

2 March 2015

Freepost Wellington City Council
Social Housing Service Policy (COP001)
Wellington City Council
P.O. Box 2199
Wellington 6140
policy.submission@wcc.govt.nz

Re: WCC Social Housing Service Policy

This submission is from the Architectural Centre, an incorporated society dating from 1946, which represents both professionals and non-professionals interested in the promotion of good design.

1. The Architectural Centre applauds the council's commitment to social housing for the "long haul," and its position that social housing is "essential for the city's wellbeing" because it enables vulnerable people and those on low incomes to "live in the city and contribute rather than be exiled to the fringes." We also congratulate the council on its recent upgrade of, and investment in, its housing stock. We are also aware that a commitment to social housing involves more than simply providing housing, it also requires providing ongoing support to tenants and we encourage the council to also invest in this aspect of social housing, including the council's stated aim to "support tenants to improve their quality of life and wellbeing and to contribute to and benefit from living in Wellington." We strongly support council's work, on behalf of Wellington's citizens to care for those most in need and most vulnerable in our community through social housing initiatives.

2. We note that the proposed review will "consider the Government's social housing policy." We understand from recent announcements that the government is intending to move out of the social housing sector, and hope that the council does not reduce its commitment to social housing as a result of this change in central government policy. We encourage the council, rather than alter its position on social housing, to see this as an opportunity to engage with central government on areas such as reviewing tenancy laws. We also note that central government policy will likely impact on the provision of housing for older people. While this may provide new opportunities for iwi-based papa-kainga, it will also likely increase the significance of local council provision of housing for older people.

3. We also appreciate the stated awareness and importance of considering issues pertaining to aged care. While the document is particularly conscious of how the council can provide for "elderly tenants who are no longer able to live independently," we would also point to the need for the council to be mindful of its need to address wider issues of city and urban design related to older people, including kerb design, public transport (including bus stop design), and visual keying using colour distinctiveness to assist spatial clarity (e.g. level changes) rather than confuse this in, for example, footpath design, to prevent accidents resulting for sight impairments.

4. We also encourage the council to consider implementing regulations regarding a percentage of social and affordable housing in new developments. Many overseas cities (e.g. London, cities in the Netherlands) stipulate a percentage of affordable or social houses, and we see this as a potential mechanism to supplement the work that the council does in this area of social housing.



the architectural centre inc.
PO Box 24178 Wellington

5. While we support the overall intent and content of the document, including its statement regarding priority groups, it does seem to be a very thin document for such a complex issue.

6. We respond to the specific questions asked as follows:

Qu 1. Who should we house?

We support the council's continued provision of housing to high needs tenants, seniors and low income households, including people with disabilities and in need of mental health support, new migrants and refugees. We also support the council's investment and provision of night shelters, including the wet night shelter.

Qu 2. What barriers to renting in the private market should we consider?

We consider that issues such as rental costs, poor insulation (and consequential heating costs), house/flat size (especially with respect to those needing to accommodate extended whānau on a permanent or temporary basis), needs for social infrastructure in parallel with physical housing (e.g. addiction services, mental health services, community networks), location (e.g. physical location to family support structures)

Qu 3. Should we consider providing rental accommodation to key groups?

We do not consider that housing key groups should displace the current tenants in council housing, and so recommend that if the council is to invest in housing key groups (such as hospital workers) this needs to be in addition to the current level of housing stock. Such a move would also appear to be a shift from council provision of social housing into the provision of affordable housing. We do consider that such investment might assist with current council plans for intensification in specific parts of the growth spine, and wonder if the Barbican (London's reputed "council housing for the rich") might provide a model for high intensity housing in the north end of Adelaide Rd, a location earmarked for increased residential density, and whose proximity to the hospital and the CBD would likely fit with the proposed list of "key groups" (hospital, police, and education staff, and student groups). It may be approach to establish tenant eligibility requirements for such projects (e.g. proximity to workplace) to attract specific groups and to support related council policy. If such a project was considered to be strategic in terms of accommodation specific housing, it would also presumably provide council an income which could be set aside for further investment in the council's social housing.

Qu 4. How should we set the eligibility criteria?

We consider that this question lies outside of the Architectural Centre's remit.

Qu 5. How could we structure our rent discount to reflect different tenants' situations?

We consider that this question lies outside of the Architectural Centre's remit.

Qu 6. How could we support tenants to move on?

We consider that a lifecycle approach to social housing may be appropriate, supported by a diversity of housing, so that if it is appropriate for a tenant to move to a house-type better suited to family circumstances they will be less likely to be uprooted also from their community networks and neighbourhood support structures. We are also aware that fitting a home to a tenant is not a simple exercise, and each will have different physical needs from a house, including perhaps additional bedrooms to accommodate dependents or other whānau (even if not on a permanent or regular basis). Accommodation services and support which recognises additional family obligations, and needs for neighbourhood continuity at a case-by-case level would be important.

Qu 7. How could we make it easier to access housing?

We consider that the following may improve access to social housing:

(a) mandating social housing as a percentage of social housing (as noted above). To facilitate this, the council may need to provide the social infrastructure to support such developments.

(b) ensuring a joint interface (one-stop approach) for social housing with other housing providers and related agencies and programmes (e.g. HNZ, iwi, the Salvation Army, WINZ, Retirement Commission, Whānau Ora) to facilitate allocation of housing (e.g. common social housing tenancy service (shared waiting lists, processes, local/neighbourhood information etc.)) and other services and advice, and to ensure that administrative processes are not onerous, confusing, exhausting or operating in any other way to block access to housing. Privacy issues would need to be carefully considered.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this draft Social Housing Service Policy Review document. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Christine McCarthy
President, The Architectural Centre
arch@architecture.org.nz