

Visibility and Accessibility of Information in the Community Housing Sector- campaign follow up



What is this follow up report about?

The NSW Registrar of Community Housing (the Registrar) conducted a campaign in 2018 to identify if providers' behaviour was impacting on visibility and accessibility of information in the community housing sector, and, if so, what this meant for tenant outcomes more broadly. The accessibility and usability of tenant guidance remains important to maximise tenant outcomes and is a measure of organisational and sector health. Hence, the Registrar initiated preventative action in 2018 to assure these fundamentals were in place. In 2019 as part of the compliance assessment process for the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Community Housing Providers (CHPs), the Registrar tested whether the recommendations made previously about visibility and accessibility of information had been implemented, and if provider behaviour had changed as a result.

Subsequent findings

The 2019 compliance assessment round identified that all assessed Tier 1 and Tier 2 CHPs conformed to the National Regulatory Code. Of those assessed, all had actioned the recommendations made in 2018 in relation to visibility and accessibility of information. The assessments found that providers had improved:

- website information for complaints and appeals;
- accessibility and visibility of tenancy management information on websites;
- accessibility and visibility of ending tenancy policies;
- the currency of policies and procedures and removed some incorrect references.

The context of this intervention

One of the triggers for the Registrar's interest in this issue was advice in 2018 from the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) that:

The HAC finds a considerable variance in the adequacy and comprehensiveness of the CHP policies, with some lacking detail or clarity. As HAC has to use the housing provider's policies when making their decision, where there are issues with adequacy such as omissions or lack of clarity, the HAC ensures this is raised with the individual housing provider at the time of the decision.

The HAC heard 381 appeals during the 2017-18 financial year, of which 5.25% (20) were from community housing clients. This volume of appeals was consistent with numbers of appeals heard from CHP clients in previous years. However, the HAC were forecasting an increase in the number of appeals received from CHPs in 2019 to 2021, given the increase in numbers of properties managed by CHPs as a result of the Social Housing Management Transfers (SHMT) in 2018 and 2019.

The HAC had noted that issues relating to visibility was a by-product of their appeals process and not the subject of appeal. CHPs typically work closely with their clients, and have more flexibility in decisions made, so potentially tenancy matters are resolved at a local level before progressing to an appeal.

Methodology used

The Registrar assesses the compliance performance of the larger (Tier 1 and 2) CHPs annually. The 2018-2019 compliance assessment round was used to test whether CHPs had actioned the previous recommendations made, and the accessibility and visibility of CHPs key information. The Registrar used documentary evidence collection to support enquiries.

As part of the 2019 follow up campaign, the Registrar re-engaged with the HAC to review patterns in appeals related to visibility and accessibility of information. Given the low sample size of CHP appeals, trends in appeals cases related to visibility were yet to emerge.

Positive practices

All of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 CHPs assessed have policies and/or procedures publically available on their websites and available to tenants and residents in other formats. There was no evidence found of providers refusing to make information available to tenants, residents and applicants.

Overall, CHPs who received recommendations during the 2017-2018 compliance assessment round responded positively during the 2018-19 compliance assessment round. There were no instances of non-compliance detected.

Implications and considerations

The general improvements in visibility and transparency should to some extent better prepare CHPs for the expected increase in tenant expectations arising from the SHMT and other growth programs, as well as improve better practice outcomes for all. While there were no instances of non-compliance detected, the Registrar will continue to monitor visibility and accessibility of information and the impact of the transfer of public housing stock to the CHP sector.

Note: These findings are an interpretation of a sample of provider performance at a point in time.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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