

## 4.5 Neighbourhood Disputes



### **Preamble**

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

WHC is committed to offer the provision of best practice, professional services with an articulated focus on tenants input and feedback. As part of this commitment WHC is guided by fair processes, transparency and documentation which adhere to ethical administrative practices.

It is understood that to implement this commitment regular monitoring, evaluation, review and improvements are required.

WHC clearly articulates all decisions affecting applicants and tenants in writing. Applicants and tenants are informed with each decision that these are appealable, internally and externally.

Processes for neighbourhood disputes are openly available and made accessible.

WHC will apply the principle of "innocent until proven guilty" and follow procedural fairness for any cases dealing with disputes.

WHC monitors all tenancy and property management activities to ensure adherence to best practice is maintained at all times.

WHC abides by relevant legislation such as the NSW Residential Tenancy Act 1987, NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977, Privacy and Personal Information Act 1988 (see [4.5.1 Relevant Legislation](#) for comprehensive list).

WHC adheres to guidelines and policies as set out by the NSW Office of Community Housing and the National Community Housing Standards.

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### **POLICY**

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[Women's Housing Company invites tenants to raise issues and concerns about neighbourhood disputes.](#)

Women's Housing Company understands that the nature of social housing can bring up numerous issues for tenants and their advocates.

At times these are a reflection of an individual person's coping abilities, or a reflection of expectations and values that are not met by all people living within close proximity, or they may reflect a lack of respect and dignity experienced from a tenant, a neighbour, or others who affect a tenant in an adverse way.

Whatever the reason may be for a tenant or their advocate to raise a neighbourhood issue the matter is acknowledged and treated seriously.

Not all matters result in action by WHC as this will be guided by the wishes of the person raising the matter. In some instances a tenant may only require information as to options and processes available to them to resolve a matter; in other instances direct intervention by WHC may be required.

Regardless of the actual process chosen by the tenant, WHC workers dealing with the matter are required to maintain good documentation. The aim is to resolve any issues in a way that will result in an outcome acceptable to all parties.

All matters received in writing and those which require action by WHC need to be documented more formally and are reported to the Board of Directors on a monthly basis.

Tenants are informed about tenancy advice services which are able to provide information and potential representation.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint they may take the matter further to the CEO, the Board of Directors or externally.

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## **PROCEDURE**

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### **Neighbourhood Disputes**

Any WHC staff member may receive information about a matter, a situation, or a person or group of people of concern to a tenant.

If such information is received in person or verbally over the phone, the worker hearing the matter needs to clarify if the tenant requires information or action from WHC.

The following options are available to deal with disputes;

- Encouraging the tenant to approach the other party if they deem it safe to do so.
- Providing the tenant with information about noise restrictions and noise abatement order, for noise complaints only.
- Encouraging tenants to make use of the local police, for cases of intimidation and harassment, criminal activity and violence, implied or actual.
- Writing to the person complained about and requesting their interpretation of events.
- Initiating a mediation meeting with all parties at Women's Housing Company office.
- Initiating a meeting at the block of units with all tenants.
- Referring the two or more parties to a Community Justice Centre for mediation.
- Taking the matter to the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal.

If action by WHC is required, the matter has to be put in writing. This process can be assisted by sending the tenant a **Neighbourhood Dispute Form** which needs to be returned to WHC. Tenants known to WHC as having language and / or writing difficulties and/ or those who express such difficulties are encouraged to attend the WHC office to allow for an administration worker to assist them with the written record; alternatively they will be encouraged to make use of an advocate of their choice.

Once a neighbourhood dispute form has been received in writing it needs to be recorded by the Senior Housing Manager. The Senior Housing Manager will either investigate the matter or delegate the investigation to another WHC worker.

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**Date developed: 31/1/2005**

**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.

An investigation will check if policy and procedures have been adhered to and if correct information has been provided.

Providing the matter is reasonable, WHC is to write to the person complained about and request their interpretation of events.

Once this documentation has been received, the next steps are decided on in collaboration between the Housing Worker and the Senior Housing Manager. This may involve any of the options outlined above.

Unreasonable requests would include matters such as a tenant not liking another person's personality, the way they dress, or racist, sexist or homophobic complaints.

In such cases WHC will write to the tenant complaining that the matters raised are not relevant under tenancy law and WHC has no role in addressing these.

The Senior Housing Manager will respond to a written neighbourhood dispute notification, within 10 days after receipt. This will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and articulate any further process.

Each step is dated and recorded in a [Neighbourhood Dispute Register](#) which is kept with and monitored by the Senior Housing Manager regarding the issues, the process and the outcomes.

The Senior Housing Manager reports all written neighbourhood dispute notifications to the Board of Directors as part of a monthly Housing Management Data Report.

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