

4.9 Tenant Involvement & Participation



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.

Women's Housing Company acknowledges that tenants are the foundation and key stakeholders in the business of the organisation. WHC is committed to ongoing involvement and participation of tenants in the services we deliver.

WHC is motivated by an understanding that real and meaningful tenant involvement and participation will lead to better and accountable services, increased tenant and staff satisfaction and confidence, and a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards property.

WHC acknowledges that structures and strategies for tenant involvement and participation will become increasingly important with growth of the organisation, to ensure WHC maintains its community roots.

The nature of tenant involvement and participation will change and develop over time as a dynamic process.

POLICY

Women's Housing Company commits to meaningful involvement and participation in the service delivery to tenants.

WHC commits to resourcing tenant involvement and participation with staff time, postage costs, travel expenses, tenant training costs and a dedicated budget line for events and activities.

WHC recognises that such aim must be integrated into the whole of service delivery approach by WHC and cannot be separated out into individual acts.

It thus requires the whole of the organisation and its staff to embrace the notion of tenant involvement and participation as a best practice guide.

WHC acknowledges that the strategies and processes for achievement will vary over time and will not be equally shared amongst the WHC tenant population.

- Tenants in medium term housing will have equal access to all processes, however WHC recognises that the limited housing tenure will prevent long term participation.
- Tenants living in leasehold property may have participation limitation in regards to activities at WHC unit blocks.
- Budget limitations may at times impact on the variety of processes offered to tenants.
- Staff understanding and appreciation will vary and may require additional training and professional development.
- Not all tenants will be interested in being involved.

WHC guarantees the minimum of tenant involvement and participation to include:

- ongoing provision of information in regards to rights, responsibilities, changes to policies and housing sector issues, e.g. Tenant Manual, quarterly Newsletters and Annual Report
- ongoing opportunities for feedback on service delivery through formal and informal processes, e.g. surveys, suggestion box, conversations, complaints and appeals
- ongoing opportunities for input into decision making regarding tenants' accommodation units and blocks of units (capital properties only; leasehold properties are more limited due to lack of control in decision making by WHC)

WHC strives towards the establishment of a Tenant Forum with access to senior staff and the Board of Directors as a two way relationship, to allow for;

- consideration and input opportunities in decision making on service delivery processes of the organisation
- consideration and input opportunities in strategic processes of the organisation

WHC defines Tenant Involvement to mean:

Tenant opportunities to information, review, comment and feedback on WHC service delivery processes and activities.

WHC defines Tenant Participation to mean:

Tenant opportunities for participation in decision making processes of WHC.

- The integration of tenant participation as a guiding principle, in all service delivery aspects of WHC, across all departments.
- The development of formal structures allowing tenants, as a collective group, to become partners in the direction and delivery of services.

PROCEDURE

WHC guarantees **ongoing provision of information** in regards to rights, responsibilities, changes to policies and housing sector issues.

This occurs informally through conversations between WHC staff and tenants, at an at needs basis, initiated by either party.

The formal provision of information is structured and comprises of a variety of processes.

A **tenant manual** is provided to all tenants when signing a lease with WHC. The tenant manual is based on current policy and procedures and updated accordingly. The tenant manual is written in plain English and includes a section on tenant participation.

It is aimed to translate the tenant manual in the key community languages spoken among the WHC tenant community.

Each tenant receives a quarterly newsletter and special edition newsletters in case of major policy changes and key events.

Date developed: 2000

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.

The **quarterly newsletters** includes a tenant participation section LINKS – linking the WHC community. This section allows tenants to share information with other tenants. The information generally includes knowledge tenants have about services, organisations, and activities which could be beneficial for other tenants with a view to improve their lives emotionally, socially and practically.

The newsletter also includes information about the wider housing sector in terms of trends and developments, specific information regarding WHC service delivery issues and practical hints, information and contact details about support services, activities and upcoming events of interest to the tenant group.

Every quarterly newsletter includes a rent statement, listing all rent payments over 13 or more weeks, listing any rent arrears and/or non-rent debt.

The **annual report** is made available to all tenants attending the Annual General Meeting. The report and the AGM provides tenants aggregated information about WHC as a whole, and information and access to staff and Board members.

Tenants have the opportunity to join WHC as a member by filling in a membership form, no fees are required. Membership to WHC allows tenants to elect Board members and vote on any proposed constitutional changes. Board membership is open for tenants.

Through the activities of the Community Development Worker, WHC tenants have been participating in the **Community Housing Tenant Network**. The Network is a tenant resource for information, training and support; it operates in the interest of all community housing tenants in NSW and thus promotes the broader issues and concepts of tenant participation.

It is envisaged that the WHC representatives on the Network in the future will be elected from the Tenant Forum, once established.

WHC guarantees **ongoing opportunities for feedback** on service delivery through formal and informal processes, e.g. surveys, suggestion box, discussions, complaints and appeals.

At the end of each calendar year, WHC mails out a **tenant survey** for feedback and suggestions on service delivery matters and tenant participation.

The tenant survey mail out includes a reply paid envelope to prevent lack of participation on the grounds of costs.

The tenant survey is translated in 4 key community languages.

Tenants initially receive the English version of the survey with a covering letter offering the translated survey on request. A language sheet covering 21 languages is included encouraging tenants in their language of preference to contact WHC via the telephone interpreting service if they are unable to understand the content of the WHC letter.

It is anticipated that the electronic tenancy management database will allow selection by language for future language specific mail outs.

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The tenant survey needs to be returned to WHC by a certain date, usually after around 6 weeks. After the deadline, the Senior Housing Manager collates and analyses the responses and reports the analysis including any recommendations to the Board. An action plan is developed and monitored by the SHM, the action plan is evaluated at the six monthly policy & procedure workshops (see [4.8 Ongoing Evaluation](#)).

At the beginning of each tenancy, WHC includes a [new tenant survey](#) into the sign up kit for the tenant, including a reply paid envelope.

The new tenant survey aims to ensure through monitoring that new tenants are inducted into WHC according to policy with relevant information to guarantee a successful tenancy. The new tenant survey also includes a section on ascertaining their interest in tenant participation and the type of participation preference.

Depending on the number of returned surveys, the Senior Housing Manager collates and analyses the responses on a half yearly or yearly basis and reports the analysis including any recommendations to the Board.

An action plan is developed and monitored by the SHM, the action plan is evaluated at the six monthly policy & procedure workshops.

At the end of each tenancy, tenants are requested to return an [exit tenant survey](#) to assess their overall satisfaction with WHC.

Depending on the number of returned surveys, the Senior Housing Manager collates and analyses the responses on a half yearly or yearly basis and reports the analysis including any recommendations to the Board.

An action plan is developed and monitored by the SHM, the action plan is evaluated at the six monthly policy & procedure workshops.

The [suggestion box](#) in the office foyer allows tenants an informal way to comment and provide feedback. The suggestion box is monitored by the Community Development Worker who collates, analyses and reports any matters to the SHM on a weekly basis. This information is fed into the action plan process at the six monthly policy & procedure workshops.

Informal feedback through [conversations](#) between WHC staff and tenants is reported back to the SHM at weekly housing team meetings and feeds into the action plan process at the six monthly policy & procedure workshops.

[Complaints and appeals](#) may also include suggestions for improvements, directly or as a result of the complaint or appeal (see [4.5 Neighbourhood Disputes](#), [4.6 Complaints against WHC staff](#), [4.7 Appeals](#)).

This information is collated by the SHM and feeds into the action plan process at the six monthly policy & procedure workshops.

WHC provides **ongoing opportunities for input into decision making** regarding tenants' accommodation units and blocks of units.

This generally applies to capital properties only due to WHC having control over the maintenance process at such properties. Leasehold properties are more limiting as WHC has no control over the decision making process when it comes to property alterations, pets and less control in the case of neighbourhood dispute resolutions.

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Informally, this occurs through **conversations** between WHC staff and tenants. For minor matters staff have the discretion to approve tenant requests.

The guiding principle for such discretion is that any such tenant request does not interfere with the quiet and peaceful enjoyment of another tenant's tenancy.

For matters of more significant or potential impact, either on other tenants or WHC as an organisation, policy & procedures need to be adhered to, e.g. permission for pets; extended stay of visitors.

A more formal and inclusive form of tenant input into decision making are **block meetings**. Block meetings at capital properties are promoted as good practice and may be arranged periodically, at an at needs basis for planning, celebration or assessment purposes, or as a result of conflict.

Two or more WHC staff should be participating in block meetings, to allow for the smooth running of the meetings while allowing ability to address issues as they arise. WHC staff are encouraged to assess the need and arrange for on-site interpreters to minimise any language barriers. If the blocks involve partnerships, the support providing services are encouraged to attend also.

Issues for discussion may be raised by staff and/or tenants, the meetings are facilitated by WHC staff with a view to keep discussion constructive and positive.

Minutes of block meetings will be taken by WHC staff and written up after the meeting. A summary of issues, decisions and actions will be mailed to all WHC tenants at the block, even if not all tenants participated. Copies of the minutes are filed in the respective tenant files and a special folder for block meetings (to allow for monitoring and evaluation).

WHC strives towards the establishment of a **Tenant Forum** with access to senior staff and the Board of Directors as a two way relationship, to allow for;

- consideration and input opportunities in decision making on service delivery processes of the organisation
- consideration and input opportunities in strategic processes of the organisation

In order to make tenant involvement and participation meaningful for the whole organisation, WHC is working towards the establishment of a Tenant Forum as a central point of contact.

It is anticipated that this would allow for consultation with tenants as well as allowing tenants to raise issues collectively.

The first stage towards the Tenant Forum is the convening of meetings with invited tenants. These tenants are invited by the CD worker on the basis of their demonstrated interest and active participation in tenant activities. This pre-tenant forum group will be supported to develop terms of references, objectives, and success measures for a future tenant forum to be presented to the Board of Directors for consideration.

All community activities towards the development of the Tenant Forum are **evaluated** by the participating tenants.

The feedback from the evaluation forms is collated and analysed by the CD worker, an analysis including any recommendations are reported to the SHM.

An action plan is developed and monitored by the CD worker in conjunction with the SHM, the action plan is evaluated at regular supervision meetings.

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