

Preamble

Women's Housing Company (WHC) is a community housing association as part of the social housing system in NSW. WHC provides long term housing for single women and medium term housing through support partnerships.

At times applicants / tenants with Women's Housing Company are more vulnerable than others due to particular needs. In order to provide the best service to all applicants / tenants the Office of Protective Commissioner policy will aim to provide direction for WHC staff for a particular situation.

POLICY

At times, Women's Housing Company staff may make the assessment that a tenant is not coping well with their daily finances. This usually relates to observations in regards to a history of rent arrears and an inability to stick to repayment agreements. There may also be relevant information and history on a tenant's application form and / or file notes on the TMS database.

Staff who identify concerns of such nature regarding a particular tenant are required to inform the Senior Housing Manager immediately.

If it is then assessed that the tenant is displaying a substantial level of concern in relation to a lack of financial management skills, or appears to be taken advantage of financially by others, a report to the Office of Protective Commissioner (OPC) may be filed.

The OPC may not accept such a report unless accompanied by a mental health assessment from a health professional.

In the absence of such evidence, WHC may still go ahead with a report even if deemed to be unsuccessful given the limitations for WHC to act.

At other times WHC is informed that a tenant may be subject to an Office of Protective Commissioner Order.

In these cases WHC staff must be alerted to such orders as part of our duty of care and act according to the order.

PROCEDURE

Once a staff member has identified a tenant displaying a lack of skills managing their finances the staff member will invite the tenant to the office to discuss the matter. At this stage the staff member would aim to refer the tenant to financial counselling or budgeting services.

If however the staff member identifies concerns in regards to cognitive or mental health issues impacting on the tenant's financial management skills, the Senior Housing Manager needs to be informed.

If possible WHC will aim to gain authority from the tenant to communicate with a health professional in regards to the concerns. However, authority may not be able to be secured at all times.

The staff member in conjunction with the Senior Housing Manager will be required to make an assessment of the severity of the observation and evidence available. If sufficient grounds are established the Senior Housing Manager will instruct the staff member, or personally will file a **Report with the Office of Protective Commissioner**. This will also be done in the absence of supporting evidence from a health professional.

The staff member making the OPC Report is required to make an entry under general notes in the database to this effect.

In discussion with the Senior Housing Manager a decision needs to be made whether it is useful or counter-productive to inform the relevant tenant in writing about WHC lodging a report with the OPC.

At times tenants may come under the direction of the **Office of Protective Commissioner under an order**.

Once Women's Housing Company is informed either by the tenant or by the OPC that an order applies, the following procedure is to be followed by the relevant housing worker.

1. Women's Housing Company requests the OPC to provide us a copy of the order. The copy is to be stapled at the back of the file together with the next-of-kin and consent forms.
2. Women's Housing Company needs to clarify if the residential tenancy agreement for the tenant is valid or if it needs to be resigned by the OPC.
3. Women's Housing Company needs to clarify if the income reviews, rent arrears letters, debit notes e.g. for water, need to be sent to the OPC.
4. If this is the case, Women's Housing Company needs to enter the OPC's address in the relevant field for overriding postal address on TMS.
5. Women's Housing Company should do a courtesy call to the tenant to inform them that from there on specified letters will go to the OPC.

Date developed:31/1/05

Date/s policy was ratified and/or changed by Board: 31/1/05; 28/8/07

Note: Procedures are designed to guide the implementation of a policy and will be updated on a regular basis as part of ongoing best practice service improvement.