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| Officer responsible Director of Policy | Author Margaret Macadam |
| Corporate Plan Output: Policy Advice | |

The purpose of this report is to inform the committee about a recent review of tenant support within the Council's housing service, and to seek endorsement for the draft tenant support policy, which has been formulated on the basis of the review findings.

INTRODUCTION

The review, which was initiated by the Housing Working Party, originally referred to "welfare" support for tenants of the Council. From the outset the term "welfare" was seen to be inappropriate, as it implied some connection with welfare benefits. The term "tenant support" seems to be more appropriate, since the issues addressed by this report focus on supporting tenants to live independently. This term is used wherever possible, but in some instances it has been necessary to use the term "welfare", when reference is made to existing documents which use this term.

The Council's overall housing policy as set out in the 1998 Strategic Statement states:

"The Christchurch City Council contributes to the community's social well-being by ensuring safe, accessible and affordable housing is available to people on low incomes, including elderly persons and people with disabilities."

This report addresses support issues as they affect City Housing tenants. The issues of isolation, loneliness, confusion and despair, however, are prevalent in today's society, whether the affected groups are in their own homes, private sector rental units or Council rental units. The issues that Council faces as a social landlord are obviously connected to these city wide concerns. In its 1999 Annual Plan, Council confirms its commitment to enhancing community cohesion and well-being (Strategic Goal A). In particular, Strategic Objective A2 relates to:

"strengthening communities by...:

- initiating and supporting community development projects...*
- working with community groups, government agencies and other funding bodies to address key areas of social need"*

The implementation of the tenant support policy will clearly need to occur within the context of any city-wide initiatives (eg community development projects) which aim to enhance community cohesion and well-being.

BACKGROUND

The 1997 Review of Outputs of the Council's Housing Function identified that in a number of areas, Council policy was not well developed or expressed. "Policy" was often little more than one-off resolutions of the Council approved from time to time

over a number of years. The provision of “welfare ” services was one such case: present policy consists of some 16 individual Council resolutions passed between 1990 and 1996 (see Appendix A). The 1997 Review (3.3.3, p11) defined the output of welfare services as follows:

“To conduct a programme of providing activity and welfare services to tenants in accord with Council policy. Such services to include:

- Recreational and social activities for elderly tenants.
- Counselling in cases of special need.
- Welfare support where specific cases are identified within established guidelines.
- Liaison with relatives and doctors where necessary.
- Networking with third party providers of welfare services.
- Liaison with ethnic communities.”

One of the objectives set by the 1997 Review was to develop a plan of welfare service provision (ie tenant support) for adoption by Council. One of the issues that needed to be addressed was the definition of tenant support - where it starts and where it finishes. Originally, such services were provided only to tenants of Elderly Persons’ Housing. With the gradual removal of the distinction between this group of tenants and other Council tenants, these services should be provided in all other areas of City Housing.

Some tenants have potentially high support needs. There are currently no parameters in place to determine the nature and extent of the Council’s involvement in providing support for its tenants. It was therefore necessary to develop a policy to provide guidance on this matter. In order to develop an appropriate policy for this area, it was necessary to undertake a consultation exercise. Outlined below are the aims, structure, findings and conclusions of this exercise.

AIMS

The aim of the consultation exercise was to seek community, Council staff and elected member views on the following issues:

- the nature and extent of past and current tenant support services provided by the Council for its tenants, and how this should develop in the future;
- the nature and effectiveness of existing relationships between City Housing and other support agencies in the city, and the potential for developing these relationships further;
- other possible models of support.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation exercise consisted of the following:

- Interviews with City Housing staff (Tenancy Liaison Officers and Team Leader, and Activities Coordinators), and the Property Unit Manager
- Group discussions with representatives from relevant external agencies, and with City Housing tenants
- Seminar with Councillors and Community Board members

The relevant external agencies were identified in collaboration with City Housing staff, who also provided contact names within organisations. The Review did not set out to talk to every agency in contact with City Housing. The aim was to consult with a range of organisations that represented different areas of support. A total of 30 agencies attended four group discussions. A list of participating agencies is included as Appendix B.

It was not within the scope of the Review to conduct a large-scale consultation of all tenants. The aim was to gain a broad understanding of underlying themes and issues, rather than to seek quantifiable data. A relatively small-scale qualitative exercise was therefore deemed appropriate. A total of 48 tenants were selected at random from 16 of the complexes, spread throughout the city, and invited to participate in the consultation. Twenty-two tenants attended four focus group discussions.

REVIEW FINDINGS

The tenant support role of City Housing

Review participants were very clear that Tenancy Liaison Officers were facilitators of support services for City Housing tenants, but that they were not and should not be actual providers of these services. This provision was the responsibility of support agencies. Participants saw the role of Tenancy Liaison Officers as “keeping their finger on the pulse”, monitoring situations, picking up issues before they became problems, providing information for tenants, and liaising or putting tenants in touch with relevant agencies where appropriate.

Tenancy Liaison Officers were clear that their tenancy and support roles were interdependent and could not be split. An awareness of support issues was an important contributing factor in stable tenancies. At the same time, Tenancy Liaison Officers needed to be aware of their wider tenancy responsibilities for all tenants when addressing the support needs of an individual tenant.

The majority of the Tenancy Liaison Officers’ tenant support involvement was at a fairly low level - “keeping an eye out” as described above. A small but growing number required more intensive involvement on a fairly infrequent basis. Those with high support needs included both older people and people with disabilities/mental health problems.

Most participants saw the main aim of the support facilitation role as enabling tenants to live independently, empowering tenants to help themselves. This contributed to a better quality of life for tenants, and helped to prevent the need for institutional/residential care. The support role also contributed to the effectiveness and efficiency of the service by minimising tenancy breakdown and thus maximising occupancy.

In addition to the support facilitation role of Tenancy Liaison Officers, City Housing also provides support for its tenants through its Activities Coordinators. In providing opportunities for social/recreational activities for tenants, these members of staff help to combat the social exclusion experienced by some tenants.

Internal Resource Constraints

Tenancy Liaison Officers commented that tenancy and reactive maintenance issues took up most of their time, and that there was very little time available to spend on support facilitation. The ideal way to monitor tenants' support requirements was through a regular visiting programme. As a result of time constraints, Tenancy Liaison Officers were not visiting tenants to the extent that they perceived to be necessary.

In order to perform their support facilitation role, Tenancy Liaison Officers needed to maintain up to date knowledge of available services, and good working relationships with the relevant contact people in these agencies. Another repercussion of the time constraints was that many of the Tenancy Liaison Officers were finding it hard to make time available to maintain existing contacts and establish new ones.

The Availability of External Support

If a tenant presents with a health problem, City Housing generally wants assurance from a GP or a social worker that she/he can live independently, and details of the support available where appropriate. If tenants' needs are great enough, they are entitled to community support. If this is the case, the Review findings indicate that the issues for Tenancy Liaison Officers are mainly around keeping in touch with the relevant support agencies, as discussed above.

If tenants' needs are assessed as not being high enough to qualify for community support, they may nevertheless require a low level of support to maintain their independence. If they do not receive this (because agencies are not funded to provide it) then their support needs may increase. Review participants were concerned about tenants who were falling through the gaps in the system.

Review participants raised the issue of tenants who choose not to have contact with support agencies. Obviously this is a matter of individual choice: tenants cannot be forced to have contact with support services against their will. Nevertheless, guidelines are required to enable City Housing staff to deal with any problems which may arise.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

As highlighted above, the three main issues raised by this review are:

- The need for a clear understanding of the parameters of City Housing involvement in facilitating support for their tenants
- The need for internal mechanisms which will enable Council staff to carry out their responsibilities in this area
- The need for strategies to address situations where support from external sources is not being accessed by tenants, or is not available.

The key issues highlighted above will inform the development of an appropriate tenant support policy. As a first step in this process it is useful to repeat the overall goal of City Housing in this area. The overall vision for City Housing, as adopted by Council on 18 December 1996 is as follows:

“The Christchurch City Council contributes to the community’s social well-being by ensuring safe, accessible and affordable housing is available to people on low incomes including elderly persons and people with disabilities.”

Of the six goals identified as contributing to this vision of City Housing, none relate specifically to the area of tenant support. It is recommended, therefore, that an additional goal be adopted:

“To ensure that tenant support is facilitated, in order to assist tenants to live independently and achieve a good quality of life, ”

Parameters for City Housing involvement

The objective is to provide clear policy statements so that there is an understanding by all parties of the tenant support role of City Housing. The principles that underlie this statement should also be clear, and guidelines should be drawn up to help City Housing staff to fulfil their role.

Options

The options are actual provision of tenant support services, or facilitation of these services.

Preferred policy

As the above discussion makes clear, there is currently little argument in favour of direct provision of tenant support services (with the notable exception of the Activities Coordinators who are seen as having a separate but complementary role from that of Tenancy Liaison Officers). There may be some potential for obtaining Government funding to provide additional low level support for independent living. This will need to be investigated further, and is by no means guaranteed. Even if further funding is available, it may be more appropriate for this to be provided in partnership with another agency.

The facilitation of support services clearly enhances community cohesion and well-being, as well as contributing to the effective and efficient provision of the City Housing Service, whilst at the same time:

- Filling an identified gap (on-going monitoring);
- Making best use of existing resources (not duplicating the work of existing services);
- Promoting partnerships with other agencies in the city;
- Reducing the potential for conflict of interest (ie if trying to be both landlord and carer).

The preferred policy is for Tenancy Liaison Officers to facilitate support for their tenants, and for Activities Coordinators to continue to provide recreational and social opportunities for tenants. In line with current plans to integrate City Housing, and ensure consistency across the service, all tenants in both the former “Elderly Persons Housing” and “Public Rental Housing” Units should be covered by this policy. Outlined below are the proposed policy statements, followed by the principles that should inform their implementation.

Policy Statements

- **Tenancy Liaison Officers will facilitate support by monitoring the needs of their tenants and referring on to other agencies as appropriate. This will be achieved through:**
 - **interviewing all prospective tenants;**
 - **visiting tenants at least once per year, and more frequently as necessary;**
 - **maintaining networks with, and an up to date knowledge of, the wider support system in the city.**
- **City Housing will put mechanisms in place which maximise the ability of Tenancy Liaison Officers to facilitate the support of their tenants. It will ensure that adequate training and resources are made available to enable the Tenancy Liaison Officers to perform this role.**
- **City Housing will ensure that there are formal mechanisms in place that enable tenants to communicate their views/concerns (for example, satisfaction surveys, tenant meetings).**
- **Activities Co-ordinators will contribute to the social well-being of City Housing tenants by providing/encouraging social and recreational opportunities.**
- **City Housing will work with other Council Units with a view to encouraging community development initiatives within the complexes.**
- **The Council will work with other agencies to identify and document gaps in support provision, and lobby relevant government agencies and departments for increased resources to meet these needs.**
- **The Council will work with other agencies to attempt to address issues raised by gaps in the support system, and will investigate the potential for further joint initiatives.**

Principles

- The ultimate aim of support facilitation is to enable tenants to live independently, maintain their tenancy, and achieve a good quality of life
- City Housing staff should work to empower tenants (by enabling tenants to help themselves).
- City Housing staff should assist tenants to solve their own problems, by referring them to the appropriate agencies
- Referrals should be made only at a tenant's request and/or with the tenant's consent unless her/his physical or mental health dictates otherwise.
- The principles of the Privacy Act should be applied in all referrals.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

A number of issues have arisen during the course of this review that will need to be addressed as part of the policy implementation process. These are outlined below.

Staffing ratios

If the policy is to be implemented across all Council housing complexes, an assessment needs to be made as to the required level of staffing. This applies to both the Tenancy Liaison Officers and the Activities Coordinators. Assessment of work loads would form part of this exercise, as would comparisons with staffing ratios in other housing services (eg in other City Councils)

Management Guidelines

Before the policy can be implemented, management guidelines need to be formulated and agreed upon.

External Resources

As discussed above, further Government resources are required to address current gaps in the system. The findings of this review have pointed to these gaps in broad terms. In order to make a strong case for these resources, it will be necessary to provide evidence of the consequences of current resource levels for City Housing tenants.

Tenancy Participation

It is essential to ensure that tenants' views are taken into account in any developments. The satisfaction survey (frequency to be agreed) will provide one means of achieving this. Aside from this, however, there is currently little structured tenant participation. A review of tenant participation arrangements (including community development initiatives) both in New Zealand and abroad would identify the alternatives that currently exist and the potential benefits of such arrangements.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the draft tenant support policy goal, statements and principles, as detailed in the report, be endorsed.
 2. That the relevant existing resolutions regarding Council housing welfare services (Policy Register, 31/12/98) be replaced by the new policy.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.