



Redevelopment of public housing estates

How can public housing tenants be informed and consulted?

24 June 2010

In a democratic society an important principle is that people are able to participate in major decisions that affect their lives. Housing NSW has programs to regenerate public housing sites. *Some* of these plans mean that tenants will have to move and communities will be broken up. Tenants should be able to participate in decision making around these changes. Moving from your home is a major life stress. In an ethical and compassionate society strategies need to be in place to mitigate this trauma.

The following strategies can make a difference in fostering meaningful participation and decreasing the trauma and social disruption:

- Opportunities are created for tenants to participate in the decision making *from the beginning*.
- Opportunities are created for the community to come together and be informed and consulted.
- Clear timelines are provided for when tenants are likely to be affected.
- The reasons for the development are clearly explained in a way that does not denigrate either the estate or the residents.
- The reasons for the re-development should include a statement setting out all the social and economic costs and benefits.
- Clear, timely, ongoing communication tailored to all the language and cultural groups affected.
- Clear, fair and consistent policies on what people are entitled to when they move.
- Ongoing support for community activities after redevelopment.

Questions public housing tenants and advocates could ask:

1. *Why is this happening?*

- What are the reasons for the re-development?
- Has there been a social impact study? If so, what does it tell us?
- What are the social and economic costs and benefits of the re-development for the community?

2. How are people going to find out about what is happening?

Will Housing NSW use a variety of ways to explain what is happening on the estate in order to reach a broad range of tenants, including Aboriginal tenants, tenants whose first language is not English and tenants with disabilities? Will strategies include:

- informal gatherings like barbeques,
- public meetings with interpreters,
- surveys and one-to-one interviews using interpreters when needed,
- newsletters in community languages,
- a simple one-stop-place where tenants can make enquiries.

3. Will there be opportunities to participate in decision making?

a). For the community as a whole:

- will there be an ongoing accessible forum or reference group where tenant representatives, service providers and local community representatives meet regularly with the Department to consult about the re-development?

b) For tenants on the estate:

- will there be formal consultative arrangements for tenants? If so what form will it take?
- will adequate support including administrative support and a private meeting place be given to tenant groups? Will affected tenants be able to get training on how to work with the Department's planning processes?
- will tenants' representatives be able state their views directly to the senior management of Housing NSW? Will the tenants' views actually influence what happens with the re-development? Will explanations be given to tenants about which of their suggestions were accepted and which were not, and why?
- will tenants have access to independent advice and advocacy about the broad policies of re-development and the plans and processes? Will other forms of support from independent organizations be available? Will Housing NSW fund a community-based tenant advocate to provide independent advice and advocacy on individual tenancy matters?

4. In the event that tenants are asked to move:

- Will tenants be rehoused in an area of their choosing?
- Will tenants have associated costs such as utility connections paid upfront?
- Will improvements undertaken by tenants be recognised and compensation negotiated?
- Will tenants retain their tenancy status under any new agreement?
- Will additional occupants in the present housing be recognised and

housed in the new tenancy?

- Will neighbours who chose to, be relocated in close proximity, so that they can continue their long term connections and mutual support?
- Will the relocation process be sensitive to family connections and support?
- Will culturally-appropriate support will be provided to tenants facing grief at the loss of their homes?
- Will trained resettlement officers assist in resolving problems that arise from relocation? Tenants might be fearful of being settled in a neighbourhood where they are not wanted and are isolated from friends and support. Have departmental officers the flexibility to find creative ways of dealing with this in consultation with the tenants themselves?
- Will agreements with tenants be in writing?

5. *Will there be events that tenants might want to help Housing NSW organise that would bring the community together in a time of change?*

These could be:

- Planning for community events which celebrate the life of the community and recognise the importance of its history.
- Celebrating and documenting the life of different people in the community such as elders, parents and children.

6. *And what about the department's staff?*

- Do all departmental officers have an understanding of the impact of decisions on the community?
- Can they relate in an appropriate and sensitive manner to tenants?
- Have departmental officers access to cultural awareness training?
- Will there be staff from appropriate cultural backgrounds on the local Department of Housing team?
- Do Housing NSW staff have access to support and de-briefing in this stressful situation?

It is a good idea to ask for responses in writing. It usually reduces misunderstandings.