle Management, Agreed Action Plan and Individual Housing Pathway.

Legal status of plans

Issues and concerns raised in relation to the legal status of tenancy plans included:

- The legal status of individual tenancy plans is not clear. Providers stated that if plans did not form part of the legal contract between a provider and tenant then mandatory implementation and compliance would not be achievable.
- There are issues with tenants being expected to sign up to tenancy plans at the commencement of a tenancy when they were highly stressed and vulnerable. Compliance with conditions or tasks in the individual tenancy plan can then become problematic as the tenancy progresses.
- Whether individual tenancy plans would be appealable and if so the risks for organisations (e.g. if a provider fails to refer a tenant to an external support service).
- Questions about whether 'ownership' of the tenancy plan rests with the provider, the tenant or the department. Associated with this was the issue of whether the tenancy plan goes with the tenant when they exit or are transferred (to another property or provider).

Departmental staff who attended the workshops provided additional information on the purpose and status of individual tenancy plans including:

- The purpose of individual tenancy plans is to assist providers to identify key tenancy management activities which will assist in sustaining the transitional housing tenancy. The plans will include a strong focus on identifying exit pathways from transitional housing to longer term housing and implementing strategies in order for exits to be achieved in a planned and sustainable manner.
- It is not intended that individual tenancy plans will form part of the legal contract between a tenant and provider. The legal instrument will continue to be a tenancy agreement signed by the tenant and provider and which is consistent with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1994*.
- It is intended that tenants and providers will work collaboratively on identifying and undertaking activities which will sustain the transitional tenancy and actively plan for exits to longer term housing options.

Process for implementing and monitoring individual tenancy plans

Issues and concerns raised in relation to implementing and monitoring tenancy plans included:

- The successful implementation of individual tenancy plans will require the provision of accurate and detailed client information by the department at referral point and ongoing communication about a tenant's application for long term social housing. Processes for notifying a provider of a change of tenant circumstances will be required (i.e. where a housing review indicates that an applicant's housing need has changed and the applicant will therefore be placed in a different segment on the housing register).

- A simple standardised template should be developed to ensure state-wide consistency and minimise workload demand.
- Clarification was sought as to whether individual tenancy plans would become a performance indicator for providers.
- Individual tenancy plans should be reviewed every six months rather than the annual reviews proposed. This would also be consistent with the existing practice within the Community Rent Scheme of reviewing tenancies at the end of six-month lease periods.

Additional questions and issues raised by respondents included:

- Several respondents were supportive of the proposal to implement individual tenancy plans stating that it would formalise and standardise existing tenancy management practices within their services.
- Individual tenancy plans offer an opportunity for tenants to work collaboratively with transitional housing providers in identifying and securing longer term housing options and using the time in transitional housing to address issues which may reduce these options. Examples include tenants seeking to exit to the private rental market who can use their transitional housing tenancy to establish a good tenancy history.
- Whether transitional housing clients placed in a very high/high need segment on the housing register, and whose longer term housing needs are best met by a longer term social housing response, will be required to complete an individual tenancy plan. Associated with this was the question about when individual tenancy plans would be prepared for clients who were housed through proposed rapid responses.

COMPONENT FIVE: RESOURCING

Proposal

Continuation of triennial funding for recurrently funded providers who are willing to work to implementation of new arrangements. Review of existing funding principles and methodology in 2008/09 to consider implication of new arrangements and address existing issues.

Feedback

Feedback was received on a range of resourcing issues including the potential impact of proposed changes to targeting, revised referral and the introduction of individual tenancy plans. In addition, divergent views were expressed with respect to the proposal to introduce triennial funding arrangements for the Community Rent Scheme from 1 July 2008. These resourcing issues will receive further consideration within the context of the review of transitional housing resourcing arrangements to be undertaken in 2008-09.

Triennial funding arrangements

Issues and concerns raised in relation to triennial funding arrangements included:

- Some providers were of the opinion that it was unreasonable to expect services to sign agreements pending finalisation of changes to program arrangements. These providers suggested that 12-month agreements were their preferred option. Other providers requested the assurance of triennial funding and noted the additional costs incurred in leasing capital items on a short term basis.

Changes to targeting arrangements

Issues and concerns raised in relation to directing assistance to those assessed with the greatest need and promoting transitional housing as the preferred response for young people included:

- Targeting transitional housing as the preferred option for young people would create additional resourcing demands as young people's income levels are lower thus requiring higher rental subsidies for privately headleased properties.
- Maintenance costs and repairs tend to be higher in accommodation specifically used for young people.
- A need for additional upskilling/training if organisations are required to broaden out their tenant base.

Introduction of individual tenancy plans

Issues and concerns raised in relation to resourcing for tenancy plans included:

- Implementing, monitoring and reviewing individual tenancy plans would require additional resources (worker time and skill development/training).
- Individual tenancy plans assume that providers will be able to access/refer on to external support agencies and support can be difficult to identify particularly in rural/regional areas of the state.
- Memorandums of Understanding (or similar instruments) may be required to ensure support is forthcoming.
- Individual tenancy plans create increased responsibility on providers to identify exit points. In the current private rental market this is not always feasible and is considered resource intensive.
- The products being developed by the department (Rent Start and RentConnect) while welcome additions, were viewed as small and of insufficient scale to make a substantial impact on exit options for transitional housing tenants.

Innovation to resourcing arrangements

Issues and concerns raised in relation to changing resourcing arrangements included:

- The need to establish a more flexible use of resources, with examples including not attaching duration of tenure to property type (i.e. shared facility Community-managed Housing - Studio Units stock could be an appropriate long term housing response) and allowing the transfer of surpluses within services across programs to respond to resourcing demands (e.g. from Community-managed Housing - Studio Units to Community Rent Scheme to meet rising market rents).
- Developing products for clients and referring agencies such as fact sheets to explain the purpose and parameters of transitional housing.

Additional questions and issues raised by respondents included:

- Consideration of the additional costs of providing skills training in rural and remote areas.
- The resourcing requirements within area offices to manage the Housing Register and ensure appropriate and timely client referrals occur.
- Reviewing management fees charged by Community-managed Housing - Studio Units funded organisations to establish benchmarks. There is considerable variation across Community-managed Housing - Studio Units providers in the level of existing management fees charged and the purposes to which fees are applied.
- The need for additional resourcing of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program / Crisis Accommodation Program services to provide external support services to clients exiting to transitional housing.

Where to from here?

This summary report has outlined the considerable feedback on proposed changes to arrangements for transitional housing.

The department recognises that further discussion with providers and area offices is required so simple, workable procedures can be developed to integrate and align transitional housing within one social housing system.

A further series of workshops is proposed for October 2008 to gather detailed feedback on draft applicant referral and allocation procedures. In addition, the workshops will discuss options for assisting existing transitional housing tenants who are assessed as having a low need for housing to exit to other forms of housing assistance.

It is proposed that the workshops involve transitional housing providers and area office staff at a local level to enhance capacity for attendance. However for the greater Brisbane metropolitan area, it may be more efficient to run combined sessions for area office and provider staff.

ATTACHMENT A

Written feedback respondents

Metropolitan Association Towards Community Housing (M.A.T.C.H)

Central Queensland Regional Community Housing Council

Queensland Shelter

Brisbane Boarders

Bayside Adolescent Boarding Incorporated

North Queensland Regional Community Housing Council

Collaborative response from bric, Inner Northern Community Housing Association, Mangrove Housing, M.A.T.C.H., Interlink Housing and Support Association, Sunshine Coast Regional Community Housing Council, Access Community Housing Association Cairns

Access Community Housing Association Cairns

Two responses were received from anonymous respondents