



**Queensland** Government  
Department of **Communities**

# **Summary report**

## **Stakeholder feedback on proposed service delivery arrangements for Transitional Housing**

May 2009

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## Introduction

In May 2008, the former Department of Housing released a discussion paper, 'Realigning transitional housing in one social housing system', which identified key policy and operational changes required to align transitional housing to one social housing system.

The department held four workshops across Queensland on the proposed changes. A report summarising the feedback gathered through those workshops is available from the department's website.<sup>1</sup>

Draft service delivery arrangements, including allocation processes, were developed in preparation for the introduction of the client intake and assessment process. The client intake and assessment process requires applicants for social housing to complete a Housing Needs Assessment. This determines their level of need, and consequently, the segment that their application is placed on the Housing Register.

In October and November 2008, the department hosted 12 workshops for transitional housing providers and area office staff. The purpose of the workshops was to gather specific feedback on proposed service delivery arrangements for transitional housing, including the development of proposed allocation procedures and processes.

The workshops provided an opportunity for area office staff and transitional housing providers to discuss how they will work together to deliver services to clients within one social housing system.

An invitation was extended to all transitional housing providers<sup>2</sup>, and other relevant stakeholders.

The workshops were well attended by approximately 200<sup>3</sup> people representing:

- Community-managed Housing – Studio Units providers
- Community Rent Scheme providers
- Same House Different Landlord providers
- Crisis Accommodation Program providers
- Supported Accommodation Assistance Program providers
- Long Term Community Housing Program providers
- Affordable Housing providers
- Community Housing Resource Workers
- Queensland Shelter representatives
- Tenants' Union of Queensland representatives, and
- Departmental officers, including area office staff.

To stimulate discussion and generate feedback, a registration pack, containing six proposed service delivery process flows, was sent to all attendees prior to the workshops. These process flows can be found at Attachment A.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.housing.qld.gov.au/programs/pdf/summary\\_report.pdf](http://www.housing.qld.gov.au/programs/pdf/summary_report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this realignment, transitional housing providers are defined as those funded under Community Rent Scheme, Same House Different Landlord and Community-managed Housing – Studio Units.

<sup>3</sup> This is a conservative figure based on attendance sheet figures. It should be noted that not all attendees signed their name on the attendance sheet.

The process flows outlined new service delivery requirements for transitional housing providers, including:

- new allocations processes for referring applicants and filling vacancies, and
- regular review of transitional housing tenancies, including tenancy review planning to assist clients to access longer term housing options.

This report documents feedback presented by stakeholders during the 12 workshops held in October and November 2008 on proposed new service delivery arrangements for transitional housing.

## **Overview of feedback**

Attendees reported they had had sufficient time prior to the workshops to review and consider the six proposed service delivery process flows, as well as sufficient time at the workshops to adequately discuss the proposed arrangements.

The themes and general points raised and discussed at the workshops will assist with the implementation of proposed service delivery arrangements for transitional housing which include:

- The importance of strengthening and enhancing relationships and communication between providers, area office staff, applicants and tenants.
- The need for policy, procedures and information systems to be in place before providers and area offices are required to implement the new arrangements.

Key issues and comments raised in relation to each proposed service delivery flow are outlined below.

## **Allocation processes**

The proposed process flows outline how the Department of Communities (Housing and Homelessness Services) and transitional housing providers will work together to fill a vacancy within one social housing system. These processes are based on the existing arrangements for the Long Term Community Housing program and Affordable Housing providers. They are designed to ensure fair and consistent service delivery arrangements across the system.

## **Vacancy notification**

The vacancy notification process describes how transitional housing providers would notify the area office of an upcoming vacancy and the subsequent process for filling that vacancy with an eligible applicant from the housing register.

Two options were developed by the department to guide discussion on the vacancy notification process.

### **Vacancy notification option 1**

Option 1 requires area offices to undertake a pre-allocation check prior to generating a referral report.

The benefit of this option is that the provider received a referral list with applicants who are eligible for housing assistance, who can be housed immediately.

#### **Vacancy notification option 1 – feedback**

- Providers recognised the value in area offices undertaking a pre-allocation check prior to generating a referral report. This will ensure that the referral report contains accurate information on eligible applicants. This is the process as it applies to filling long term vacancies.

### **Vacancy notification option 2**

Option 2 allows providers to make a provisional offer to an applicant, subject to confirmation of their income eligibility, from an unverified referral report.

The benefit of this option is that, if the agreed applicant is eligible, area offices will only need to perform one pre-allocation check. However, if the agreed applicant is ineligible, the provisional offer of housing assistance is withdrawn. The provider will then need to select another applicant from the referral report, or if none of the applicants are suitable, request the area office create a new referral report.

#### **Vacancy notification option 2 – feedback**

- Providers raised concerns that this option has the capacity to raise expectations for applicants provisionally offered housing assistance and then cause confusion when an offer is withdrawn due to ineligibility.
- Providers are concerned that this option may result in delays if further offers need to be made or if a referral report has to be reproduced.

## **Vacancy notification general feedback**

Attendees generally preferred vacancy nomination option 1.

- Discussion was held regarding the need for a common purpose for transitional housing which clearly identifies:
  - the intention of the housing assistance,
  - realistic expectations for tenants on the duration of tenancy, and
  - the support tenants can expect during their tenancy.
- The importance of providers' access to, and understanding of, the systems in place to assist in the referral process, such as the use of the Community Housing referral mailbox, was raised. Providers suggested the adoption of a single liaison officer, within each area office, for vacancy notifications and transitional housing enquiries.
- Providers with properties across a number of area office regions discussed how relationships and communication would be managed with multiple area offices.
- Providers commented that value could be added to referral reports by including tenancy history, debts and neighbourhood dispute information, where available.
- Verification checks, at times, can be difficult for area office staff to complete within the specified referral timeframes; specifically for applicants with a disability or applicants with high, or very high, need.
- Providers and area office staff commented that there should be some flexibility in the number of referrals included in a referral report. Under the applicant referral process for long term community housing, area offices include three applicants. Workshop attendees suggested that there may be occasions where one is appropriate. It was strongly noted, however, that this flexibility should only take place where both providers and area offices agree to a local practice arrangement.
- Attendees discussed ways to manage offers of long term housing for clients of transitional housing. Attendees supported clients either being offered the option of placing their application for long term housing on hold or rejecting an offer, without penalty, if they had recently moved into a transitional housing property.

## **Nomination**

Two possible nomination options were proposed. These are provider nomination and area office referral to a Community Rent Scheme provider. It is anticipated that provider nominations will primarily be used to fill vacancies under the Same House Different Landlord program, however, under certain circumstances this process could apply to other transitional housing programs.

### **Provider nomination option 1**

- The process enables a provider to nominate a preferred applicant at the same time as notifying the area office of an upcoming vacancy. Under this process, the support arrangements required to help an applicant maintain their housing are negotiated between the housing provider and support service prior to referral and allocation.

### **Provider nomination option 1 - feedback**

- Workshop attendees commented that this process reinforced existing practices, which were seen to be working well when tenants needed support, often from another agency to maintain their tenancy.
- Discussion was held regarding 'out of turn' allocations and that it may be perceived that some applicants have received housing assistance before those who are in higher need or who have been on the housing register longer.
- The role of the area office in confirming that a nominated applicant is eligible and matched to transitional housing was discussed. Attendees also discussed how this role could affect the responsibility of providers to select the applicant to be offered housing assistance. Attendees wanted clarification on whether this was an information provision and advice role or if the area office was deciding if the nominated applicant could be housed.
- Providers and area office staff at some workshops raised the complex and lengthy process associated with replacing a property under the Same House Different Landlord program.

## **Area office nomination option 2**

This process enables area offices and providers to assist applicants that have been assessed as having a very high and immediate housing need.

Through this process, the area offices can nominate an applicant, assessed as having a high or very high need, with a specific property need to the Community Rent Scheme provider, requesting that a property meeting the applicant's needs is sourced by the provider from within the private market.

### **Area office nomination option 2 - feedback**

- Providers generally supported this process for use in exceptional circumstances but not as normal practice.
- It was recognised by attendees that this process enables particular types of properties to be sourced to meet the specific needs of an applicant, providing greater benefit and better outcomes for the applicant.
- Providers and area offices will need to have very strong working relationships with clear and open communication if this process was to be successful.

## **Bulk referral**

The bulk referral process is designed to manage large numbers of referrals and allocations when new housing complexes or multiple vacancies from a provider become available.

The process enables area offices to create a bulk referral list for providers to select the required number of suitable applicants from. This process is currently being used to fill vacancies in properties recently acquired for the Community-managed Housing – Studio Units program.

### **Bulk referral process – feedback**

- General discussion was held regarding the number of referrals that would be required to successfully tenant a housing complex with multiple vacancies.
- There was a broad discussion about the importance of providers and area offices communicating how referral, allocation and support arrangements will work on a local basis.
- Area office staff reported that a high proportion of applicants indicated that they do not want to be referred to and allocated housing assistance in a shared facility property. Attendees identified a need to be able to produce referral reports that included applicants that have indicated they are willing to consider an offer of shared facility accommodation.
- Providers and area offices acknowledged the need to more clearly communicate to applicants housed in shared facility accommodation, of their capacity to remain on the housing register. Both parties agreed that work needed to be undertaken with applicants to increase the likelihood of them accepting an offer of shared facility housing assistance. This involves discussing shared facility accommodation with suitable applicants early in the application process.
- Area office attendees discussed the importance of having some flexibility to draw referrals from within various segments of the housing register and how this would assist providers to ensure complexes do not have a high concentration of tenants with high or very high needs.
- Attendees generally agreed that the bulk referral process was good and had worked well in the past; however, it requires flexibility and good communication between providers and area offices early in the process to ensure applicants are offered suitable and appropriate housing assistance.

## **Managing existing transitional housing tenancies**

### **Service delivery for existing tenants following the implementation of the client intake and assessment process**

A process flow, outlining the arrangements to align the Community Rent Scheme with the client intake and assessment process, was presented to workshop participants for feedback.

The process flow demonstrates how tenancy management plans contribute to ongoing service delivery for tenants and facilitate movement through and out of social housing as set out in the discussion paper 'Realigning transitional housing in one social housing system'. Tenants receiving transitional housing assistance remain on the housing register.

### **Service delivery for existing tenants following the implementation of the client intake and assessment process – feedback**

Providers commented that in order for this process to be successful, they would need to be informed of the applicant's assessed need. Housing Services can produce a report for providers that gives information about the applicant's segment on the housing register.

- To improve outcomes for applicants, it was widely agreed that Housing Services should:
  - offer training on developing and implementing tenancy management plans,
  - develop a tenancy management plan template for use by all providers, and
  - promote other departmental products, such as RentStart and RentConnect.
- Discussion was held on the limited availability and capacity of support services to provide assistance to applicants and how this can impact on assisting clients to exit to longer term housing options.
- Providers located in regional areas commented on the realities of a tight and unaffordable housing market. This can often prohibit providers from assisting tenants to exit into sustainable housing. With this in mind, the process would require flexibility, particularly in relation to how long tenants could remain in a transitional housing property (duration of assistance).
- A solution offered at some workshops was to quarantine some long term community housing and public housing properties and use these to exit tenants from Community Rent Scheme properties. This would create a flow within the system and provide long term housing options for people with high or very high needs.

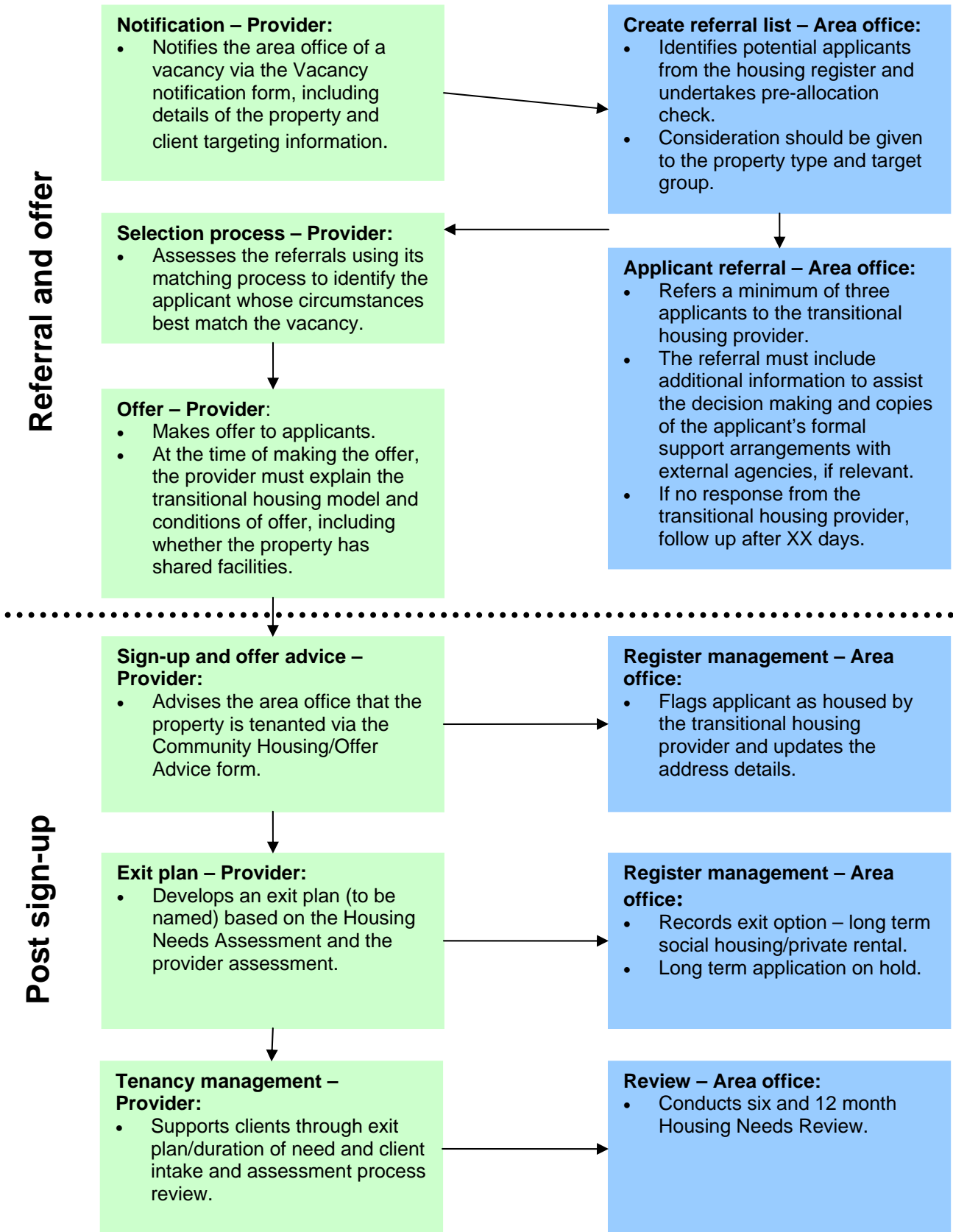
## Next steps

In 2009, Housing Services is committed to amending the *Housing Regulation 2003*, publishing a transitional housing allocations policy and developing procedures to assist with implementation. Further work will also be undertaken on the development of tenancy management and planning tools and processes. The draft transitional housing allocations policy was presented to the Stakeholder Group in February 2009 for comment.

Housing Services will continue to consult on the development and implementation of allocations arrangements with the Transitional Housing Stakeholder Group and the wider community housing sector.

## Attachment A

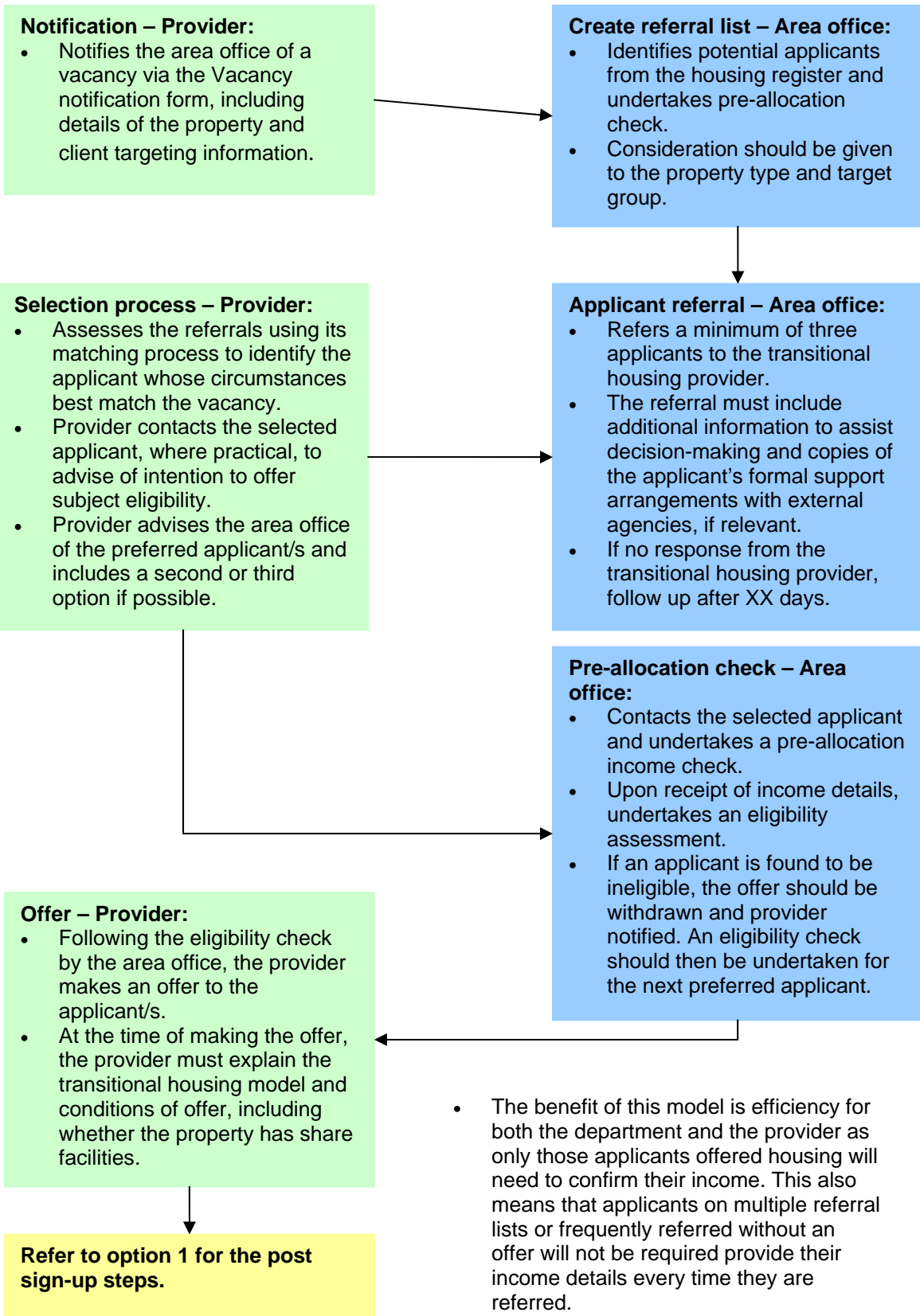
### Draft vacancy notification option 1 Applicant referral process – transitional housing



## Draft vacancy notification option 2

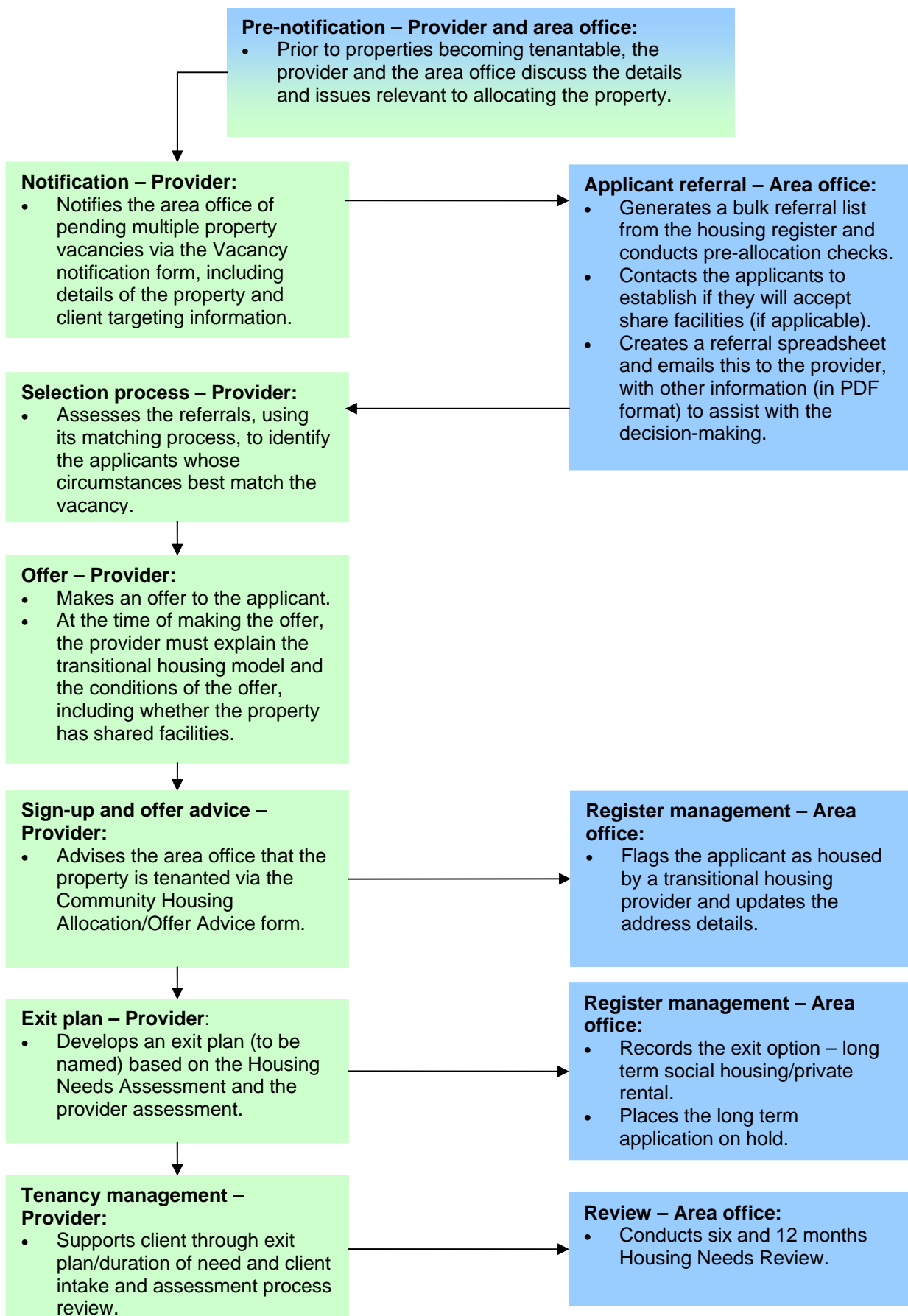
### Applicant referral process with eligibility check at offer stage

Referral and offer

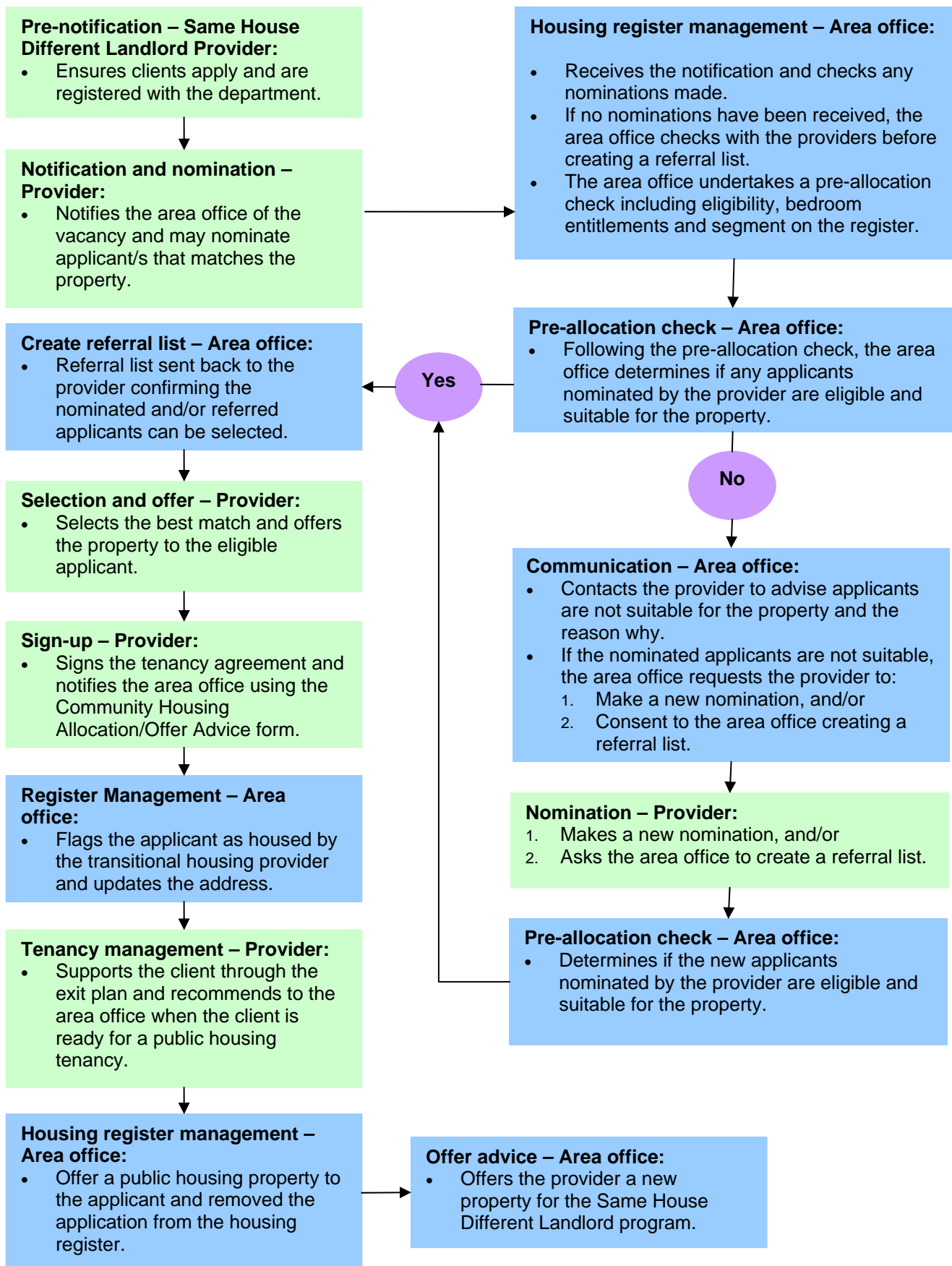


- The benefit of this model is efficiency for both the department and the provider as only those applicants offered housing will need to confirm their income. This also means that applicants on multiple referral lists or frequently referred without an offer will not be required provide their income details every time they are referred.
- Under this model, it is important that providers make it clear to applicants that an offer is subject to an income and eligibility check by the area office.

## Draft bulk referral Applicant referral process – transitional housing



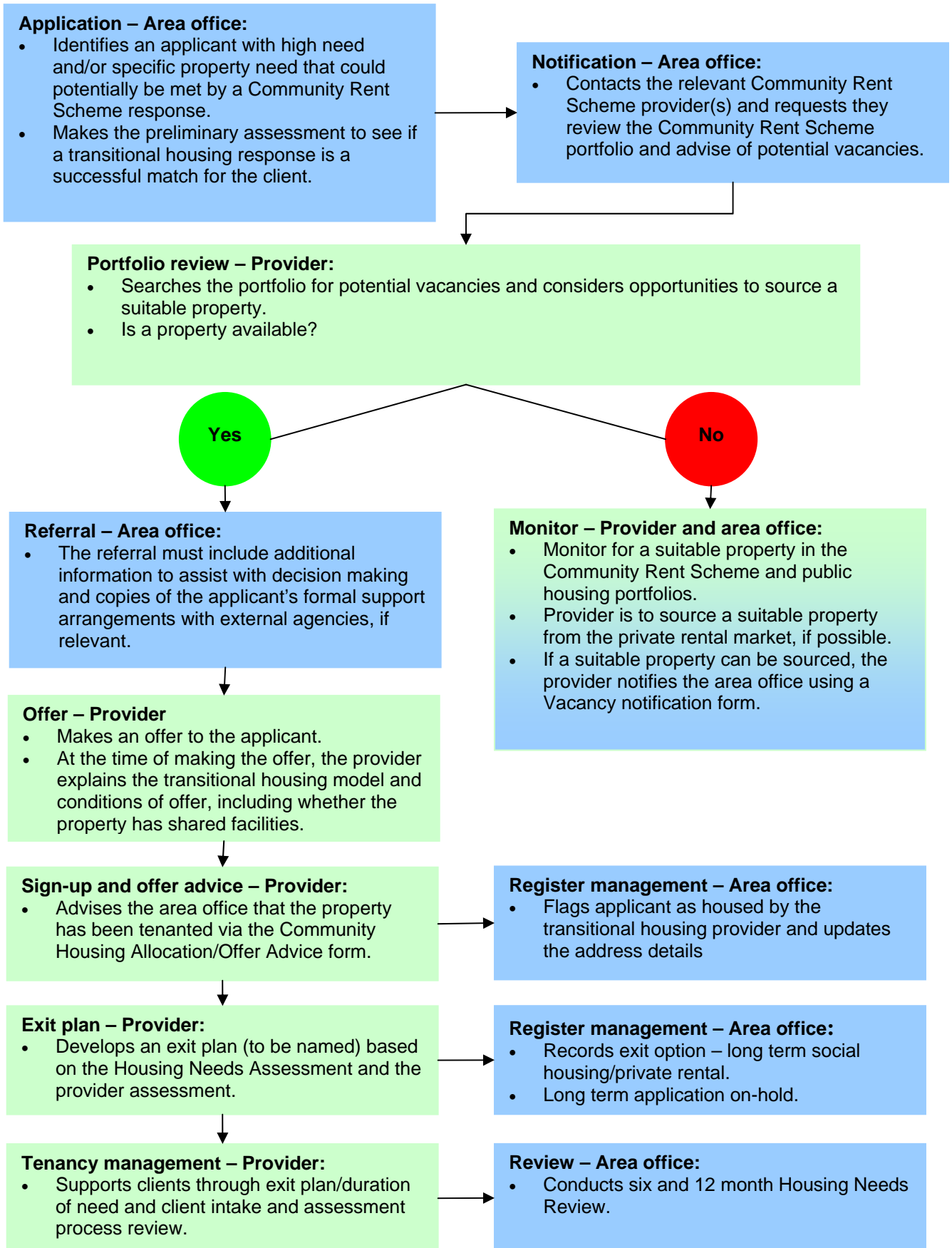
## Draft nomination Applicant referral process Same House Different Landlord\*



\*This process could be adopted for Community Rent Scheme and Community-managed Housing – Studio Units providers, where service level agreements (i.e. Memorandums of Understanding/protocols) are in place with support agencies.

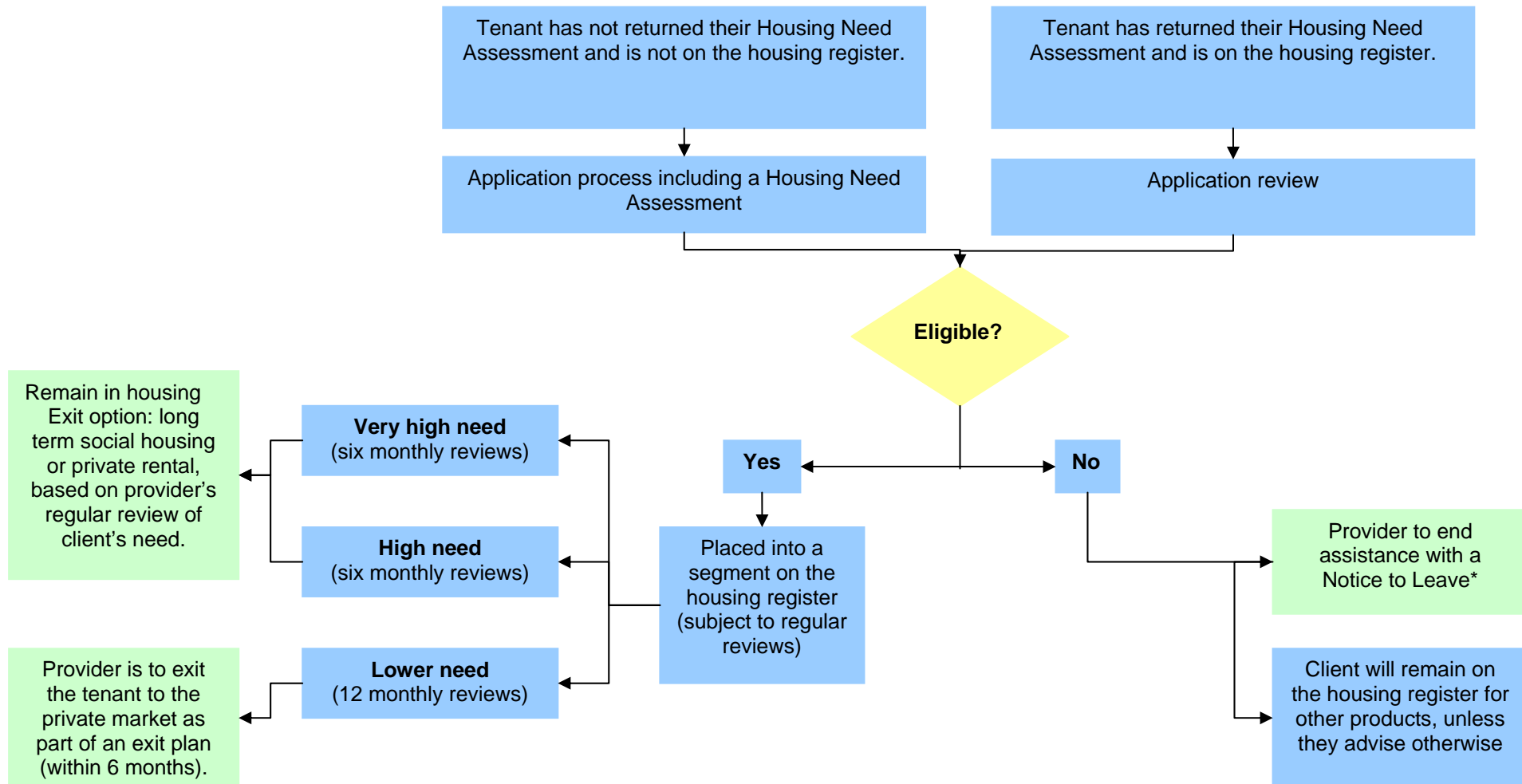
## Draft nomination

### Area office referral to a Community Rent Scheme provider



## Draft – Community Rent Scheme

### Service delivery for existing tenants following client intake and assessment process implementation



\*As per section 163A of the Residential Tenancies Act 1994