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Level 2 6 Lithgow Street  
Campbelltown NSW 2560

20 May 2026

Dear Ms Vella,

**Submission regarding the Functional Review changes and the impact to the Northern District Housing Services.**

**Workload and burnout**

Members agree that 5 months after the Functional Review things are worse under the new structure not better, lots of nuanced info has been lost with the shake up and the workload has increased causing negative psychological impact on members. The ongoing disconnect between expectations and operational reality is contributing to psychosocial risks, including heightened stress, fatigue, increased sick leave and experienced staff leaving the Department.

Members were told roles were lost because they were supernumerary and workload for certain roles would be reduced because of the changes in the functional review as tasks would be diverted to other teams. However, tasks members were told they wouldn't have to do, they now have to do. Example of this is phone lines and subsidies. The supernumerary positions were there because the work demanded it and while the Department advised there is no further funding for these positions does not mean the work goes away.

The structure for Tenancy and lack of staff have resulted in reduced capacity to complete Client Service Visits (CSVs), with increasing fatigue and unplanned leave impacting field work. Rental and water arrears are still growing, influenced by both resourcing limitations and travel distances. The specialist team engaged to support Client Service Officers (CSOs) with rent reduction activities produced some short-term improvement due to the increased resourcing, but the gains were not sustainable. Once this additional support was withdrawn, arrears began to increase again, reinforcing the ongoing impact of insufficient baseline

staffing. The volume and complexity of work has increased significantly. A growing number of matters are escalating into Ministerial and Local Member enquiries, which require urgent, detailed, and often time-intensive responses.

The workload of Access and Demand (A & D) has not improved with the restructure despite the Access Hub created to address this workload, that included answering phones. Temporary Accommodation (TA) assessments are much longer to process because of complexity of clients. NGO services have huge demand and are often at capacity so just referring clients to these services is not a solution. KPIs are still being pushed with our members having to complete 7 per day or 4 if on the counter. This leaves no accommodation for walk in and complex referrals. If there are limited staff then A & D staff need to spend further time on the counter limiting their ability to get to their work. This is evidenced by Tenancy and other staff not in A & D required to be on a phone roster and counter to support their colleagues with their workload.

Efforts have been made to address the issues however they have largely been short-term or indirect measures that have not resolved the core challenges of resourcing and workload.

### **Phone lines**

Tenancy staff expected to answer A & D calls are left feeling incompetent and anxious when they are unable to give solutions to clients or complete the tasks required and it's the same issue when it comes to A & D staff who are only able to provide limited support to Tenancy clients. Members feel like this is a waste of time for the client and the staff member and is causing further backlog of their own work. Having the specialist team answering the phones to plug the hole made by inadequate staffing is not economical sound and takes them away from the important work the role was designed for in the first place. It is also causing rifts between Tenancy and A & D teams with each team believing the other is not doing their role when they are, but it's impossible to complete all the work due to capacity.

Members had been told in the past by Housing Services that because of the complexity of the roles, Tenancy and A & D roles were deliberately separated as mental load was considered too high. The 8-week rolling recruitment now requires new recruits to do both areas.

The phone queues are causing issues for clients. Members used to be criticised if call responses were over 15 minutes however now the wait times are 1-2 hours. When members do get to the call they are often faced with agitated clients. There has also been incidents of micromanaging as to how long our members spend on and off these phone calls, not allowing

for complexity or appropriate customer support. Members are told to ring CSOs if they can't respond to calls but CSOs are usually busy, either on counter/driving/break/another call or on a Client Service Visit (CSV).

### **Access and Demand**

The current workload expectations and reported daily volumes are not reflective of actual operational demand. Staff are assigned a minimum of 7 TAs (4 if you're on the counter) per day however this does not reflect actual output. On most days, staff complete 10 or more TAs, with examples of up to 18 completed in a single day. Assigned TAs do not include additional workload, such as walk-in customers and referrals from Link to Homes, priority, and urgent matters. Staff are required to assess and process TAs at the counter, even when the task is assigned to another CSO and there is already a significant queue. Staff reported continuous high-pressure environments that include managing emergency situations (police and ambulance attendance) while maintaining TA processing. There is constant management under-reporting of actual TA workload.

### **Portfolios**

While other districts that cover less distances had their portfolios reduced to 250 the Northern District had their portfolios reduced to 300. The district also lost 37 staff and it covers a greater geographical area so this does not appear to be fair or reasonable. Members are now reporting some portfolios are over 300 properties.

Lack of geographical knowledge since the Functional Review is also slowing everything down. Staff don't know boundaries and the way portfolios are split up doesn't make sense. Example: Tweed Heads are managing Goonellabah (a suburb of Lismore), Alstonville and Ballina and when clients attend their nearest office in Lismore, they are told to contact Tweed Heads. Increased driving distances plus increased traffic at certain hours of day is not being measured. Staff from other areas do not know the areas that clients are calling up about and so local knowledge and support has been removed.

### **Lismore/New England Tenancy Team**

The amalgamation of Lismore and New England regions have resulted in negative impacts on client service delivery in Tamworth and Armidale.

Prior to amalgamation, the New England region was serviced by approximately 5 CSOs and 3 Senior Client Service Officers (SCSOs), while Lismore region had approximately 5 CSOs and 1 SCSO. Following amalgamation, the combined region is serviced by 1 SCSO and 6 CSOs and 1 General Scale Administration Assistant with added workload due to an expanded geographic footprint. A Housing Manager position was created consolidating responsibilities managed by two separate Grade 9/10 Team Leader positions, each overseeing the Lismore and New England Tenancy Teams. Expecting effective service delivery to Tamworth and Armidale and as far down as Taree from a base approximately 400km away from Lismore is not operationally viable and significantly limits local responsiveness and field presence.

Due to the new structure field work involves extensive travel, earlier starts, later finishes, minimal breaks, and days involving many property visits. There is also an added expense of staff needing sustenance to be away from home.

Members who have portfolios a distance from their office are unable to easily drive back and complete CSVs if the client was not home when the CSV was organised. If there was a matter that needed to be dealt with by the Housing Manager then these unrealistic distances will also impact on their workload and ability to support the customers and staff. This workload is not sustainable and presents risks to staff wellbeing, work health and safety, and service quality.

### **Removal of Accessible Front-Facing Services Tamworth and Armidale**

The former model for Tamworth and Armidale included a locally based SCSO based in Tamworth and a CSO based in Armidale providing both field work and front-facing services from the DCJ office. Now that this capacity has been removed, clients who attend both the Tamworth and Armidale DCJ offices to lodge forms or seek assistance are being turned away, despite longstanding practice they could do this.

This removal of front-facing services impacts tenants with low literacy, limited digital capability, and no access to scanners or printers. The consequences of this reduced accessibility has been demonstrated by the subsidy review process. Many tenants in Tamworth and Armidale did not return subsidy forms and, as a result, rents defaulted to market rate. While tenant responsibility is acknowledged, many tenants actively attempted to lodge forms in person and were unable to do so due to the absence of front-facing services. Many tenants in these regional areas are already experiencing disadvantage. The current service model has further compounded this disadvantage and undermines equitable access to Homes NSW services.

## **KPI and performance expectations**

Despite high workload, backlogs, significant vacancy rates and positions filled with new starters unable to complete the much needed work until they complete the onboarding and training, there has been limited adjustment to KPIs or performance expectations.

Expectations have increased, including expanded field day requirements and the expectation that the SCSO issue 20 Notices of Termination per week. These expectations do not appear to fully account for the time required to undertake quality engagement, travel across extensive geographic areas, and prepare matters appropriately for tribunal processes. There is a focus on high-level performance data that does not fully reflect the operational context in which the teams are working in.

## **Admin roles**

District ended up with no Housing Assistants (HA) and it seems the executive didn't understand the crucial role the HAs provide and the impact of moving these positions out of the district. They also didn't consider the impact of not having the new General Scale Housing Assistants ready to support the district in the new restructure. Five months later new recruits have started to be employed however still need to be trained for the role. The impact to CSOs and SCSOs of having these support positions removed and then not replaced in a timely manner has created further backlogs and workload for staff. New admin recruits are willing workhorses but it is still not clear what work they are required to do that is different to HAs and the PSA is concerned that this low-level position will be pressured to take on tasks that they are not paid to do.

## **Training**

Staff should have been trained before they were placed in their new roles. Putting staff in new roles without training first and then expecting them to perform high demand roles, often with backlogs, has placed psychological stress on many of our members. Existing staff are training new staff but then feel disheartened when the organisation does not have structures in place to retain staff. It seems like a waste of their time.

Members are requesting consultation and training before they are transferred into new roles.

## **Recruitment**

The initial 8-week induction with minimal practical experience had been exacerbating workload concerns. There has been positive reports from members now that this has been changed and new staff can start practical work before the 8 weeks onboarding has finished. It doesn't matter how good the training is new recruits still need ongoing support in the office and this is difficult for existing staff to provide when they already have unmanageable workloads. New recruits are also thrown in the deep end when they start with no buddy or ongoing mentoring program.

The new 6 x CSO roles announced, where are they going and are these roles permanent addition to the organisational structure? There are still CSOs positions on the establishment that remain long-term unfilled across every team in the district.

### **New 7/8 role**

Staff who lost 7/8 roles were told they'd be informed if any new 7/8 roles came up in the district and be given preference for the roles - this did not happen with the recent advertisement for a new 7/8 role.

### **Overtime (OT)**

Members are not keen to give up weekends to do OT when they are already burned out. Members would prefer management to give back the staff they took away and allocate new staff based on workload needs that have increased not decreased over the years. OT is only offered to CSOs and no other positions that may have been willing to support the district with the OT.

I can be contacted further in this regard on 0419980503 or [rreilly@psa.asn.au](mailto:rreilly@psa.asn.au)

Yours faithfully  
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