

Community Housing Policy – Adopted February 2007

1. Introduction

The Local Government Act 2002 outlines Council's responsibility to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of its community. The 2006-2016 Waitaki Community Plan identifies 36 community outcomes for the District. These include the following outcomes for social wellbeing:

- Waitaki has strong and proud communities
- Waitaki people are safe and healthy.

Council recognises that the provision of community housing for those in need can support the wider goals of social wellbeing for our community and contribute towards the community outcomes identified above.

Council will review this policy at least every 5 years to ensure that it is meeting the community housing needs of the Waitaki District.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to further confirm and define Council's role in community housing in the Waitaki District.

The policy outlines Council's objectives for the provision of community housing and the mechanisms through which these objectives will be met.

3. Council's Role in Community Housing

Council considers that its role in providing community housing is:

- To identify housing needs within the Waitaki community that are currently not being met by other housing providers.
- Where practicable and within the scope of Council policy, to meet identified housing needs through the provision of appropriate, affordable rental accommodation.
- To liaise with relevant social support agencies on matters relating to its housing service and the wellbeing of its tenants.
- To provide a regulatory environment for other housing providers that is conducive to the provision of suitable and sustainable community housing.

Council does not consider that its role is to provide social support services to tenants beyond the provision of needs-based community housing.

4. Key Objectives for Community Housing

To meet its responsibilities under the Local Government Act 2002 and to work towards achieving the community outcomes, Council has identified the following objectives for community housing:

- 4.1 To promote the social wellbeing of the District by providing community housing to those most in need of assistance;
- 4.2 To work towards ensuring that Council's community housing service is suitable and affordable to its tenants, and is maintained accordingly;
- 4.3 To work in collaboration or partnership with organisations already involved in delivering housing, social services or other services to applicants or tenants, in order to ensure the wider needs of tenants are met;
- 4.4 To develop projects and seek funding where available to assist it in meeting its community housing policy objectives;
- 4.5 To manage its community housing asset to ensure that it is self-funding and not subsidised by rates;
- 4.6 To ensure property and tenancy management practices consider the needs of the tenants and are in keeping with the Residential Tenancies Act 1986; and
- 4.7 To review and consult on community housing policy, strategy and planned projects, where required, to ensure ongoing community support.

5. Council's Primary Customer Group for Community Housing

Council has identified and defined a primary customer group for its community housing service to enable it to meet its objective of providing this service to those most in need of assistance. In doing so, Council considered:

- Relevant statistical data and projections for the Waitaki District
- National studies and reports
- Central government policies and strategies
- Tenant demographics and occupancy rates
- Ability to access housing in the private rental market
- Consultation with key stakeholders and associated service providers

With reference to the above, Council's primary customer group for community housing is those aged 60 years and over, with limited income and assets, or any other identifiable need for social housing.

Council acknowledges that there are others in the community who may also have a need for its housing service. The applicant criteria in this policy therefore allows for consideration of all other applicants who have been assessed as having a need for community housing.

Council will review its priority customer group at least every 5 years to ensure its community housing continues to be provided to those most in need of assistance.

6. Working with Other Groups and Organisations

Council will identify groups and organisations with which it can cooperate or work in partnership with, either formally or informally, to achieve its community housing objectives.

In selecting and working alongside these groups and organisations, consideration will be given to the following:

- The most effective ways Council can work with the other groups or organisations in order to achieve its objectives
- The value the partnership will add to the provision of Council's community housing service
- The experience and/or resources the group or organisation can bring to the partnership and Council's community housing activity
- Defining the role of the other organisation in the context of Council's community housing service

All agreements for partnership or collaboration in respect to Community Housing, both formal and informal, will be approved by delegations of the Chief Executive. The principles contained in this policy are deemed to apply to any such agreement.

7. Asset Management

7.1 Funding and Depreciation

Council's community housing services will be self-funding and not subsidised by rates (allowing for depreciation, administration and rates). A long term planned preventative maintenance programme shall be developed based on a forward 10 year programme cycle.

Council will place any operational surpluses or deficits from community housing activities in the Community Housing Reserve to fund capital commitments and possible future community housing developments.

7.2 Acquisition or Disposal of Housing Properties

Every three years, as part of the Waitaki Community Plan process, Council will undertake an assessment of its community housing assets in collaboration with key stakeholders. This assessment will take into account factors which include:

- The number of people on the waiting list for community housing;
- The length of time spent on the waiting list;
- The demographics of those on the waiting list; and

- The provision, or planned provision, of community housing in the district by other providers.

Any projects for the acquisition or disposal of community housing properties that may be identified as a result of this assessment will be included in the draft Community Plan for community discussion.

7.3 Unit Maintenance

Council will maintain all Affordable Housing units to a standard consistent with:-

- Providing a safe, healthy and pleasant environment for its tenants;
- Promoting tenants independence and ability to 'age in place';
- The maintenance practices of other community housing service providers;
- Enhancing the townscape and Council's image and reputation as a property owner/investor /landlord; and
- Protecting and enhancing Council's investment.

Annual inspection of all units will be undertaken, with repairs completed and chattels that are the responsibility of Council replaced as required. Tenants will be advised throughout the process.

Council will compare annual inspection results against the previous years, to ensure that overall standards are maintained or improved and that the maintenance of units is consistent with this policy.

7.4 Unit Development

In fulfilling its role as a community housing provider and where considered appropriate, Council will identify and explore strategies and projects for unit development to further promote the achievement of its housing objectives.

Projects for unit development will identify specific requirements for its housing units that, in addition to Council's policy standards for unit maintenance, will take into account:

- Energy efficient unit design
- Location, accessibility and storage requirements
- The physical and social needs of the primary customer group

Council will fund any unit development projects from the Community Housing Fund Reserve and where opportunities exist, apply to external sources for funding.

Where appropriate and considered to be in the best interests of its community housing objectives, Council will consult with key stakeholders on unit development strategies and projects.

8. Tenancy Management

Council will ensure that its tenancy management procedures are consistent with the Human Rights Act 1993 and the Residential Tenancies Act 1986.

8.1 Applicant Criteria

The following applicants, in order of priority, will be considered for community housing units:

- “Category A” applicants are those aged over 60 years on a permanent benefit who possess less than \$20,000 in total assets for a single person or \$30,000 for a couple.
- “Category B” applicants are those aged over 60 years on a permanent benefit, with assets exceeding the permissible amount for “Category A” applicants, and who have been assessed as having a specific need for community housing.
- “Category C” applicants are those on a permanent sickness or invalid’s benefit who possess less than \$20,000 in total assets and who have been assessed as having a specific need for community housing.
- “Category D” applicants are classified as being all other applicants who have been assessed as having a specific need for community housing.

Applicant criteria under this policy will be reviewed annually in conjunction with waiting list and tenancy trends.

8.2 Assessment Criteria

All applicants will be interviewed prior to unit allocation to determine suitability for Council’s housing units.

All applicants must either be able to care for themselves or require minimum supervision and support from community support providers. Prior to unit allocation and where appropriate, Council will require written confirmation from a health professional to ensure tenants are able to live independently or with the assistance of health services.

All applicants must demonstrate a willingness to adapt to living harmoniously in a close community environment, either through providing appropriate referees that can be verified and contacted by Council, and/or through the interview process.

Credit checks will be required of all applicants to determine if there are high debt levels, which may lessen the ability to afford the rent, and to determine if there is a significant history of rental arrears.

With regard to Category B, C and D applicants, in determining a ‘specific need’ for community housing, the following matters will be taken into consideration:

- The applicant’s current living situation

- The applicant's ability to afford housing in the private markets
- The applicant's requirement for accessibility to essential services
- The extent to which a Council housing unit will enable the applicant to live independently in the community or to 'age in place'
- The availability of suitable alternative accommodation

8.3 Unit Allocation

Council delegates to the Chief Executive the authority to allocate its community housing units. This will be done in accordance with the following:

- Units will be allocated in priority order and following consideration of all the assessment criteria, with "Category A" applicants having highest priority.
- Where no Category A or B applicants require or are offered the unit within 30 days of the unit being available, the unit may be offered to Category C or D applicants.
- Units are to be let on the basis that the tenant is on a 110 day fixed term agreement to assess their long-term suitability for Council's housing, including social compatibility with existing tenants in the complex.
- Category D applicants will be offered tenancy on a fixed-term agreement basis and their ongoing need for community housing will be assessed at the end of each fixed term.
- Where there are no A, B, C or D applicants in need of a housing unit, then the unit may be allocated to other members of the public at Council's discretion and at market value rent. In the event that the unit is required by a Category A, B, C or D applicant, Council will give the tenant notice to end the tenancy in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act.

8.4 Chattel Provision

Council will provide floor and wall coverings, stove, tracks for curtains / drapes, a letterbox and television aerial for each unit. Where other chattels are currently provided, Council will not replace the same.

As funds become available garden sheds, mobility scooter parks or similar storage facilities will be provided on a joint use basis by all tenants.

8.5 Rental value

Council will ensure that its Community Housing units are affordable to its priority customer group by ensuring that rental values:

- Are below market value;

- Take into account current superannuation and benefit rates; and
- Are in keeping with current national policy on affordability.

With regard to the above, rental values need to be maintained at levels that ensure Council's Community Housing activity is self-funding and not subsidised by rates.

Rental values will be reviewed annually to ensure they are in keeping with Council policy.

The Chief Executive is delegated with authority to determine all market value rents (in accordance with Council's policy on valuations).

8.6 Rent management

Rent shall be paid by the tenant, or on behalf of the tenant, into Council's bank account fortnightly in advance by way of direct credit.

All rent arrears will be brought to the attention of the tenant in writing. Where rent arrears are ongoing and/or outstanding, the matter will be referred to the Tenancy Tribunal for resolution in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act.

The Chief Executive is delegated with authority to determine all tenancies and rents and matters relating to arrears of same. The Chief Executive's delegated authority shall not include authority to grant rental holidays exceeding one months duration.

8.7 Tenant Wellbeing

In addition to the annual maintenance inspections, Council will visit all tenants annually to help ensure its community housing service is meeting their needs. These visits will enable Council to determine:

- The tenant's level of satisfaction with the housing unit;
- Whether the tenant has any issues or concerns relating to their unit, neighbours or other matters relating to their tenancy;
- The tenant's ongoing ability to live independently in Council's community housing unit and what support services they may require in order to continue living independently; and
- The tenant's general level of wellbeing.

Where any issues are raised concerning Council's housing service, action will be taken where considered necessary. For issues beyond the scope of Council's housing service, the tenant will be referred to the appropriate agency for assistance and support.

Where the tenant's ongoing ability to live independently is in question, Council will liaise with the relevant service provider or health professional, in consultation with the tenant, to ensure the best possible outcome for the tenant.

8.8 Resolution of disputes

The Chief Executive is delegated with the authority to resolve all disputes with regard to residential tenancies, in accordance with the parameters outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act, except where there is an agreement between Council and another party.

Notwithstanding any statement in this or any other section of this policy document, Council retains the right to lease any property at such a rental or on such terms as Council deems appropriate.

All tenants have an obligation to ensure the quiet enjoyment of other tenants occupying Council's community housing units and Council will take all reasonably practicable measures to ensure that no tenant interferes with the peace, comfort and privacy of any of its other tenants.

Where a nuisance situation arises, Council will notify in writing the tenant who is in breach of their obligations, requesting that the situation is remedied within a specified timeframe. Where, following written notification, the nuisance situation is ongoing, Council may refer the matter to the Tenancy Tribunal for resolution under the Residential Tenancies Act.