



27 October 2015

Housing NSW PSA delegates meet with Brad Hazzard

On 24 September 2015, Acting PSA General Secretary Steve Turner, delegates and PSA Industrial Advocate Kate Lawrence-Haynes, met with the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Social Housing, the Hon Brad Hazzard MP. This was a regular quarterly meeting to discuss issues and concerns raised by Housing NSW members.

The PSA raised the context for public and social housing reform and members concerns over the potential impacts of further reform on service quality.

Members are aware of a strong NSW Government interest in reform of this area. Since the Federal Government's introduction of the stimulus package in 2010, 21 percent of Housing NSW stock has been transferred to non-government community housing providers (CHPs). This follows similar directions in other states, in line with the reform agenda set out in the National Affordable Housing Agreement. In May 2009, the States and the Commonwealth agreed to develop a large scale community housing sector in Australia to own and/or manage up to 35 percent of social housing stock by 2014.

A continued transfer of stock up to the 35 percent target could have substantial implications for Housing NSW staff.

Other activities that may influence public and social housing reform include:

- The Audit Office will examine the frameworks for social housing reform. It will also look at the extent to which the transfer program as a whole is meeting government objectives of increasing the stock of social housing (and reducing government liabilities). A report was due to be tabled this financial year but has been delayed and will not be finalised until March 2016.
- Submissions under the Premier's Innovation Initiative regarding opportunities for the Government to work with non-government organisations and the private sector to drive innovation that can help increase the size of the social housing portfolio, and deliver better economic and social outcomes.

- Discussion with the Commonwealth Government on directions for public and social housing as part of the Reform of Federation. CHP clients are able to access Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) while, for public housing, this only applies to the Aboriginal Housing Office.

Minister Hazard noted further discussions with the Commonwealth are expected. Any changes to CRA may affect social and public housing reforms.

- FACS - Social Housing in NSW, a Discussion Paper for input – November 2014.
- The recommendations of the Final Report of the Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing released in September 2014 and Minister Hazzard's response of 11 May 2015. This noted that the Government will release a new Social Housing Policy Framework this year but this has now also been delayed until March 2016.
- A 25 May 2015 discussion forum at Sydney Technology Park on the issues facing social housing in NSW chaired by Minister Hazzard.

Next steps

The PSA sought information from the Minister on the scope and timing of any housing reforms, stressing the need for meaningful consultation with the PSA.

Minister Hazzard did not indicate that any specific decision or reform package was imminent. He observed that any stock transfers were likely to be slow. Any forward directions would likely require Cabinet deliberation.

The Housing delegates raised concerns about the implications of current transfers to CHPs in the Sydney district including the impact on Housing NSW staff. The Minister asked his staff for a full list of recent transfer activity and the status of transfers such as freehold or leasehold. He wanted to understand the accountabilities of CHPs managing these properties, the quality of the contracts and the sanctions for poor outcomes for clients.

While there may be arguments for further transfer of housing assets to CHPs, the Minister said he had not finalised his views. He mentioned a perception that community housing does 'wrap-around' services for housing clients better than Housing NSW.

The Housing delegates stressed CHPs often have the less complex clients and have much lower property oversight loads. Any comparison with the CHP sector is not on a like-for-like basis.

The delegates discussed the nature of the housing affordability crisis affecting many of their clients with rent levels exceeding 50 percent of income even in the outer areas of Sydney. Public housing waiting lists are growing.

At the delegates' request, Minister Hazzard agreed to visit Campbelltown to understand how members deliver wrap around services to clients to ensure client focused outcomes.

At the 2 October 2015, FACS Cluster Deputy Secretaries, Operations meeting with the PSA further clarification was provided. FACS management confirmed that a Social Housing Strategy was currently under development. It would be informed by the various policy inputs mentioned above. The PSA requested on-going consultation on this matter.

What can you do?

On the issue of wrap-around services and client outcomes, the Housing delegates refuted that CHPs do this better. They gave various examples of the comprehensive services offered by Housing NSW in liaison with other NSW agencies and NGOs. Housing NSW is actively involved in supporting the CHP's wrap around services. The long term experience, in-depth expertise of Housing officers and their compassion and dedication to ensuring customer focused outcomes was also highlighted.

The PSA needs members to help demonstrate that Housing NSW provides comprehensive, wrap-

around support to clients. Lines of investigation are more detail on Housing NSW clients having more complex needs than typical CHP clients, the quality of Housing NSW services, and Housing NSW support to NGOs. We want to provide the Minister with more evidence on this.

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Temporary staff and fair outcomes

The arrangements for temporary staff to secure on-going roles in Housing in line with the Government Sector Employment Act were also discussed at the meeting.

Delegates pointed out different approaches apply in different districts. Minister Hazzard recognised that this could cause inequitable outcomes and he asked his staff to look into this matter further. FACS management have stated that new guidelines on conversion of temporary employees are imminent. But to date there have been extended delays with these guidelines.

The PSA will continue to work with members on this important issue of fair access to on-going employment.

In conclusion

Overall, the meeting with Minister Hazzard provided a good level of frank engagement. The Minister has agreed to meet with the PSA on a regular basis and another meeting is scheduled for November 2015.

The PSA will actively pursue engagement and consultation with the Government on future directions for public and social housing. Member views will be critical in ensuring a comprehensive and effective PSA response to the Government on any future reforms.

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