



# Policy and Procedures Manual

<b>PART 1: GOVERNANCE</b> .....	4
Board and Members.....	4
Monitoring.....	5
Delegations.....	6
External Reporting.....	6
Role and Purpose of Subcommittees.....	7
Management Model.....	8
Duty Statements.....	9
<b>Part 2: TENANCY MANAGEMENT</b> .....	14
Applicants.....	14
Establishing and Maintaining Tenancies.....	18
Rent Management.....	19
Changes in tenancies/Special circumstance requests.....	23
Breaches of Tenancy Agreement/Metro Housing Policy.....	25
Transfers.....	25
<b>Part 3: ASSET MANAGEMENT</b> .....	30
Repairs and Maintenance.....	31
Use of Contractors.....	33
Property Inspections.....	34
Planned Maintenance (capital properties).....	35
Leasehold Acquisitions.....	36
Fee for Service Projects and/or partnerships.....	37
<b>Part 4: COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS</b> .....	38
Complaints.....	38
Appeals.....	39
<b>PART 5: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT</b> .....	44
Budgets.....	44
Finance Sub-Committee.....	44
Financial Reporting to Funding Body.....	45
Investments.....	46
Expenditure.....	46
Accounting Systems.....	47
Rent collection.....	48
Debtors.....	48
<b>PART 6: ADMINISTRATIVE &amp; MANAGEMENT INFORMATION</b>	
<b>SYSTEMS POLICY</b> .....	49
Filing Systems.....	49
Motor Vehicles.....	50
Telephone System.....	50
Database.....	50
<b>PART 7: OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY</b> .....	52
Staff.....	52
Contractors & Sub-Contractors.....	55
Community Partners.....	55

Roles and Responsibilities.....	55
OH & S Audit and Other Agreed Arrangement .....	56
<b>PART 8: HUMAN RESOURCE MANANGEMENT .....</b>	<b>60</b>
Co-operative Management (Board of Directors).....	60
Personnel Practices .....	60
<b>PART 9: CODE OF ETHICS .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Donations.....	65
Reducing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption.....	66
Whistleblower Policy .....	68
Equal Opportunities.....	69
<b>PART 10: TENANT RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION .....</b>	<b>73</b>
General Statement on Tenant Rights.....	73
Confidentiality & Privacy.....	73
Tenant Involvement.....	74
Communication .....	76
<b>PART 11: WORKING WITH OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Referrals and Information.....	78
Information About the Co-operative .....	78
Support Partnership Agreements .....	78
Joint Ventures.....	78
Participation in Community Issues.....	78
Peak Organisations .....	78
<b>PART 12: EVALUATION AND SERVICE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Policies and Procedures.....	80
Strategic and Risk Management Plans .....	80
Business Plan.....	80
Local Community Partners.....	80
Tenants.....	80
Maintenance (Cyclical).....	81
Contractors.....	81

## **PART 1: GOVERNANCE**

### **Objective:**

The purpose of this policy is to describe Metro Community Housing's Management Model. This is intended to delineate the roles and responsibilities of 1) The board of Directors, 2) the Manager and staff, and 3) the Co-operative's membership.

### **Board and Members**

The Co-operative is managed and controlled by its Board of Directors. The rules of the co-operative specify that there must be a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10 Directors. Directors are nominated by members and elected at the Annual General Meeting (held no later than 30 November each year as required by the Registry of Co-operatives).

Metro Community Housing has determined that there will normally be 8 directors. A change to our constitution approved at the Annual General Meeting for 2009 states that Directors will serve a term of 2 years with half of the directors (4) standing down at each Annual General Meeting as from 2010.

The powers and responsibilities of the Board are set out in the Rules of Incorporation. (See rules 38 - 59).

### **Nomination to the Board**

Prior to the Annual General Meeting, an advertisement will be placed in a local newspaper with details of the date, time and purpose of the meeting. Information about the nomination process will be sent to all current co-operative members. Anyone nominating to be a Director must be a member of the organisation.

### **Membership to the Co-operative**

All Metro tenants automatically become members of the Co-operative upon signing their lease. Non-tenants wishing to become a member of the Co-operative must apply in writing to the Board of Directors using the standard Membership Application Form. Members can be either individuals or organisations, but must reside in NSW. Members can be under eighteen years of age, but must be over eighteen years of age to hold office or vote. Each member is entitled to one vote only.

### **Application Process**

Applications for membership must be made on the prescribed form, and lodged at Metro Community Housing.

The application is put to the Board for approval at the first Board of Director's meeting after the application is received. If approved, the applicant's name and details are entered

on the 'Register of Members'. If refused, the applicant is sent a letter informing them that their application has been refused.

The Board shall not refuse any application on the grounds of race, sex, class, financial status, religion, political belief or sexual preference.

If the Board does refuse an application for membership it does not need to give a reason, but must return the membership form. The Board must also document its decision and notify the applicant in writing.

### **Board Composition**

The full Board shall elect Executive members to hold the positions of:

- Chairperson
- Deputy Chairperson
- Secretary
- Treasurer

The remaining position holders are titled "ordinary members". Persons are nominated for Executive positions and voted for/endorsed by the full Board at the first Board of Directors meeting following the Annual General Meeting.

### **Representation**

The Board, and in particular the Chairperson, will undertake regular reviews of the membership of the association to ensure that it is representative of the community served and the membership of the association.

Representation on the Board must also take into account the need to have members with relevant skills and expertise in areas such as legal, financial, asset and business management, tenancy and community services, and community development.

### **Board Procedures**

The Board of Directors will establish written procedures for the conduct of its business. This information will be compiled in a Director's Kit issued to all Board members. These procedures are also publicly available.

### **Monitoring**

The association will monitor its procedures and performance on a regular basis and will make such information publicly available through production of an Annual Report which is made available to all members, and distributed at the Annual General Meeting.

## **Delegations**

The Board of Directors will establish reporting procedures and lines of delegated authority within the association to clearly outline the respective roles of the Manager and the Board of management. The association will maintain a written Schedule of Delegations.

## **External Reporting**

All registered community housing providers are responsible to the Independent Registrar of Community Housing.

Board members and staff must be aware of their obligations and must be familiar with the processes to report to the Registrar any incidents or situations that may damage the reputation of Metro Community Housing or the broader community housing sector.

## **Reporting to the Registrar**

The Regulatory Code is designed to ensure that ‘a registered community housing provider must notify the Registrar, in a timely manner, of any incident relating to its operations that damages, or may damage, the reputation of the community housing sector’ (taken from *Reputation of Community Housing Sector*, [www.rch.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rch.nsw.gov.au)).

Examples of the types of incidents that should be reported to the Registrar:

- Serious or repeated instances of fraud, corruption or criminal conduct of a similar kind in connection with the provider’s operations
- Any instances of serious or repeated breaches of the Provider’s Code of Conduct
- The removal of governing body members or senior staff for misconduct or an offence
- The calling of a special general meeting by members
- A motion of no confidence in the governing body, a governing body member, the chief executive officer or senior member of staff
- The resignation of the chief executive officer, auditor or financial officer for non-personal reasons
- The dismissal of the chief executive officer, auditor or financial officer
- The investigation of the provider by external agencies (such as the funding body, law enforcement bodies or integrity agencies)
- Proceedings in a court of law against a provider
- Any matter that has adversely affected, or may adversely affect the financial solvency or viability of the provider
- Any breach of potential breach of financial or property covenants and
- Any adverse media coverage, or potential media coverage, about the provider

All notifications must be received by the Registrar within no more than three working days.

Complaints and Notifications procedures can be found at [www.rch.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rch.nsw.gov.au):

1. click on “Enquiries, Notifications and Complaints” banner
2. select “Enquiries, Notifications and Complaints” form
3. follow the instructions for submission

The Registrar for Community Housing can also be contacted on: 1800 330 940  
Or [registrar@housing.nsw.gov.au](mailto:registrar@housing.nsw.gov.au)

Refer to section 9 “Reducing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption” and “Whistleblower Policy” for further information.

### **The Responsibilities of Directors**

The primary duty of a Director is to act in the best interests of the whole organisation and to ensure the organisation is properly managed:

- 1) Financially – to ensure that the organisation remains solvent and manages its finances responsibly.
- 2) Legally – to ensure that the organisation operates within the law and honours all contracts
- 3) Constitutionally – to ensure that the organisation follows the aims and rules of its constitution

Refer to Attachment A for details of roles and responsibilities

### **Role and Purpose of Subcommittees**

Subcommittees are established to deal with tasks that are outside the scope of matters dealt with at regular Board meetings. Board members will nominate themselves to a sub-committee based on their areas of expertise and/or interest. The full Board of Directors formally appoints the subcommittee and outlines its responsibilities and powers. Subcommittees will have clear terms of reference setting out their delegated authority.

In most instances sub-committees will have an investigatory/advisory role and will refer recommendations back to the full Board for decisions to be endorsed.

Standing subcommittees will be formed to focus on the following areas:

- Finance – to oversee and monitor the financial operations of the co-operative. To liaise with the Accountant in the development and regular review of the annual budget. This Sub-committee will include the Treasurer, Chairperson and Manager.

- Policy – to develop and review policy areas in response to changing circumstances or needs of the organisation, our tenants, the operating environment or at the request of the BOD. The sub-committee will consult with tenants/stakeholders in relation to significant changes. Policy changes or new policies will be brought to the full BOD for endorsement.
- Tenant participation - to liaise with tenants and identify areas of interest and/or need, to assist tenants to participate in the decision making processes of the co-operative
- Ad-hoc sub-committees
- A sub-committee consisting of at least 3 board members will be formed as required to deal with disputes referred to the Board – these will generally relate to complaints about the actions of, or appeals against the decisions of the Manager.

### **Management Model**

The distinction between governance and management can rarely be constant or immutable and strict boundaries can create the risk of establishing unachievable distinctions which do not acknowledge the organisation’s stage of development, the number and skills of staff, and the qualifications and skills of Directors.

The board’s level of involvement in the day to day affairs of the co-operative will vary, but generally the Board’s roles and responsibilities are confined to setting and monitoring compliance with strategy and policy, supervising management practices and providing support to the Manager.

It is expected that the Manager and staff will be responsible for carrying out their delegated responsibilities (as set out in their respective duty statements) and managing the day to day operations of the co-operative.

Legislative requirements and the Co-operative’s Rules require the Board to defer certain decisions to members at general or special meetings.

### **Legislative and Regulatory Context**

NSW Government	Housing Act 2001
NSW Government	Housing Regulation 2009 (Housing Act 2001)
NSW Government	Co-operatives Act 1992
NSW Government	Co-operatives Regulation 2005

### **Related Policies, Procedures and Documentation**

Metro Community Housing Co-op Ltd	Rules of Association
Metro Community Housing Co-op Ltd	Policy and Procedures rev. December 2010
NSW Federation of Housing Associations	Code of Practice
Housing NSW	Policy and Procedures

## **Responsibilities of the Manager**

As an employee of the co-operative, the Manager is precluded by the Rules of the Co-operative from serving on the Board of Directors. The Manager's functions will generally (but not exclusively) cover the following areas:

- Serving the co-operative (directly or through delegation to other staff) by ensuring that the strategies determined by the Board of Directors are implemented
- Being familiar with the Organisation's objectives and complying with all relevant policies designed to further these objectives
- Selecting, training, supervising and supporting other staff
- Managing the organisation's assets effectively by ensuring the maintenance of an effective business structure and compliance with operational and budget requirements
- Developing and/or maintaining adequate accounting and record keeping systems (this will be done in conjunction with the Accountant)
- Ensuring sound purchasing and contracting practices
- Researching and reporting to the Board on areas of interest to the organisation
- Identifying the need for and recommending to the Board the acquisition of external sources of assistance to resolve problems affecting the organisation.
- Meeting all reporting obligations to funding and regulatory bodies

## **Responsibilities of the Members**

Legislative requirements and the Rules of the Co-operative require the Board to defer certain decisions to members of the Co-op at General or Special Meetings. These decisions include:

- Changes to the rules of the co-operative
- Acquiring or disposing of certain of the Co-operative's assets
- The election (or appointment) of members of the Board of Directors
- Changing the Co-operatives structure or winding up of the Co-op

## **Duty Statements**

As a Responsible Director you must:

- Keep up to date on the activities of the Co-operative.
- Participate fully and ensure responsibilities are shared equally.
- Understand how any proposed action will affect the Co-operative – particularly if it involves large expenditure by the Co-operative.
- Do not agree to any decision that you do not fully understand – get outside professional/independent advice if you need more information.

- Ask questions – all office bearers and sub-committee members should be asked to explain their areas of responsibility.
- Communicate openly and honestly with other Board members, Co-operative members and the Housing sector
- Raise any concerns about the actions of staff or other Board members with the Chairperson (or with the Deputy Chairperson if your concerns relate to the Chairperson), ie do not raise these matters at a Board meeting without first advising the Chairperson and/or request that it be placed as an agenda item for the first available meeting.
- Do not interfere in daily operational matters

At each meeting the Board will be presented with the following reports:

- Financial reports
- A Profit and Loss statement for the preceding period giving a clear account of income and expenditure
- Cheque Register showing cheques written by the Co-operative for the preceding period
- Rent arrears reports showing tenants in arrears/amounts and actions taken
- Balance sheet – showing assets and liabilities. This gives a good indication of how the organisation is travelling financially
- List of debtors – usually post tenancy debts/water usage costs – the Board may be called on to write off these debts at a later stage
- Cyclical maintenance expenditure – approval for predicted future costs
- Correspondence
- Major/important correspondence that should be notified to/considered by the Board
- Staffing
- An update of staff issues – leave requests, significant issues affecting staff/organisational activities.

### **Chairperson**

The Chairperson has overall responsibility for managing the Board of Directors and co-ordinates the work of the Secretary, the Deputy Chairperson, the Treasurer and ordinary directors. The Chairperson acts as spokesperson for the co-operative and liaises regularly with the Manager regarding the operations of the organisation.

Skills:

- Knowledge of community housing sector; able to lead and mentor other board members and staff; able to conduct meetings in an impartial, firm and structured manner; good communication and negotiation skills and able to promote positive image of the co-operative

#### Core Tasks:

- Chair Board and general meetings to facilitate discussion and participation, ensure relevance and promote good decision making
- Ensure that meetings proceed in a timely manner, adhere to the agenda and maintain an appropriate balance between business and social activities.
- Co-ordinate the work of the Board and sub-committees, staying in touch with the operations and broad activities of the co-op.
- Ensure that Board members fully understand the purpose of their role, and have sufficient information and the necessary skills to perform their duties.
- Be aware of organisational history, rules of incorporation and decision making processes and make sure the Board acts within these principles.
- Represent the organisation and act on behalf of the Board in emergency situations

#### **Secretary**

The Secretary is responsible for the communication within the Board and with the membership.

#### Skills:

Knowledge of the community housing sector and the operations of the organisation; good organisational and communication skills; knowledge of meeting procedures.

#### Core Tasks:

- Assists with the work of the Board in conjunction with the Chairperson
- Ensures that all necessary records are kept eg. Register of members, copy of constitution, signed copy of attendance at Board meetings and general meetings
- Acts as the principal executive officer in the absence of the Chair

#### **Deputy Chairperson**

The Deputy Chairperson supports the Chairperson and other Board members in their responsibilities.

#### Skills:

Good communication skills, knowledge of the community housing sector and the operations of the organisation

#### Core Tasks:

- Liaise with the Chairperson and Board members to keep up to date with the operation of the organisation and assist with identified tasks
- Chair meetings, and represent the co-operative when the Chairperson is away or unable to fulfil their responsibilities

- Welcome and encourage new Board members and others at meetings, guiding them through the process

## **Treasurer**

The Treasurer is responsible for overseeing financial management of, and keeping members informed about the financial situation of the co-operative.

### Skills:

Well developed financial management skills; ability to understand, interpret and explain budgets, balance sheets and profit and loss statements; good organisational and communication skills.

### Core Tasks:

- Ensure that an annual budget is prepared and check spending and income against the budget on a regular basis
- Make sure that there are proper financial procedures and checks in place
- Make sure that the book-keeping and financial records are kept up to date.
- Make sure that the funding body receives all required financial documentation, ie quarterly reports and annual financial returns/audit.

The Treasurer should ensure that the following reports are made available to the Board of Directors at each monthly meeting:

- Monthly Financial Statement
- List of all cheques written in the previous month
- Arrears list
- List of debtors

Each month the Treasurer should:

- Review the financial statements prepared by the accountant and discuss any queries
- Check the monthly Cheque List
- Review the budget in the light of the latest financial statement before each monthly Board of directors meeting and make suggestions to the Board regarding appropriate financial management of the funds.

## **Ordinary Directors**

Ordinary members are required:

- To act in the broader interests of the organisation at all times,
- To ensure that the co-operative operates in an efficient manner
- To ensure the co-operative operates according to its rules.

#### Skills:

Knowledge and understanding of the organisations rules, policies and procedures; understanding of local community issues; possession of specialist skills identified as necessary to the effective governance of the organisation (ie legal, financial, property, community development, mental health).

#### Tasks:

- To attend board meetings and listen to the information presented and make decisions in the best interest of Metro Community Housing
- To read all reports, minutes, and notices distributed to members in order to keep informed and contribute ideas and views to the Board.
- To contribute time to planning processes and the work of sub-committees as reasonably required.
- To carry out any tasks assigned to them in a timely manner.
- To support all decisions made by the Board even if they personally disagree with the decision made by a majority of board members.
- To represent the organisation in a positive way in all dealings with external agencies/individuals
- To undertake any required training or professional development to enhance their skills and improve their ability to make a positive contribution to the organisation
- To participate in organisational planning and evaluation activities
- As a signatory to bank accounts, to check that information on the cheques matches that on the cheque requisition forms and that an invoice in an appropriate format is attached.
- To ensure all other legal obligations are met

## **Part 2: TENANCY MANAGEMENT**

Objectives: To ensure fair and transparent tenant selection and tenancy management processes, that tenants have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities, that all tenants are able to achieve long-term sustainable tenancies, that the changing needs of tenants are met and that financial resources (particularly rents and non-rent debts) of the organisation are managed effectively.

### **Applicants**

There is a common process for assessing eligibility for social housing across NSW called Housing Pathways.

Housing Pathways has been developed with Housing NSW, 28 Community Housing Providers and the Aboriginal Housing Office to establish one application system and a single state-wide waiting list.

For information about the cross-sector, state-wide eligibility policy visit:

<http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/Am+I+Eligible/Social+Housing/>

### **Application forms**

Application forms can be picked up from any participating social housing provider, or can be found on the Housing Pathways website:

<http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/Additional+Information/Forms.htm>

### **Assessment of Eligible Applicants \***

Before the introduction of Housing Pathways Metro Community Housing used a ranking system to assess the urgency of a clients' application for housing assistance. We used a points based scoring system to rank eligible applicants in order of priority based on their overall score.

Applications were scored with points allocated according to the following criteria:

*i) Years on Waiting list*

1 Point for each year on waiting list after first year (to maximum of 5 points).

*ii) Disability/Chronic medical conditions (supporting documentation required)*

1 Point for mild disability

2 Points for serious disability

3 Points for Life threatening illness

*iii) Ties to the area*

1 Point for people who have resided in the inner west for over 5 years, have a child who has attended school in the area for over 2 years, or who have family, cultural, medical, support networks in the area.

*iv) Age*

- 1 Point for Young people (18-21 years); and for older people (60-65 years)
- 2 Points for older people (66-70 years)
- 3 Points for older people over 71 years or Aboriginal people over 45 years.

*v) Family situation*

- 1 Point for a single parent with 1 child or a couple with 2 children
- 2 points for a single parent with 2 children or a couple with 3 children
- 3 points for a single parent with 3 or more children

*vi) Housing Situation*

- 1 Point for people paying more than 30% of their income in rent or living in overcrowded housing (adults without a bedroom, more than 2 children under 10 sharing a bedroom, children of different gender over 12 years sharing a bedroom),
- 2 Points for people paying more than 50% of their income in rent or living in sub-standard housing
- 3 Points for people who are homeless

*vii) Other Circumstances*

- 1 Point for persons from Non-English speaking background with poor English or poor literacy skills
- 2 Points for people experiencing domestic violence/living in a refuge after escaping domestic violence/recently arrived refugee
- 4 Points for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Since the introduction of Housing Pathways in April 2010, common eligibility procedures are used to assess applications. However individual community housing providers are still able to prioritise the waitlist according to their own policies.

In an attempt to create parity between the old points system and the new statewide system, special ranking/waitlist procedures have been put into place for the first phase of Housing Pathways.

In this first phase of the transition, Metro Community Housing uses the same list generated by Housing NSW (for more information visit [www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au)), but uses a filter that organises this list in accordance with our ranking system.

This transitional arrangement is in place because Metro Community Housing wanted to ensure that people who were on our individual waitlist and scored highly were not disadvantaged in the change over.

The ranking system is also applied to applicants who were not on Metro Community Housing's individual waitlist. This is done by use of a custom made computer system that extracts the necessary information that the applicant has provided so that the applicant can be given a point score.

***\*Please note: Ranking system has been temporarily suspended from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, on advice from the Housing Pathways Advisory Council. The program used to calculate ranking is under review. In the interim Metro Community Housing will follow the assessment/ranking practices used by Housing NSW.***

## **Applicant Selection Processes**

Allocation of housing stock is based on the scoring system explained above.

When we have a current or expected vacancy the highest scoring applicant for that property type will be contacted in writing and by phone (where possible) by either the Manager or a Housing Worker to confirm their current circumstances. Where there is more than 1 applicant with the same ranking the applicant who has been on the waiting list for the longest period will be made the first offer.

In certain cases Metro Community Housing may filter the search when creating a waitlist, when allocating for particular properties (such as a property that is designated to house only single men or seniors) or allocating to meet certain benchmarks. These are outlined below.

## **Allocation Benchmarks**

- **Men:**  
Metro Community Housing has a commitment that 30% of our tenancies will be allocated to single men. This is a specific allocation policy created by a change in the objectives of our constitution as from 1 March 2007.
- **Support Partnership Tenancies:**  
Metro Community Housing aims to allocate 25% of all tenancies to support partnerships. This means that every 4th vacancy will be offered to a support partnership but this would be spread across total allocations in a year – each allocation will be assessed on its merits to determine if it would be more appropriate to offer to an applicant from the general waiting list or a support partnership nominee. Support Partnership tenancies are not drawn from the NSW Housing Register. Support Partnership allocations are approved by the Manager.

## **Transitional Tenancies**

The transitional tenancy waitlist is managed separately from the NSW Housing Register.

Suitable clients are nominated by several support providers who have a partnership agreement with Metro. The nominations are then assessed through a collaborative process involving support agencies and Metro Community Housing. Clients must have a t-number or applicant reference number.

Offers of housing are for a fixed-term period of two years. In this time, transitional tenants are expected to make an application for priority housing through Housing Pathways.

If the client can demonstrate that they remain live on the priority housing wait-list but have not been made an offer during the two-year transitional period, Metro Community Housing will only continue to house clients on a three month basis, pending an offer of permanent housing through Housing Pathways.

If an offer has still not been made during this period, Metro Community Housing will renew the three month lease using the same policy as above.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Conflict of interest may arise in situations where a staff member or someone with a personal relationship with a staff member applies for social housing. In these cases everything must be done to reduce the conflict of interest:

- Management must be informed, and actions and decisions recorded on Conflict of Interest register.
- Staff member involved must not be involved in assessment or allocation process.

### **Confidentiality**

All information regarding applicants collected during the assessment process, will be confidential and will not be discussed externally (i.e. outside of the Housing Pathways network of social housing providers) except with the specific consent of the applicant (applicants will generally have signed specific consents).

### **Appeal and Complaints**

If the client disagrees with the decision that Metro Community Housing has made regarding an application for housing, they should first speak Metro Community Housing about the reasons the decision was made.

If the client is still unsatisfied, they should request a formal review of the decision by the Manager. The Manager will explain the reasons for making the decision in writing.

If the client is still unsatisfied with the outcome of the formal review, they can lodge an appeal with the Housing Appeals Committee. HAC is an independent agency that reviews decisions made by Community Housing organisations and Housing NSW.

For information call 1800 629 794 or visit [www.hac.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hac.nsw.gov.au).

### **Establishing and Maintaining Tenancies**

All offers of housing to applicants will be made in accordance with the state-wide Housing Pathways offers policy, which can be found at [www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au).

A refusal of two reasonable offers will result in the client being removed from the Housing Register, unless either offer is deemed to be “unreasonable”.

### **Withdrawal of offers**

If for any reason an offer of housing is withdrawn, the applicant will be notified in writing as soon as possible. A full explanation as to the reasons a withdrawal has been made will be available.

### **Accepting an offer/filling a vacancy**

New tenants who have been offered a property will be given a maximum of 14 days to sign the lease on their new property. A Holding fee of \$20.00 per week will be required from 3 days after the offer has been accepted.

In accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act, a Residential Tenancy agreement and Premises Condition Report will be given to each tenant prior to occupancy. Information will be explained verbally and tenants provided with the following documents:

- A Tenant Handbook containing information about tenant’s rights and responsibilities, our services and complaint and appeal processes.
- The Renting Guide (information about tenancy law)

Where possible, information provided to new tenants will be translated into appropriate community languages. The telephone interpreter service and ‘on site’ translators will be used where required and/or requested at sign up and in subsequent contacts with tenants.

### **Shared Housing**

‘Shared’ tenancies only apply to tenancies offered through partnership arrangements with a support agency. If a vacancy is within a shared house e.g. three singles living within one house, each tenant will be treated as an individual tenant and receive their own Residential Tenancy Agreement for a ‘bedroom’, with ‘access to all common areas’. The same rights and responsibilities shall apply as per the Residential Tenancy Act and all steps outlined in ‘accepting an offer/filling a vacancy’ will apply.

Where there are two individuals living in the same household, a joint tenancy agreement will apply, or the tenancy agreement will be in the name of the original applicant.

## **Property Condition Reports (PCR)**

Tenants will be provided with a property condition reports and information about how to complete and return the PCR.

## **Rent Management**

Our rental calculations are based on the Human Services (Housing NSW) “Community Housing Rent Policy”.

## **Rent Calculation**

1. Rent will be calculated in accordance with the Community Housing rent setting policy:
  - Wages/Salaries, Business Income and Pensions are assessable at 25%
  - CRA payments are assessable at 100% for all tenants
  - Family Tax Benefits A & B are assessed at 15%
  - Pharmaceutical Allowance is not assessable income
  - Child Disability Allowance is not assessable
2. The income of household members who are under 18 years of age and in receipt of Commonwealth benefits is not included in the calculation of rent.
3. Where tenant does not have an income but is eligible for Centrelink payments and has either not applied, or not complied with Centrelink reporting requirements, or they have a reduced income due to a loan repayment, they will be charged rent at the rate applicable to the full rate of Centrelink pension/benefit to which they would normally be entitled.
4. Where the tenant is temporarily not in receipt of any income due to imprisonment or where they have a reduced income due to meeting the costs of a drug/alcohol rehabilitation or other residential program, no action will be taken to terminate their tenancy for non-payment of rent where the tenant supplies written evidence of their income situation. Once the tenant recommences receiving an income they will be required to sign a Rent Arrears Agreement to repay the rent owing from the period when they were without income.
5. If the tenant, their partner and/or other household members are wage or salary earners, the wage or salary shall be determined by provision of their 6 most recent payslips or a completed Employer Declaration stating their gross income (including allowances and any salary sacrificing amounts) for the last six months.
6. Where a tenant has breached the terms of their obligation with Centrelink, and provides confirmation of this, they will be charged according to the income they actually receive during the breach period.
7. If wages change from week to week, income will be averaged across a 13 week period.

## **Fluctuating Incomes**

Tenants who have fluctuating incomes because they work on a casual or sessional basis, will be required to submit income details on a quarterly basis if their income varies by more than 20% from week to week. Income assessments will be based on an averaging over the 13 week period.

## **Rent Review & Increases**

Metro will conduct a review of Tenants' income every six months to confirm continued eligibility for rental subsidies (where applicable) and to assess the rent payable. We will conduct more regular reviews when tenants have fluctuating incomes.

The Tenant Handbook will inform tenants that it is a condition of their tenancy that they advise the Co-op within fourteen days of any changes to their income. Failure to advise the Co-operative of any increases in income may risk an ongoing tenancy.

If the Co-op becomes aware of a change in the circumstances of a tenant, they can request updated income information from that tenant between official rent reviews. The same process for assessing rent increases will apply.

Where a notice of increase of rent to market rent has come into effect and the tenant later supplies proof of income, the assessed rent will take effect from the date the income statements are supplied. A tenant may apply to the Disputes Committee to waive or vary rent payable for a period in special circumstances.

In circumstances where a tenant has failed to advise Metro of an increase in their income, then the applicable rent increase will be commence from 60 days after the income increase

## **Rental Bonds**

Rental bonds are required to be paid by all new and/or transferring tenants. The bond is equivalent to 4 weeks rebated rent (2 weeks for tenants in “shared” properties)  
Where a tenant cannot afford the full bond at the time of signing the lease, the tenant may pay a minimum amount of \$100.00 and repay the balance at a minimum rate of \$25.00 per fortnight for single people receiving a Commonwealth Benefit, and \$40.00 per fortnight for couples/single parents receiving Family Tax Benefit.

This option is only available to tenants who sign a Centrepay agreement for direct deduction of rent and repayments of bond.

Waged tenants will be expected to repay their debt at a rate based on repaying 7.5% of their gross income minus rent.

All bonds will be forwarded to the Rental Bond Board within 7 days of receipt and the collection of bonds will comply with relevant legislation. Information about bonds will be explained to tenants at the time of sign up.

### **Rent Review Procedure:**

Twice per year all tenants are required to supply current information about their household income. The process is as follows:

- All tenants (except those who have recently supplied income information) will be sent a dated Income Review letter stating that they must supply evidence of the income of all the people in their household within four weeks of or they will be charged market rent.
- The letter will specify the final date when the income evidence must be supplied and the date that rent will change (60 days from the date of the letter).
- The letter will state the market rent that will be charged if current income evidence is not supplied.
- A translated 'important letter' form will be attached for tenants who may have difficulty understanding English.
- A photocopy of the letter is kept on the tenant's file.
- Tenants must supply written verification of all income sources. Where the tenant is self-employed they should supply a copy of their most recent taxation return or profit and loss statement (as outlined in the Office of Community Housing rent assessment policy).
- No later than one month after sending the rent review letter a follow up letter is sent to any tenants that have not replied.
- When information is received the new rent is calculated using the Rent Calculation form on the database. This is based on the Department of Housing Income Policy.
- A copy of this calculation and advice on the new rent start date is sent to the tenant within 7 days and the 'new rent' letter, copies of the income statements and the rent calculation form are filed in the tenant's file (Income & Rent Review section)
- Tenants who are seeking rebated rents who do not provide income statements or other documentation confirming their incomes by the due date will be charged market rent as from the rent change date (ie 60 days after the rent review request letters are sent).
- If tenants subsequently provide income statements in support of a request for rent to be rebated, the rebated rent will be assessed from the date the documents are provided.

The market rent is stated on all residential tenancy agreements. This means that rent can increase or decrease during the period of the fixed term agreement, as long as the amount is not greater than the market rent.

If income has decreased the new rent will take effect from the date the information is supplied (e.g. if a tenant brings an Income Statement dated May 8 showing reduced income the rent reduction would be backdated to that date). If tenants' income increases between rent review periods they are required to notify us within seven days but the new rent will not take effect for 60 days.

### **Rent Payments**

Two weeks rent in advance must be paid at the time the Residential Tenancy Agreement is signed (or the tenancy commences). Tenants must continue to pay rent fortnightly in advance. Payment methods include:

- a) Direct deposit into Metro bank account - either by depositing money at any CBA bank (or authorized CBA banking agent) or by Netbank direct debit transfers to the Metro account
- b) Payment in cash or by cheque/money order at Metro office
- c) Centrepay deduction scheme (our preferred option)

Tenants wishing to pay by direct deposit will be supplied with an agent number and a deposit book for the Metro bank account.

### **Rent Statements**

Rent statements will be sent to all tenants quarterly or at any time upon request. Details of all rent/other payments will also be recorded on the Tenant Management System database

### **Rent Arrears**

Our aim is to keep people in affordable housing and in advance with their rent. To ensure this, a review of rent arrears for all tenants will be conducted regularly. Arrears are reviewed every fortnight at the fortnightly review meeting.

1. If a tenant is more than 14 days in rent arrears they will be served a letter for non-payment of rent, giving them 7 days to amend the arrears (Letter 1).
2. If the tenant does not respond and the arrears fall further behind, after 7 days, the Manager will issue a Notice to Terminate.
3. If the arrears are not cleared by the end of the Notice Period we will apply to the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal for a Specific Performance Order where tenants have entered into a formal repayment agreement

Where tenants have not signed a formal repayment agreement we will apply to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal for an order giving us vacant possession of the property and an order that the tenant pay all rent owing.

Tenants who incur non-rent debt will be expected to sign a repayment agreement before Metro Community Housing will pay any non-rent debt on the tenant's behalf. Tenants in non-rent arrears will need to pay a minimum of 7.5% of their income in addition to their rent until their debt is cleared. Metro Community Housing is unable to agree to pay any non-rent costs upfront without a signed agreement in place.

In relation to water usage charges, tenants must pay this debt in full within 90 days of Metro issuing an invoice. This may require tenants to pay more than 7.5% of their income in relation to these charges. Metro Community Housing can provide advice to tenants in relation to strategies to reduce water charges or to work out a regular fortnightly arrangement which will cover their average water usage costs.

At the Tribunal hearing we will not pursue an order for possession if the tenant consents to a Specific Performance Order to repay all arrears owing.

If the tenant breaches this order we will apply to the Tribunal for vacant possession of the property.

### **Advocacy Services**

We encourage our tenants to seek the assistance of a tenancy advocacy worker to provide advice prior to, or to represent them at the Tribunal. If a tenant fails to attend a Consumer Trader & Tenancy Tribunal hearing and has not signed a Repayment agreement for their rent arrears we will seek an order of possession. A tenant has the right to ask for a meeting with the Disputes or Appeals Committees to discuss their rental situation.

### **Notices**

A copy of all arrears notices/letters sent to tenants shall be kept in the arrears folder.

Letters, which accompany a Notice to Terminate a Tenancy, shall:

- Be forwarded with a multilingual "this is an important letter" form.
- Provide contact details of a local Tenancy Advice Service.
- Be in plain English and tailored to individual needs where possible.
- Be courteous and respectful.
- Provide a clear message to tenants that the Co-operative wants to keep people in housing and is willing to negotiate an agreement to allow the tenancy to continue.

### **Changes in tenancies/Special circumstance requests**

Metro Community Housing understands that housing needs and/or family situations may change. Metro has policies in place to ensure that the specific needs of our tenants are met, and that the organisation is adequately informed of any changes in situation that have a direct bearing on a tenancy.

## **Occupancy of Properties**

Tenants must notify us of any changes in the number of permanent occupants residing at their premises within 7 days. The tenancy agreement made between the Co-op as landlord and a tenant will specify the maximum number of people able to reside in the property.

When making a housing offer we will consider the number of people in the household compared to the number of bedrooms in the property.

## **Succession Policy**

Where a tenant dies or leaves the country permanently, an adult member of their household who has been residing in the property (and declared for rent assessment purposes) for at least two years prior to the tenant vacating, may request to take over the tenancy.

Requests to take over the lease/tenancy will be considered by the Manager (or the Board of Directors) only if the person seeking succession meets the criteria (eligible for social housing on the NSW Housing Register).

Until the request is decided the family may remain in the property as long as the usual conditions of the tenancy are kept. In deciding the request we will consider the number of people who will occupy the property, and whether the property is leasehold or capital.

If the request is refused we will give 90 days notice to allow the family member to find alternate accommodation

## **Notice by a Tenant**

Tenants wishing to vacate their property are required to provide at least 21 days notice. The Housing Worker will arrange an inspection of the property as soon as possible after notice is given to assess the property condition.

Metro will assess any rent or debts owing and notify the tenant immediately to make arrangements to claim all/part of the bond and/or come to an agreement with regard to paying off costs and/or returning to the property to complete maintenance required.

Arrangements will then be made with the owner or real estate agent for the final inspection (preferably with the tenant present) and a handover of all keys as soon as practicable after the tenant has vacated.

Final inspections will be undertaken as per the Residential Tenancy Act regulations.

Negotiations for any end of tenancy repairs or maintenance will be between Metro and the owner/agent, and the owner/agent shall not negotiate at any time with the Metro tenant.

### **Abandonment**

The Co-op will honour all of its legal contracts and agreements with regard to 'abandoned' properties under the Residential Tenancy Act.

### **Absence from Dwelling**

Absences for periods of up to 3 months can be approved. Rent must continue to be paid through Centrelink direct deduction or paid in advance.

Rent will be reduced to a minimum level in certain circumstances, such as a tenant being imprisoned or entering a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program (further details are set out in Housing NSW Rent Policy).

### **Breaches of Tenancy Agreement/Metro Housing Policy**

Where a tenant has failed to provide the correct information about their housing situation (e.g. income, household members) the matter will be referred to the Board for resolution. The Board may take the following action:

- Immediately increase the rent to market value
- Withdraw any offers of future rehousing
- Seek termination of the tenancy

Tenants will have the right to access the Disputes and Appeals Sub-Committee in relation to any decision of the Board.

Any Notice to Terminate issued for breach of the lease agreement will follow the same principles applied in the Eviction for Rent Arrears policy. This means that all eviction proceedings will be undertaken as per the regulations of the Residential Tenancy Act. All attempts will be made to prevent eviction, including following the Metro disputes and appeals procedure if necessary.

### **Transfers**

There are two categories of transfers, Management Initiated Transfers and Tenant Initiated Transfers.

In managing all transfers Metro Community Housing will:

- Use a fair and transparent process for assessment and allocation
- Engage clients in the process
- Support the creation of a sustainable tenancy through considered allocation

- Aim to meet the client’s housing and locational needs

### **Management Initiated Transfers**

Metro Community Housing has developed a Management Initiated Transfer policy to ensure that the management of our housing portfolio is fair and responsible. By making maximum use of our resources, we are able to offer the best possible social housing service to all our clients.

Metro Community Housing may require a tenant to relocate for reasons relating to property management or tenancy management. The circumstances in which such a request may be made are as follows:

- The lease that Metro Housing holds on a property is terminated by the owner/managing agent (NTT issued)
- A rent increase has been issued that puts the price of the property above the Rental Bond Board’s median price (the maximum amount that we are funded for)
- Metro Community Housing requires the property for a property swap with another social housing organisation or for sale
- The property/site has been chosen for redevelopment to provide more appropriate housing
- A property is under occupied
- A property is over occupied
- The property has features/modifications that are no longer required by the current tenants (e.g. modifications suitable for people with a disability)
- Serious neighbour disputes that involve a Metro tenant/tenants that cannot be resolved through mediation and might reasonably be resolved through relocation

All Management Initiated Transfers will be treated as priority transfers.

Procedure for a Management Initiated Transfer:

1. Housing Worker or Manager will write to client explaining reasons for decision and issue client with a 90 days “No Grounds” Notice to Terminate
2. Housing Worker will liaise with client to find replacement property. If a vacant and suitable property is available, this property will be offered to the client. However if there is no property available, Metro Community Housing will pick up a new leasehold property that meets the tenant’s requirements.
3. New lease is signed. New lease will reflect conditions of previous lease (i.e. fixed term or ongoing).
4. Once a new property is secured, client needs to organise their own removalists. Metro will pay a removalist allowance for any Management Initiated Transfer

(except where tenancy has been terminated due to a breach of the terms of the Tenancy Agreement, where requests will be considered on their merits) –

Large family (3+ household members) - \$500.00 max  
Small family (2-3 household members) – \$350.00 max  
Single person household - \$200.00 max

### **Tenant Initiated Transfers**

There are a number of reasons that a tenant may wish to move to another property. For example, the size, location or type of property may no longer be suitable.

A tenant requesting a transfer must provide Metro Community Housing with a completed *Transfer Request Form* (available on our website [www.metrocommunityhousing.org.au](http://www.metrocommunityhousing.org.au) or from our office) and attach any relevant documentation or evidence to support their case.

Evidence may include:

- A doctor's report
- Police event number or report
- AVO
- Report from community/social worker
- Report from Home Care Service
- Evidence of legal separation
- Statutory declaration

To be eligible for a transfer, a client must:

- Have lived in the property for more than 24 months, except in the case of emergency/priority transfers
- Have no CTTT orders
- Have no rental arrears or serious non-rent debt

In assessing a request for a Tenant Initiated Transfer Metro Community Housing needs to consider the need and urgency. Approved transfers will be assessed as either a wait-turn transfer or priority transfer.

Priority Transfers include:

- 'at risk' situation
- Family breakdown
- Severe overcrowding
- Conflict management
- Management Initiated Transfers

- Compassionate reasons
- Medical condition or disability (must be able to demonstrate that a move would have an immediate/significant impact on health)

Wait-turn Transfers include:

- Medical conditions (when tenant has demonstrated a need, but not an urgent need)
- Moderate overcrowding
- Locational need (e.g. change in work circumstances, change in school, need to be close to family).

Procedure for tenant initiated transfers:

1. Complete *Tenant Transfer Request* form and attach copy of evidence
2. Housing Worker will liaise with client to find replacement property. If a vacant and suitable property is available, this property will be offered to the client. However if there is no property available, Metro Community Housing will pick up a new leasehold property that meets the tenant's requirements.
3. New lease is signed. New lease will reflect conditions of previous lease (i.e. fixed term or ongoing).
4. Client is responsible for organising and paying for removalist in the case of Tenant Initiated Transfer.

### **Number of Offers**

Transfer approved clients are eligible for two reasonable offers of housing. A reasonable offer is considered to be anything that meets the demonstrated requirements according to the client's application to transfer.

If the client rejects both reasonable offers, the client will immediately be removed from the transfer waitlist.

In the case of Management Initiated Transfers, Metro will undertake a thorough evaluation to ensure that the two offers made are reasonable. If the offers are considered reasonable, the client will then be issued with a 90 days "No Grounds" termination notice. This decision is open to appeal and review by Metro Community Housing and/or the Housing Appeals Committee during the 90 day period.

### **External Transfers**

To assist in meeting transfer needs, Metro Community Housing will consider a range of transfer strategies, including the possibility of applying for an external transfer through Housing Pathways.

In cases where Metro is unable to provide the type of housing required (e.g. a specifically modified property) or meet the locational needs of a client, the client will be encouraged to submit a Housing Pathways transfer application.

In the case of a 'cross-provider' transfer, the client must meet common eligibility standards. These can be found at [www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au)  
In some cases where a tenant requests a transfer to another area we will assist that tenant to contact housing associations operating in that area. If a tenant from another Housing Association contacts us requesting an exchange, we will advertise the details of the tenant's needs in our newsletter once we have confirmed that their current housing provider supports the transfer and confirms that rent payment history and property care has been acceptable. This option only applies to our generalist properties (ie excludes special projects).

### **Appealing Decisions**

If the client disagrees with the decision that Metro Community Housing has made regarding a transfer, they should first speak to their Housing Worker about the reasons the decision was made.

If the client is still unsatisfied, they should request a formal review of the decision by the Manager. The Manager will explain the reasons for making the decision in writing.

If the client is still unsatisfied with the outcome of the formal review, they can lodge an appeal with the Housing Appeals Committee. HAC is an independent agency that reviews decisions made by Community Housing organisations and Housing NSW. For information call 1800 629 794 or visit [www.hac.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hac.nsw.gov.au).

### **Part 3: ASSET MANAGEMENT**

Objective: This policy is to ensure that tenants reside in properties in a reasonable state of repair, that a prompt, effective maintenance service is offered to our tenants, and to ensure the protection of the government's assets and maintain capital properties according to the Housing NSW standards (at the minimum).

The Asset Management Plan (AMP) has been developed to inform Metro's Business Plan and to prioritise the maintenance of the co-operatives capital properties. The AMP links to other key plans and documents including the Strategic and Operational Plans, Risk Management Plan, 10 year Budget forecasts and annual budgets.

#### **Asset Profile**

Metro Community Housing is a not for profit housing association funded by the NSW Government through the Community Housing Division of Housing NSW. The Co-operative's primary aim is to provide secure and affordable housing to people on low incomes and/or with special needs.

As at 1 July 2010 our property portfolio consisted of 82 capital properties, one HPA property and a leasehold quota of 261 properties leased on the private rental market.

We also have 2 affordable housing properties which were acquired through SEPP 10 provisions (one is funded for the difference between tenant rent received and rent paid from a Leichhardt Council grant and the other is rented to us at below market rent (tenant pays full rental amount)).

#### **Property Types and Location**

Our capital portfolio consists of units and houses as outlined below. Our capital properties are located in 5 Local government areas (Ashfield, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Leichhardt and Marrickville). Our leasehold properties are primarily located in these LGAs although we have a scattering of properties in several other LGAs.

Type	No	Percentage
Studio units	14	18%
1 bedroom units	18	21%
2 bedroom units	27	32%
2 b/r houses	6	7.5%
3 b/r houses	11	14%
4 b/r houses	2	2.5%
5/6 b/r houses	4	5%

## Repairs and Maintenance

General standards for all tenancies:

- We will provide the property in a reasonable state of cleanliness, and fit for habitation by the specific tenant at the start of their tenancy.
- We will maintain the property in a reasonable state of repair, considering the age, prospective life of the property and the rent payable.

## Non-Urgent Repairs

When the office is contacted with a request for repairs or maintenance the Housing Worker or Administrative officer will:

1. Try to establish the cause of the damage or obtain as much information as possible about the nature of the problem. If the damage was the result of tenant negligence, staff will inform the tenant of their responsibility to meet the cost of repairs/remediation.
2. Establish if it is URGENT (if urgent refer to procedure on urgent repairs (as defined by the Residential Tenancies Act 1987)
3. Staff will complete a 'Work Order' (on TMS) and fax the order to the property owner, real estate agent or Metro approved contractor. A copy of all Work orders will be placed in property files and kept on TMS
4. Staff will confirm access arrangements with the tenant or confirm tenant is happy for their contact details to be given to the real estate agent or contractor.
5. When invoice is received, check it against the work order form and note that tenant has verified that the work was satisfactorily completed (work order for capital repairs should be signed by tenant where possible at bottom of form or otherwise checked by staff) before paying account.
6. If repair request is not addressed within 21 days (or as required under Residential Tenancy Act) and agent not responsive, Metro Housing will arrange for a contractor to do the work and may apply to the CTTT if situation cannot be resolved.

## **Urgent Repairs**

The following shall be deemed 'urgent' or 'emergency repairs as per the Residential Tenancies Act 1987:

- A blocked or broken toilet
- A serious roof leak
- A gas leak
- A dangerous electrical fault
- Flooding or serious flood damage
- A failure or break down of the gas, electricity or water supply to the property
- A failure or breakdown of any essential service such as hot water, cooking, heating or laundering
- A burst water service
- Any fault that causes the residential premises to be unsafe or unsecure.

Tenants shall be advised at sign up that if they cannot contact us after hours for 'urgent' or 'emergency' repairs, they should look at the bottom of their Residential Tenancy Agreement for the names of preferred contractors/utility companies in an emergency.

Tenants in capital properties should call Rapid Construction in the case of emergencies. Rapid have been contracted by Metro Housing to undertake all emergency work on capital properties.

If these tradespersons are not available tenants will be informed of their right to contact any qualified tradesperson and right to reimbursement for the cost of any work up to \$500.00 upon providing us with a copy of the receipt for work undertaken.

### **Urgent Repairs (Capital)**

If less than \$500, Metro staff will telephone the contractor as above and post/fax a copy of job order. If work is likely to cost more than \$500.00 staff will authorise temporary repairs to remove the urgency, obtain quotes (depending on likely final cost), and refer to Manager.

Tenants in capital properties should call Rapid Construction in the case of emergencies when Metro Office is closed (after hours). Rapid have been contracted by Metro Housing to undertake all emergency work on capital properties.

### **Urgent Repairs (Leasehold)**

Telephone and/or fax Real Estate Agent or landlord and request repair. Note request on Database and put copy in property file.

If staff cannot reach the Real Estate Agent/Landlord, or they are unable to arrange the repair within 24 to 48 hours, organise a suitably qualified tradesperson from the list of

contractors to do repairs up to cost \$500 and forward a request for reimbursement to the agent/Landlord within 14 days.

### **Information for Tenants on Repairs and Maintenance**

All tenants will be given a Tenant Information Handbook at the start of their tenancy. This book will outline information about repairs and maintenance.

### **Length of time for repairs and maintenance**

- Timeframes for urgent repairs are set out in the Residential Tenancy Agreement and real estate agents and owners are expected to comply with these.
- Metro undertakes to follow up requests for urgent work and take all possible steps to ensure tenants living in leasehold properties are able to have necessary work completed in a timely manner. This may include applying to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal for an order.
- Urgent repairs on capital properties will be completed within 48 hours of Metro receiving advice of the problem. Non-urgent repairs will be completed within 21 days of a request being made for responsive repairs.
- Cyclical or planned maintenance for capital properties will be programmed in our Asset Maintenance Plan. Metro may consider requests for planned maintenance (ie painting) to be brought forward/delayed at the request of the tenant.

### **Use of Contractors**

Except in exceptional circumstances (non-regular trades etc) Metro will use only pre-approved contractors.

Requests for work on our standard “work order” will state whether the work is urgent or non-urgent.

Contractors will be asked to make appointments with the tenant before attending the property and to should show identification confirming they are authorised to do the repair. Tenants shall be advised that they do not have to provide access if identification is not produced.

Where a complaint is made about a contractor’s behaviour, the Manager will speak directly with the contractor to try to resolve the complaint. We will not continue to employ contractors who behave in an inappropriate manner.

Tenants have the right to ask for the complaint to be heard by the Disputes Committee or an outside appeals service such as the Housing Appeals Committee, if the complaint is not resolved.

## **Selection and Performance of Contractors**

‘Approved’ contractors will be selected via an ‘Expression of Interest’ process conducted every two years via an advertisement in a local paper. All selected contractors must sign: a statement confirming that they have relevant insurances and licenses to carry out work in their nominated trade, a ‘contractor protocol’, which will include a clause that ensures that tenants are treated respectfully and information is kept confidential.

Contractor performance, including cost, quality of work and timeframes, will be determined via feedback from tenants and random checking of their work.

All contractors must comply with relevant legislative and licensing requirements. We will inspect any major repairs done at our capital properties to ensure the work has been completed to a satisfactory level. Capital property tenants will be advised to always try to sign the contractor work order to indicate their satisfaction with any completed maintenance. If this is not done, staff will contact the tenant to ensure work is completed and sign off on the work order prior to paying invoices.

## **Property Inspections**

All properties will be inspected annually and a written record kept on the property file. Any required maintenance will be reported to the Real Estate Agent or a work order issued to one of our contractors.

Where necessary, a follow up visit will be made to check that the work has been done to a satisfactory level. The staff member who undertook the inspection should bring any major maintenance issues to the attention of the Manager. Staff responsible for property inspections will be given appropriate training to perform this role.

## **Post Vacancy Inspections**

We will inspect all properties prior to, or as soon as practicable, after a tenant vacates. This will be done, where possible, with the tenant and the agent present. Staff will take the ingoing property condition report to refer to.

If the property is left in good condition, a Claim for the Refund of Bond form in favour of the tenant will be lodged within 14 days (or transferred to a new property).

The tenant will be notified in writing of any repairs where they are deemed to be responsible. However, if the tenant is unable to do the repairs or cannot be contacted within a reasonable timeframe, we will undertake the repairs as negotiated with the agent/landlord, and send a debit notice and explanatory letter to the tenant seeking reimbursement of costs incurred.

Any outstanding post tenancy debts will be followed up at the CTTT and bonds will be claimed.

## **Planned Maintenance (capital properties)**

Metro will at all times have a minimum 10-year 'rolling' cyclical maintenance plan to ensure effective and timely maintenance of all capital properties. All capital properties were scoped by Topjob Building Services in 2008, and will be maintained in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the scope. A copy of this document is available for sighting at the Metro Community Housing office.

Financing the cyclical maintenance component of asset management' strategy will be determined by the costed 10 year asset maintenance plan and will comply with all minimum benchmark levels set by our funding body.

We are required to allocate an amount per property, per year, for cyclical maintenance. This amount will vary and is linked to CHLP funding guidelines.

Cyclical maintenance expenditure will be accounted for in the annual budget and the Board of Directors will monitor expenditure on a monthly basis at Board meetings and through its Finance Sub-Committee.

Structural maintenance requirements will be reported to the funding body for resolution.

The Ten Year Asset Management Plan will:

- Include annual costings and timeframes and be updated annually
- Be developed by a qualified contractor with expertise in scoping/asset maintenance planning
- Be endorsed by the Finance Sub-committee and monitored on a regular basis by the Finance sub-committee and Board of Directors
- Be made available to tenants on request
- Prioritise safety and security and the protection of our assets

## **Procedure for Cyclical Maintenance**

Where major cyclical maintenance is required for an amount over \$10,000.00 (e.g. installation of new kitchen) then:

1. The Manager (or Asset Officer) will issue a work order to obtain 3 quotes from contractors who specialise in the relevant trade. Metro approved contractors will be given first option to tender for work.
2. Ensure the contractor has the relevant license and insurances and is a reputable tradesperson.
3. If not already an approved contractor, the contractor must sign the contractor protocol before commencing any work.
4. Work Orders issued to the preferred contractor shall have the quoted price including GST and include the timeframe for completion

## **Leasehold Acquisitions**

Leasehold properties will be acquired only after inspection by the staff.

The agent/owner must provide the Co-op with written documentation approving such an acquisition and the monies required at the time of signing the lease.

Such approval will then be used as the 'invoice' required to prepare 'sign up' cheques for bond, lease preparation fee and rent in advance.

Procurement of new leasehold properties:

- Leasehold properties should meet these minimum standards:
- have minimum security (e.g. deadlocks and window locks)
- have smoke alarms
- be in a reasonable condition
- be available for a minimum period of 12 months with a continuation clause but wherever possible be for 2 years or longer
- meet the stated needs of potential tenants prior to being offered.
- not be offered to a potential tenant without that person/s viewing the property
- have all required maintenance completed or confirmed in writing prior to occupation
- have all additional terms explained (e.g. pets, water usage, garden maintenance)
- be within the median price range as specified by the funding body
- be managed by a registered Real Estate Agent or be accompanied by a 'deed of ownership' if renting from a private owner.
- meet all other requirements regarding 'reasonable condition' under the Residential Tenancy Act.

## **Asset Disposals**

We have categorized our capital properties on the basis of Retain, Redevelop or Dispose in relation to our longer term asset management strategies and we have made recommendations to Community Housing Division about properties that we consider would be suitable for redevelopment if funds were available.

## **Development of Special Projects**

Where we are to acquire properties under a specifically funded program, (e.g. CAP), then all other parties to the project such as potential tenants, or community partners, will be provided, where possible, with the opportunity to participate in the planning process. We will engage professional resource bodies or contractors (nominated or approved by the Community Housing Division) to assist in the technical development and/or upgrade of such a project.

### **Fee for Service Projects and/or partnerships**

Where the Co-op enters into support partnerships or undertakes fee for service tenancy management, a formal partnership contract will be signed by all parties to the agreement. The information to be contained within such an agreement shall include:

- Statements about the type, size and location of a property
- The costs involved to both parties (if any)
- All other legal obligations of both parties with regard to maintenance and upgrades
- Roles and responsibilities of both parties including privacy information

## **Part 4: COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Objective: To have in place a fair and transparent complaints and appeals procedure.

### **Complaints**

A complaint or dispute exists when a person who is directly affected (or their advocate), is aggrieved, by the behaviour of an individual staff member or by other persons working for the co-operative. There are a number of steps in dealing with complaints.

#### **Category 1 – Minor Complaints**

In the first instance, minor complaints should be brought to the attention of the staff member concerned. This can be done verbally or in writing.

If the complainant is not willing to do this, the matter should be referred to the Manager. The matter will be dealt with as an informal complaint – we will attempt to resolve it through explanation and clarification, provision of additional information or review of the actions/decisions made by the staff member/person concerned.

The complainant is welcome to have a formal or informal advocate of their choice make a complaint on their behalf. They will need to give authorization for the co-operative to discuss issues related to their complaint or their tenancy with the nominated person

#### **Category 2 - Formal Complaints**

Where informal resolution has failed, or where the matter is more serious (eg. allegations of breaches of the Codes of Ethics or Codes of Conduct) the complaint needs to be made in writing.

There is a Complaints and Appeals form available which provides information about the complaint process. These matters will be referred to the Disputes Sub-committee.

#### **Category 3 – Complaints Alleging Illegality**

Where a complaint alleges illegality - for example fraudulent behaviour by a staff member, the matter will be referred to an appropriate investigative body such as Police. Complaints of this kind must be in writing.

### **Documentation**

The co-operative will document the outcomes of actions/decisions of the Disputes Sub-committee. Written advice about the rationale for any decisions will be made available to the complainant. This documentation will be kept on a registered Complaints file.

## **Breaches of Policy/Procedure/Guidelines**

If a member or tenant has contravened the rules of the Co-operative or breached policies, program guidelines, or their tenancy agreement, the Board of Directors can take action to remedy the breach. Remedial actions may include eviction – by obtaining a binding ruling from the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal. The Residential Tenancies Act defines circumstances in which immediate termination of a tenancy agreement is possible (for example evidence of immediate threat to neighbours by the tenant).

In such circumstances the Manager is authorized by the Board to implement eviction action without recourse to the disputes process.

## **Role of the Disputes Sub-committee**

The Disputes sub-committee will be convened for all Category 2 complaints. The sub-committee will comprise two Board members and one independent person. No member of the Disputes sub-committee will have been the subject of the complaint, or involved in the decision making that is the subject of the complaint or appeal.

The sub-committee will be convened no later than 2 weeks after receipt in writing of the dispute. Any decision/recommendation made by the sub-committee must be endorsed before the full Board of Directors at the next Board meeting. All parties involved in the dispute have the right to make a dissenting report which is clearly identified as their personal view.

## **Conduct of the Dispute Process**

Prior to any dispute hearing, all parties involved in the dispute resolution will be given the “ground rules” for conduct of the meeting (see Attachment A).

## **Appeals**

An appeal can be lodged by any individual, co-operative member or tenant (or a nominated representative acting on their behalf) who is directly affected by a decision on the grounds that the decision:

- was not in accordance with the Co-operative’s policies or procedures, or program guidelines
- was unfair given the specific circumstances applying at the time
- was a denial of natural justice

## **The Appeal Process**

Appeals should be lodged on the form available from the office (see Attachment B). It will then be referred to the Disputes Sub-committee.

## **External Avenues of Complaint and Appeal**

If the complainant/appellant is not satisfied with the decision or recommendation of the Disputes Sub-committee, they will be given information about the Housing Appeals committee - an external and independent complaints body.

## **“Ground Rules” for Dispute Meetings**

It is expected that the "ground rules" for conflict resolution listed below will be followed by all participants involved in resolving the dispute. Failure to do so by any party may result in the meeting be adjourned until agreement is reached that everyone present is prepared to abide by these agreed behaviours. The ground rules are

That all parties who have something relevant to say will, as far as is possible, use 'I' language, eg. 'I saw,' 'I feel', 'I believe' etc, rather than 'you are', 'you always', 'you should'.

Everyone must agree to take responsibility for their own actions or behaviour when telling their story and not try to shift the blame onto someone else.

Parties are not to raise matters that are not relevant, or do not comply with the accepted procedures as outlined and agreed upon at the beginning of the meeting.

Each person involved, and others who have something relevant to say will be allowed an agreed amount of uninterrupted time in which to put forward their point of view. Time will be allocated equitably to all the parties to the dispute.

People who feel that they have something relevant to add to the discussion should raise their hand at the appropriate point in the discussion, and wait for the facilitator to acknowledge them and allow them to proceed.

No insulting or abusive language or provocative behaviour will be tolerated. The meeting will be immediately be cancelled if parties do not desist from such behaviour after one warning.

No speaking over others, and no interrupting – discussions will be through the facilitator and not between parties to the dispute.

(Attachment A)

## **How to Lodge a Complaint or Appeal**

If you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of our services you are asked to follow these steps:

- If the complaint is minor (e.g. you are a tenant and want to complain about the performance of a contractor), first talk to your Housing Worker.
- If you have a concern about the actions or behaviour of your Housing Worker please talk first to the staff member concerned who will attempt to resolve this matter with you.
- If this did not resolve the problem or if you do not feel able to raise your concerns with the staff member concerned, please talk to the Manager. Do not raise your concerns with another member of staff.
- If these informal steps have not resolved your concerns then you may want to lodge a formal complaint. Formal complaints need to be in writing.

To lodge a formal complaint you need to complete the form attached to this information sheet.

## **Appeals**

If you wish to appeal or request a review of a decision made by the Co-operative you need to complete the attached form. If you require assistance in completing the form we can refer you to an advocacy or support agency that can help you.

\*\*\*\*\*

Once the complaint or appeal is received in writing you will be contacted within 7 days to arrange a suitable date to attend a meeting with the Disputes & Appeals Sub-Committee, which is made up of 2 Board members and an independent person. The aim of that meeting is to try and resolve your complaint.

You have the right to bring a support person or advocate to this meeting. You will also be asked to abide by “Ground Rules” (copy attached) to help ensure a safe and productive environment for the issues to be raised and discussed.

Please note that when you make a complaint or lodge an appeal, you will need to sign a consent for the Co-operative to collect or provide information relating to your complaint or appeal.

This is to ensure that we have your permission to access/share necessary information about your situation in order to handle your complaint or appeal effectively.

Complaints & Appeals Form

Surname:

First Name:

ADDRESS:

Are you a:

Tenant

Applicant

Other:

(please circle)

Are you:

Making a complaint

Appealing a decision

(please circle)

Please provide the details about your complaint/appeal, including dates, times, and who was involved. It would be helpful if you could outline what you would like to happen as a result of making this complaint or appeal. If you need more room, please attach an additional page to this form

Multiple horizontal lines for writing details.

I consent to Metro Community Housing Co-operative Ltd. and the Disputes & Appeals Sub-Committee collecting or providing information about me from other relevant agencies or person/s only where such information relates to my complaint or appeal. I understand all information collected or provided will remain confidential and will not be given to any persons other than officers of Metro Community Housing Co-op Ltd. without my further consent.

Signature of Complainant/Appellant

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Please tick if you will require an interpreter to be available for any meeting

## **PART 5: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

Objective: to ensure accountability and transparency in decision-making processes with regard to all aspects of the Co-ops work.

### **Statement on Financial Management**

The Co-op will implement policies and procedures in relation to its financial management, which ensures the ongoing financial viability of the organisation.

The Co-op will ensure the following things are in place:

- Ten year cyclical maintenance plan with estimated costs
- Annual budget and a rolling 10 year budget forecast
- Provisions set aside annually for staff leave, maintenance, cyclical repairs
- All appropriate insurances
- Debt collection procedures
- Effective arrears management practices

### **Budgets**

The Co-op will have in place a detailed annual budget approved by the Board of Directors. The budget shall be developed in consultation with the Finance Sub-committee, the Manager and the Co-op's Accountant and will reflect the essential requirements of our funding guidelines. The board will monitor financial performance against the budget on a monthly basis.

### **Finance Sub-Committee**

No less than two Directors (one of whom shall be Treasurer) sit on the Finance Sub-Committee. The sub-committee may, from time to time, be delegated responsibility by the full Board to make financial decisions in consultation with the full Board, the Co-op's Accountant and the Manager. The Sub-Committee shall report back to the Board when decisions have been made on financial management. The finance sub-committee will be responsible for ensuring:

- The audit is finalised on time
- The annual budget is presented to the Board of Directors
- The quarterly return is signed off and finalised on time
- Cyclical maintenance plans are in place and expenditure approved
- Adequate funds are set aside to meet liabilities
- Insurances are paid in full and on time
- Debts are reported to the Board
- Undertake staff salary and Enterprise Bargaining Agreement negotiations

## Financial Reporting to Funding Body

The Board will ensure, in consultation with the Manager, that all of the financial requirements expected by the funding body and other relevant authorities, are presented within the specific timeframes which may be set down by those authorities.

The Co-ops financial reporting shall meet the requirements of the National Accounting Framework set down by the funding body and general Australian Accounting standards.

All reporting will be endorsed by either the Chairperson or Treasurer.

Procedure to ensure accurate financial reporting:

Activity	Responsibility	Regularity
Bank reconciliations are prepared and indep. reviewed	Accountant/Treasurer	Monthly - Account. Six weekly Treasurer
Fixed Asset Registers are reconciled to General Register. Depreciation is charged. Physical inventories are performed against asset register	Accountant	Annually
After EOFY accruals are reversed to ensure expenditure recorded in correct period	Accountant	Annually
Provisions are only made to cover specific costs to be incurred (staff entitlements only)	Accountant/Treasurer	Quarterly
Bad debts are written off after being approved by the BOD	Accountant/Manager Board of Directors	Quarterly of half yearly
Supporting documentation is appropriately filed (ie cheque requisition forms)	Book-keeper Administration Officer	Daily
Asset sales are recognized in the period the sales takes place (as accrued income if necessary)	Accountant	Quarterly
Payroll transactions are effected on the Monday of each fortnight (for payment into employee's bank accounts on the Tuesday of each fortnight) and PAYG payments	Accountant prepares payroll payment instructions  Payments made by Manager/Chairperson	Fortnightly
The accountant securely maintains information and records relating to payroll matters	Accountant	Fortnightly

## **Investments**

The Board will ensure that all surplus monies are invested into a fixed term deposit, with a minimum one-month expiry period. Such accounts are to be held with the Co-op's nominated bank.

The Board will ensure that the minimum amount of cash to be held in such an investment account should not fall below \$200 000

The fixed term account cannot be broken without the expressed consent of the Board and authority to break the account must be signed by no less than two Directors, including the Treasurer.

## **Expenditure**

The Manager can approve expenditure for amounts up to \$5000.00 but must obtain consent from at least one other Director for amounts between \$5,000 and \$10,000.00.

For any amount above \$10,000.00, at least 3 quotes must be sought. The Manager can recommend to the Board the preferred quote, but cannot authorise expenditure without the authority of at least one Executive Director. In cases of urgency, consent may be given verbally or by telephone but must be minuted at the next Board of Directors meeting.

Housing workers can authorise expenditure in relation to work orders up to \$500.00 for responsive maintenance (ie where no quotes have been obtained). Work orders will specify to contractors that if costs are expected to exceed \$500.00 they are required to contact the Asset Officer for approval of expenditure up to \$1000.

The Asset Manager can approve expenditure in relation to work orders of between \$500 and \$1000. Expenditure above \$1000.00 will be referred to the Manager for approval.

## **Cheque Requisitions**

All cheques must be accompanied by a 'cheque requisition form', which will contain the following information:

- Date of cheque
- Cheque number
- Amount of cheque
- Details of cheque
- Code number for accounting system
- Details of debtors to the expenditure
- Address for expenditure (if applicable)
- Signatures to the cheque

## **Signatories**

There must be at least TWO authorised signatures to a cheque. Authorised signatories will be:

- Either The Manger and ONE authorised Director, or
- Two authorised Directors (one of whom, where possible, should be the Treasurer or Chairperson)

## **Checks and Balances**

The following checks and balances will be in place in relation to financial management:

- Two PIN numbers and passwords will be required to transfer funds electronically. The Manager and the Chairperson shall hold the PIN numbers and passwords and neither shall be divulged to the other party. The Board will, from time to time, request that the PIN numbers be changed.
- There will be a password used to order new cheque books or other financial information from the bank
- The Manager will be responsible for ensuring petty cash docketts are filled out with attached receipts and the information recorded in the Petty Cash Book. The Accountant shall transfer this data to the electronic financial systems.
- No forward signing of cheques is permitted
- Cheques can only be signed where an appropriate receipt or tax invoice is available
- No cheque shall be written out to 'cash' except petty cash cheques which will be made payable to 'petty cash'.
- Quotes must be received for expenditure above \$5000.00 and approval must be granted to proceed with quote from Finance Sub Committee member or Executive Board member.
- The Accountant will be responsible for checking the receipts against the bank deposit
- A cheque register will be made available to the Treasurer prior to Board meetings. The Treasurer will table this at each Board meeting.
- The monthly balance sheet will be provided to the Treasurer prior to Board meetings. The Treasurer will then table this at the Board meeting.
- Profit and loss statements and budget shall be provided to the Board at each board meeting.

## **Accounting Systems**

The Accountant will be responsible for entering financial data, printing reports, paying wages and tracking leave entitlements for staff. Financial information shall be entered onto an electronic financial administration system at least fortnightly.

The financial systems will be regularly monitored by the Finance Sub-Committee in consultation with the Accountant and Manager, to ensure they are able to produce the

appropriate reports required for the Board, the funding body and other relevant authorities.

The Finance Sub-Committee shall, as required, conduct a review of the financial systems and make recommendations to the Board to ensure the systems are operating properly and that appropriate checks and balances remain in place.

### **Rent collection**

Tenant rent payments will be deposited directly into the tenant's designated rental account. However, rent and other payments received at the office should be deposited within 24 hours of receipt and the receipt should be checked off against the deposit book by the Book-keeper.

### **Debtors**

The Board of Directors will consider a list of all debtors quarterly and decide on appropriate action to recover the debt, or where recovery is not possible to write off the debt. The Co-op does not use debt collectors.

Where debts are written off details will still be kept on the Tenant Management system rent and non-rent accounts for that tenant. People owing the Co-op monies, even when the Co-op has written off the debt, may not be eligible for rehousing unless authorised by the Board, and a repayment plan is in place.

Debtors will be given an update at least quarterly with invoices and statements sent to tenants who owe the Co-op monies. Debtors can make arrangements with the Manager to repay the monies owed in instalments and the Accountant/book-keeper shall keep a record of instalments made against monies owed.

Statements sent to debtors shall indicate balances owed and invoices forwarded will indicate new debts incurred (e.g. water usage). Where the Manager feels debts are not being repaid, the Board will determine action.

## **PART 6: ADMINISTRATIVE & MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS POLICY**

Objective: To ensure efficient and effective systems are in place to support the day-to-day running of the Co-op.

### **Filing Systems**

The Co-op shall have accessible filing systems which will include hard copy information on the following:

- a) Individual Tenant files
- b) Individual Property files
- c) Ex property and Ex tenant files
- d) Personnel files

The Tenant files shall contain the following information:

- Residential Tenancy Agreement (including bond information if applicable)
- Income review information
- Correspondence and file notes/referrals/contact details
- Support agreements (if applicable)
- Invoices for tenant incurred costs (i.e. water usage)

The property files shall contain the following information:

- Residential Tenancy Agreement & bond information
- Correspondence
- Receipts
- Reported maintenance (also kept on database)

### **Responsibilities**

The Office/Administrative Assistant shall be responsible for ensuring the filing systems are kept up-to-date. Files shall be filed as regularly as possible to ensure they are kept in good order.

### **Storage**

The filing systems shall be easily accessible and secure. All sensitive files will be kept in secure filing cabinets away from the reception area and office thoroughfare. The office is locked and alarmed whenever unattended.

## **Archiving Files**

Files shall be kept for the maximum period of time as is required by law/regulations of relevant bodies. Files shall then be archived or destroyed.

Files no longer in regular use shall be stored in the organisation's storage unit.

## **Correspondence**

All incoming and important outgoing correspondence shall be recorded on the Co-op's database and printed out for tabling at Board meetings.

All files/data kept on the Co-ops database shall be backed up regularly to an external storage facility (internet or stored tapes) and be virus protected.

## **Motor Vehicles**

Staffs that use their own motor vehicle for work purposes shall ensure such vehicles are comprehensively insured and logbooks are kept. Staff shall be paid at the appropriate award rate and the Accountant shall do such calculations at least quarterly. See also vehicle policy.

## **Telephone System**

There will be a minimum of two telephone lines available at the office and calls will be taken throughout the day whenever staff are present. When staff are not present, an answer service shall be available with the following information:

- Emergency repair information for tenants
- Emergency housing contact information
- Non urgent message information

Non-urgent calls, where possible, shall be returned within 24 hours. Urgent calls shall be returned as soon as they are retrieved.

## **Database**

The TMS database can only be accessed via a password, known only to staff.

## **Review of Administrative Systems**

From time to time, staff shall review the efficiencies and usefulness of the current administrative systems and advise the Board of any major changes necessary. Any substantive changes to procedure will need to be approved by the Board at the first available meeting.

## **Data Collection**

The Co-op shall keep up-to-date information about its applicants and tenants and shall provide reports to the Board. The information collated shall be used to inform the planning processes in relation to acquisition of stock and tenant selection. Types of data collected will include:

- Statistics on gender, age
- Statistics on ethnicity
- Statistics on income vs rent paid
- Complaints and appeals
- Vacancy periods

Such information shall be reported to the relevant funding bodies as required and collated for the annual Data Collection for the Office of Community Housing.

## **PART 7: OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Objective: To ensure the health, safety and security of staff, tenants, applicants, Board members, other clients and visitors. To ensure the Co-op complies with the OH & S Act 2000 & the OH & S Regulations 2001 & all relevant industry standards and Codes of Practice.

Statement of principles for ensuring a safe, secure and well maintained office environment:

- That the office is wheelchair accessible
- That the office is located in an area accessible to:
  - Public transport
  - Health facilities
  - Educational facilities
  - Shopping centres
- Staff & Directors shall be kept up-to-date with OH & S regulations

### **Organisational Commitment**

Metro Community Housing is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its staff and all those who use its service. To this end the organisation will consult its employees, and where appropriate, any other stakeholders (such as clients) to ensure the implementation of safe work practices and procedures.

### **Staff**

Staff responsible for visiting properties/tenants will be provided with the following equipment to assist in ensuring their safety and security:

- Mobile phone
- First aid kit (vehicle)
- Torch (vehicle)
- Up-to-date street directory

### **Property visits**

Staff must inform at least one other person in the office if they are to make a visit to a tenant or property of the Co-op. The address/time of visit must be written in the office diary.

Staff can request that a tenant not smoke during a property inspection or visit. This request is to be framed in a polite and sensitive manner taking into consideration that it is at a tenant's home, cultural issues, etc.

If a tenant does not refrain from smoking the staff member may offer to reschedule the appointment.

### **Aggressive clients**

If a staff member has to visit a property or tenant, and that staff member feels that such a tenant/client may be potentially threatening or aggressive in any way, at least two people must attend that visit.

If there are not two staff members available, the visit must be delayed until such time as an alternative person/s (Director or support worker) is available to accompany the staff member.

### **Dealing with Aggressive clients**

Staff must always treat tenants and other clients with respect and communicate with them politely, whether in person or over the phone.

If a tenant or client becomes aggressive or threatening toward staff, whether over the phone or in person, the staff member will, whilst remaining polite and respectful in their manner, advise the person that they intend to terminate a conversation or meeting. The staff member shall refer the tenant or client to the Board by providing information about our complaints and appeals process.

The Board shall have such matters brought to its attention as soon as possible, and staff (and tenants/clients) will be supported and have their right to be treated with respect upheld.

### **Procedure for dealing with aggressive tenants/clients**

If a staff member, Director or support worker feels or is in any way threatened by the aggressive behaviour of a tenant/client, either within the office or at a property, that staff member, Director or support worker shall take the following steps:

- Leave the premises immediately if at an on-site visit
- Ask the tenant/client to leave the office (when possible, the Manager should ask the tenant/client to leave)
- If after being warned, the aggressive behaviour continues, call the Police
- Lock all doors immediately after the tenant/client leaves

### **Reporting Critical Incidents/Accidents**

All critical incidents shall be recorded in the 'Accident and Critical Incident Occupational Health & Safety Book', which is to be kept on the office premises. The information contained shall include:

- Date of incident and time
- Place of incident
- Parties involved
- Details of incident
- Signature of person making entry
- Name of Director notified of incident
- Name/s of Police officers/other authorities/persons contacted about the incident
- Any resolutions in the matter

The critical incident book shall be given to the Board of Directors for follow-up as soon as practicable after the incident, and, if required, the Board shall begin a disputes resolution procedure.

### **Counselling**

Any staff member or persons involved in a ‘critical incident’ shall be offered counselling/supervision by an appropriately qualified counsellor of their choice.

### **Training**

Where available, staff may have access to up-to-date training in Occupational Health and Safety Issues, including training in dealing with aggressive clients.

### **Regular breaks**

Staff must take at least one half hour break per day (maximum of one hour) for lunch each day and are encouraged to leave the office, or use the private space provided to eat lunch. It is recommended that staff take a break at least every hour when using the Co-op’s computers.

### **Return to Work Policy**

The co-operative will work with any staff member wanting to resume work after injury or illness to develop a “return to work” plan. The co-op will endeavour to comply with the wishes of staff returning to work by allocating tasks which are suitable for the staff member to undertake upon returning to work. For example, where a staff member is to return to work, but is unable to perform all of their duties, the Co-op will attempt to ensure that lighter duties are provided for that staff member.

The Manager will be responsible for supervising the return to work protocols for staff members.

## **Communicable Diseases**

Staff should take every precaution with regard to communicable diseases. Staff should always wear gloves in any incident where blood is involved. Staff shall also be kept trained and up-to-date on information involving HIV, Hepatitis etc.

An incident report should be noted in the Accidents and Critical Incident Report Book

Staff will not be expected to clean properties post-tenancy, and non day-to-day office cleaning shall be undertaken by a professional cleaner.

## **Contractors & Sub-Contractors**

All contractors will be provided with a copy of the OH & S Policy when they are first engaged and will be expected to sign a contractor protocol when they submit an expression of interest to Metro.

All contractors will be advised of their responsibilities under the OH & S Act 2000 and the OH & S Regulations 2001. Further, any sub-contractors used by contractors will be expected to adhere to the same standards.

All contractors will be expected to have a 'Green Ticket' when they apply to become an 'approved contractor' under the Expression of Interest Process. Contractors who do not have a Green Ticket will be encouraged to undertake the appropriate WorkCover Training to obtain such a ticket.

## **Community Partners**

Community Partners are required to have in place OH & S policies and procedures which comply with the relevant legislation prior to partnership contracts being signed.

The procedures outlined in this document will also form part of any support partnership agreement.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The co-op has designated responsibility for OH & S to all staff and management. The specific roles are delegated herewith:

**Manager:** The Manager is authorised to act on behalf of the organisation in relation to rectifying any OH & S problems, which may arise to the value of \$5000.00.

**Staff:** Staff are obliged under law to comply with the OH & S policies of the organisation. All staff shall be consulted on all issues in relation to OH & S matters and are encouraged to report any issues to the Manager or the Board.

Board: The Board has the authority to delegate responsibilities for addressing OH& S issues to the Manager and to the Employment Sub-Committee and are responsible for endorsing the decisions made by the Sub-Committee where those decisions clearly relate to OH & S matters. Any such matters relating to OH & S will be minuted.

### **OH & S Audit and Other Agreed Arrangement**

At least annually, an OH & S audit and risk management plan shall be undertaken with all staff and a board representative. This audit is intended to identify and remedy any outstanding OH & S issues within the office. Such an audit shall be documented for the Board to endorse, and where necessary, make other recommendations to ensure a safe working environment.

The Board representative/s must have the authority to act on any OH & S matters. The audit shall consider issues such as:

- That the office is fitted with appropriately maintained furniture and equipment
- That the fire extinguisher is working and serviced
- That the first aid kit is supplied with suitable equipment
- That the security in the office is efficient
- That any hazardous material has a hazardous material safety data sheet to refer to when in use but that where possible NO hazardous materials be used and that only 'green' products be purchased.

The Board will have a 'standing order' at every Board meeting to consider OH & S matters and staff should bring any issues to those meetings.

### **Consultation Process**

The organisation, in consultation with its staff, has agreed that the consultation arrangement will be "other agreed arrangements", which meets the specific consultation requirements of the OH & S Act (2000) and the OH & S Regulations (2001), and is an open, accountable and transparent method of consultation.

#### **"Other Agreed Arrangements" Consultation on OH & S**

At an information meeting in 2005, all staff reached agreement that given the size and nature of the organisation, the preferred consultation process was "other agreed arrangements" as opposed to the election of an OH & Representative or the formation of an OH & S Committee.

All employees will be invited to participate in any forums relating to safe work practices. The organisation will encourage all staff members to raise issues which staff feel must be addressed in order to ensure a safer and healthier workplace. Employees will bring such issues to the attention of the Manager, or to the OH & S Board representative, either at

fortnightly staff meetings or immediately if there is an urgent issue, and the issue will be documented and dealt with promptly.

OH & S is a standing agenda item at Board meetings, and the Manager or OH & S representative will table any issues raised by the staff and the action taken to resolve the matter/s. Staff, clients and other visitors will have access to the organisations OH & S Policy and Procedures and the OH & S Consultation statement.

### **Review of Consultation Arrangements**

Metro and its employees agreed that the type of consultation arrangements agreed upon will be continuously monitored, and with a formal review of the process to be conducted with all parties at least annually. This was decided upon to ensure that the most effective and efficient method for consultation was in place to best address the health, safety and welfare of staff and clients.

## **SAFETY WORKING PROCEDURES FOR CONTRACTORS**

Under Section 8 of the OHS Act 2000 Metro has an obligation to ensure the health and safety of all employees and other persons (contractors) at the place of work. Therefore, when Metro engages contractors at their place of work (including at residential properties managed by us) they must ensure that the contractors are not put at risk by Metro's activities, and that our employees or others at the place of work (e.g. tenants) are not put at risk by the contractor's activities. Similarly, when a contractor comes into a workplace (including a residential property) they must ensure the health and safety of their own employees and not put others at risk as a consequence of their activities.

Metro Community Housing complies with the OH & S Act 2000 & the OH & S Regulations 2001 and we expect our contractors and their sub-contractors to also abide. To achieve safe working objectives, the following is a number of steps Metro has introduced to ensure all parties understand their obligations under OH&S.

We will provide a written work order to each contractor, for each individual job they are required to undertake. Where there are identified risks associated with work to be carried out, (e.g. aggressive clients) this will be stated on the work order and we will identify systems which will eliminate or control such risks.

If a contractor attends a property and identifies risks that may be caused by the contractors undertakings, that contractor should notify the Manager of the systems to be implemented to eliminate or control those risks.

Where risks have been identified by either party, both Metro staff and the contractor shall enter into a Contractor Safety Plan (sample plan attached), which provides written information about what risks have been identified, who they effect and how the work will be carried out to address the OHS issues identified. Both parties shall sign this agreement prior to the commencement of the work.

If a contractor attends a property and a client is in any way aggressive, that contractor shall leave the premises immediately and not engage with the client. The contractor shall then advise the office as soon as possible.

Metro will advise a contractor of any other hazard that may be relevant to the residential premises (e.g. if a property is currently having renovations done or if a contractor needs to seek permission from a site supervisor before attending).

Metro will expect all contractors to contact clients to arrange access prior to arriving at a property to undertake work. This ensures the tenant can feel safe in knowing the time and date for a contractor. Contractors will need to show identification to clients when they attend to undertake work to ensure tenants feel safe when allowing access.

Contractors shall ask clients to sign the work order form when the work is completed and that work order should be returned to Metro Community Housing with the invoice.

Contractors shall respect the privacy of the clients at all times. If a client complains about the behaviour of a contractor, that contractor shall be notified immediately and an attempt to resolve the problem shall be undertaken.

Metro expects all contractors to have a clear understanding of safe working procedures when entering a residential premises to undertake work, particularly in relation to electrical safety procedures.

Metro encourages all contractors to undertake an accredited Work Cover OH & S Induction Training for Construction Work and to receive a Green Ticket.

When working with hazardous substances, Metro expects contractors to identify and understand those hazards and ensure safe working practices are adhered to. Contractors should inform tenants if any hazardous materials, chemicals or potentially dangerous machinery are to be used to carry out maintenance and to explain this to tenants before proceeding.

Contractors should wear protective clothing when working with hazardous substances or machinery.

#### CONTRACTOR ACCEPTANCE STATEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ am the principal/owner/manager for  
(please print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Company Name)

I have read and understood the Safe Working Procedures Statement and I agree to abide by the conditions of that statement when undertaking work for and on behalf of Metro. I have also been provided with a sample Contractor Safety Plan and the Metro OH & S Policy.

I agree that my company has all the necessary insurances and licences required to perform the type of work I have sought to undertake for Metro (e.g. cleaning, building, electrical) and that all employees of my company have the relevant qualifications and/or training required to undertake that work.

I will provide any sub-contractor I engage with the Metro Safe Working Procedures Statement, sample Contractor Safety Plan and the Metro OH & S policy.

I agree to inform Metro immediately if there is any change in my company's circumstances.

\_\_\_\_\_(Signature of authorised person)

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## **PART 8: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Objective: To ensure training, management, staff recruitment and employee conditions are in line with best employment practices.

### **Co-operative Management (Board of Directors)**

The board of management has responsibility for the management of the organisation and will establish and regularly review the management policies of the housing association. These policies will be available as public documents.

All new Board members shall receive a 'Director's Kit' that outlines information relating to the history, structure and responsibilities of Metro Community Housing And will be required to sign the Statement of Code of Ethics and Equal Opportunity Code of Conduct.

### **Individual Committee Member's Responsibilities**

Individual directors on the board of management will inform themselves of their general and legal responsibilities in relation to employees of the association, tenants, the local community and the broader housing association sector. They will ensure that as far as possible they access the relevant information needed to carry out their role effectively and make informed decisions, whilst maintaining regard to confidentiality.

### **Delegated Authorities**

The Board will assign delegations to staff and the Manager/other staff shall receive a written authority to act on behalf of the organisation. This will be reviewed on an annual basis to clarify and detail the responsibilities of both Board members and staff.

### **Personnel Practices**

The board of management will ensure that the association adopts fair and transparent recruitment policies, reflecting the organisation's commitment to equal opportunity. All employees will be appointed in accordance with relevant employment legislation, and salary levels will be commensurate with experience, competency and level of responsibility within the organisation. Employment records will be confidential.

Metro will comply with Anti-Discrimination & Equal Employment Opportunity legislation and philosophies when hiring staff for positions within the service.

This means that we will select staff according to their skills, aptitude, qualifications and experience relevant to the responsibilities of the position irrespective of sex, race, colour, religion political opinion, nationality, social origin, disability, age, marital status, sexual preference, criminal & medical record, trade union activities or personal attributes.

## **Advertising**

Metro positions will generally be advertised state-wide, in the Sydney Morning Herald. We may also advertise through the relevant peak bodies. Advertisements will include: job title, summary of responsibilities, selection criteria, hours of work, pay rate, a two week closing date, contact telephone & address, and interview date.

## **Selection Process**

Applicants will be notified in writing of the interview date, time & venue. Interview questions based on the selection criteria will be prepared beforehand by the selection sub-committee and all applicants will be asked the same list of questions.

The chosen applicant will be offered the position verbally and if accepted, a letter of appointment will be sent to the successful applicant, stating the title, starting date, salary and a request for confirmation in writing of their acceptance of the position.

All unsuccessful applicants will be notified as soon as possible after the position has been filled, with the offer of feedback on their interview performance.

## **Staff Responsibilities**

Staff will work to job descriptions, developed by the board of management, which clearly define their roles and responsibilities.

Metro will prepare job specifications information for all positions in the service, which will include position title and objectives, accountability requirements, list of duties, salary & conditions and selection criteria.

## **Handover & Orientation**

If at all possible a handover period of 3 days will be provided to new staff members by retiring staff members and the BOD will provide an orientation process at the commencement of employment.

## **Enterprise Agreement/contract**

An enterprise agreement, or staff contract will be negotiated with all employees upon commencement

## **Equal Employment Opportunity**

Equal Employment Opportunity is a policy that promotes selection by merit. Under E.E.O. all personnel activities should be conducted in a way that ensures that for each vacancy in an organisation, people with the best skills have the best chance of getting the job. Selection is based on a person's ability, qualifications, experience, standard of performance and relevant personal qualities. As well, under E.E.O. discrimination in employment on the following grounds is illegal:

- Race, including colour and ethnic origin
- Sex
- Marital status
- Physical impairment, whether it has existed from birth or is a result of injury or illness
- Homosexuality

## **Ethical behaviour: (See Pt. 9 – Code of Ethics)**

All staff members will be required to sign the Code of Conduct at the commencement of their employment.

## **Staff Reviews**

The board of management will carry out regular reviews of employees' work and establish reporting procedures for employees to the committee.

## **Working Conditions**

The board of management will ensure that employees have reasonable, safe working conditions and that there are public procedures in place for staff grievance or discipline, including a process for appeal.

## **PART 9: CODE OF ETHICS**

Objective: Metro Community Housing co-op Ltd requires that all staff and Board members behave in ways that are consistent with this Code of Ethics.

Ethical behaviour involves:

Observance of legal minimums and moral standards agreed by the organisation

Observance of best practice guidelines endorsed by the wider sector.

### **Legal awareness**

All Co-operative staff must be familiar with current Residential Tenancy legislation;

The Manager and all Board members must be familiar with and comply with relevant incorporation, company and employment legislation;

All staff must be aware of the requirements of relevant Anti-Discrimination legislation in their dealings with applicants and tenants.

Unintentional illegal action will be rectified as soon as the Co-operative becomes aware of it. Intentional illegal action or illegal action resulting from incompetence or negligence will result in disciplinary procedure being implemented, and in extreme cases, in criminal prosecution.

### **Commitment to social justice**

The Co-operative aims to further the principles of social justice through a commitment to principles of equity, equality of access, and respect for tenant's rights.

### **Strive for best practice**

All staff and Board members will strive for the development of best practice in all housing management and organisational management activities. Policies and procedures will be transparent, publicly available and consistently implemented.

### **Observe Confidentiality**

Board members will respect the confidentiality of information obtained in the course of carrying out their duties, and will not discuss any personal information about staff, clients, members or Directors outside the organisation, or inappropriately with anyone inside the organisation without their consent (eg. information about an employee should not be discussed with other employees, other than their direct manager).

Board members will not have automatic access to personal information about applicants and tenants. Information about individual tenants or applicants reported to the Board (eg. rent arrears action, tenant selection and allocation appeals) will be identified, where possible, by a code rather than the applicants or tenants name or address.

Board members cannot ask to view applicant or tenant files, except with the authorisation of the Board in connection with the resolution of a complaint or dispute, or a service evaluation.

No information about a client, will be passed on to anyone outside the staff team without that person's express consent. It will be explained to clients requesting that an individual worker keep something confidential, that confidentiality cannot be maintained by one worker but will be observed by all staff. Debriefing with other workers about individual clients will occur to ensure that all workers are able to deal with situations appropriately and efficiently.

Anyone requesting information about an applicant or tenant, including family members, other organisations, government departments, the police and the courts will be informed of the confidentiality policy.

Referrals or discussion with other agencies about a client's situation and needs will not be made without their express consent confirmed by a signed consent agreement. The exception to this is where we are required by legislation to provide information to external agencies such as Centrelink, Police, or Department of Community Services.

Clients will have access to any file or written record about them, and may request access to this information with reasonable notice. When providing an applicant or tenant with access to their records, care will be taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of others.

Information about tenants and applicants, including lists with names and addresses, personal files and notes, names on files or whiteboards will not be visible or easily accessible in public areas in the office.

### **Avoid Conflict of Interest**

Conflict of interest concerns the potential for unprofessional conduct in carrying out the business of the Co-operative because of relationships and responsibilities Board members and employees have outside the organisation, or because of multiple roles and relationships between people inside the organisation.

Conflict of interest will be avoided by:

- Recording any possible conflict of interest in the "Register of Interest"
- Staff and Directors will refuse to accept gratuities, personal gifts or personal advantage from contractors or suppliers in the course of undertaking work for the Co-operative, and if in doubt the matter should be declared to the Board
- Current and former staff and Directors will not be housed by the organisation unless selected through Pathways eligibility processes.

- Staff and Directors will not participate in discussions or decisions about their own tenancy or housing application, or that of someone with whom they have a personal or financial relationship
- Arrangements related to any services or work carried out for the Co-operative by tenants or applicants, whether paid or unpaid, will be documented and brought to the attention of the Board any potential conflict of interest will be brought to the attention of the Board at the earliest possible opportunity
- payments to Board members, including sitting fees and reimbursement of expenses, must be approved by the Board before payment and the decision documented

## **Donations**

Metro Community Housing is entrusted by government, the community and its tenants to manage its services and assets prudently and fairly. Metro Community Housing can receive donations, however it is extremely important that a donation does not lead to a perception of corrupt conduct where the recipient, donor or an observer assumes that:

- the recipient may lack impartiality in the course of their duties; or
- the recipient is under obligation to the donor; or
- the recipient may favour the donor in business dealings.

As any perception of corrupt conduct or favouritism reflects badly on the organisation and the sector, this policy outlines the procedures to be followed if receiving donations. Donations include donations in kind such as goods, services, services at reduced cost, staffing, use of resources as well as money. Examples include:

- Money
- Gifts
- Free or reduced tickets to shows or events
- Use of accommodation
- Use of staff at no cost
- Contractors or suppliers providing services at no or at a reduced cost
- Contractors or suppliers providing goods at no or reduced cost

## **Register of donations**

Metro CH will maintain a register of donations. All donations with a value of \$100 or more must be recorded in the register of donations, stating the description of the donation, value, name of donor, and reason for accepting or declining the donation. The register of donations will be monitored by the Board and publicly reported in the Annual Report.

## **Complaints and appeals**

Any person who believes that there has been a breach of this policy can complain using the Whistleblower or Reducing the Risk of Fraud Policy. Complaints can also be made to the Registrar of Community Housing

## **Reducing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption**

Metro Community Housing is entrusted by government, the community and its tenants to manage its services and assets prudently and fairly. As such every board member and staff member has a responsibility to guard against fraud and corruption.

## **Definition of Fraud**

A deliberate or premeditated act which involves using deception to gain advantage from a position of trust and authority. (NSW Audit office)

Examples of fraud:

- Accepting bribes or favours to gain/provide access to housing, alternative housing or better housing
- Accepting bribes or favours to buy or lease certain properties
- Misappropriation of tenant rents or charges
- Unauthorised use of organizational assets
- Stealing organisational assets
- Falsifying time sheets or expenses
- Conspiring with others to obtain a financial advantage (ie winning a tender for provision of goods or services)
- Running a private business in working hours
- Sending false or duplicate invoices
- Sending invoices for work not done or not completed

## **Warning Signs of Possible Fraud**

The following examples are indicators of a possible (but not definite) problem:

- Conflicts of interest not declared
- Undue secrecy and lack of transparency in transactions and processes
- Illogical excuses and reasons for unusual events and actions
- Staff who do not take holidays for extended periods
- Missing documentation or alterations on documentation
- Unusual, unexpected or unexplained large transactions
- Anonymous complaints or rumours from reputable sources
- Agreed policies and procedures not followed

## **Managing the Risk**

While no organisation can ever be immune from potential fraud, organizations can implement monitoring and put in place controls to help manage the risk. Metro Community Housing:

- Has clear guidelines on managing conflicts of interest
- Ensures that all staff members, volunteers and board members sign that they are aware of their responsibility to always operate with the highest level of probity
- Has clear guidelines on donations and gifts
- Has the Finance subcommittee oversight and identify areas of risk and implement controls to manage that risk.
- Undertakes a fraud risk assessment annually
- Has adequate segregation of duties and use of verification procedures.

See *Section 1: Governance, page 46* for detailed description of activities undertaken to assist in ensuring accurate financial reporting.

## **Disclosing Fraud or Corrupt Conduct**

A person who suspects corrupt conduct should report it to the appropriate person so that it can be fully investigated. The appropriate person will vary depending on the nature of the conduct and the persons believed to be involved. If the suspected fraud or corrupt conduct involves:

- one or more staff members, then it is to be reported to the CEO or the Chairperson
- the CEO, then it can be reported to the Chairperson

Where neither option is practical contact:

- the CEO of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations ( the peak body charged with handling breaches of code of conduct)
- The Registrar of Community Housing

Further information is set out in the Metro “Whistleblower” Policy.

Investigating possible fraud or corrupt conduct:

Investigations need to be handled discreetly. Information should be shared on a ‘need to know basis only and all people questioned should be reminded of their responsibilities to maintain confidentiality. Any investigation should be handled with a view that a person who is alleged to have committed fraud:

- Will be presumed innocent till proven guilty
- Should have a right to respond to allegations made against them

Allegations investigated and found to be due to corrupt conduct or fraud may lead to:

- Dismissal (staff or board member)
- Loss of home (if tenant)
- Cancellation of contracts (contractors)
- Depending on the nature of the fraud it may also lead to police prosecution.
- Quality assurance:
- Clear guidelines on managing conflicts of interest.
- Clear guidelines in place on handling gifts and donations.
- All staff, volunteers and board members sign that they agree to abide by code of conduct.
- Finance Sub-committee to take responsibility for monitoring audit and risk matters.
- Annual fraud risk assessment undertaken.
- Clear separation of duties.

### **Whistleblower Policy**

Metro Community Housing Co-op Ltd is committed to high standards of conduct and ethical behaviour. This policy aims to ensure that staff and directors can raise concerns about issues relating to service delivery, financial administration or management practices of the organisation without fear of reprisal.

This policy aims to encourage people to report an issue if they genuinely believe someone has contravened the Code of Ethical Conduct, the Conflict of Interest policy or the law.

### **Who the Policy Applies to**

This policy applies to all employees whether full time, part time or casual, and to all Directors.

### **When Concerns Should be Raised**

All employees and directors are encouraged to report any genuine matters or behaviours that they believe contravene Metro Community Housing's Code of Ethical Conduct, Conflict of Interest policy or the law. This will include:

- Conduct or practices which are illegal
- Corrupt activities
- Theft, fraud, misappropriation
- Significant mismanagement of funds or resources
- Abuse of authority
- Serious harm to public, tenant or employee safety

## **Procedure**

A person who becomes aware of any matter or behaviour that they think seriously contravenes the Code of Ethical conduct, Conflict of Interest policy or the law should raise the matter with (in order):

1. their immediate supervisor (if an employee) or with the Manager
2. the Chairperson or another member of the Board of directors (if raising the matter with the Manager is not appropriate)
3. the Office of the Registrar of Community Housing (1800 330 940)

## **Investigating Concerns**

Metro Community Housing will investigate all reported concerns and where appropriate will provide feedback regarding the outcome. We will take any necessary course of action as a result of a report. If no action is taken we will give an explanation to the person who has reported the concerns as to why this decision has been made.

## **Protection of Whistleblowers**

A whistleblower will not be discriminated against or disadvantaged for making a report in accordance with this policy. This applies if the matter is proven or not, regardless of whether it is reported to an external authority.

## **Responsibility to Act in Good Faith**

Whistle blowing provisions are intended to promote the reporting of real or perceived malpractice. If a report is not made in good faith, or is found to be malicious, deliberately misleading or frivolous, you may be subject to disciplinary action.

## **Equal Opportunities**

(see also Human Resource Management policy part 8 on Equal Employment Opportunity)

Equitable employment and service delivery policies and practices are essential to meet the objectives of the Co-operative. It is expected that all staff and board members will take responsibility for fair, non-discriminatory behaviour in their dealings with each other, with clients and in the development and/or implementation of policies and procedures that facilitate this.

Discriminatory behaviour will not be tolerated by the Co-operative. Employees and Directors are expected to treat all persons with whom they have professional dealings with respect.

## CODE OF CONDUCT

All staff (paid and voluntary) and Board members will observe the Co-operative's Code of Conduct when engaged in any business on behalf of, or in the name of, the Co-operative. Staff and Board members will agree to:

- Abide by and implement the Code of Ethics and Equal Opportunity Statements
- Be accountable
- Be professional
- Ensure service quality
- Foster tenant involvement
- Act responsibly to our community

Acceptable conduct requires that staff:

- Abide by and implement the Code of Ethics and the Equal Opportunities statement at all times. Staff and Board members will be asked to sign a statement that they have read and understood these documents and agree to abide by and implement them.
- Be accountable to tenants, potential tenants, the local community, funding agencies, the incorporating body, the wider community housing sector for meeting the specific financial, legal and social requirements and agreements related to the business of running a community-managed housing association.

Being accountable requires that staff:

- Are professional in all dealings with clients, colleagues and other people and groups you come into contact with. Professional behaviour is competent, honest, courteous, fair, non-judgmental, and respectful. Professional approaches to work will include problem solving, teamwork, consultation, empowerment, client focus and continuous improvement.
- Personal values, beliefs and ideologies that are contrary to the Co-operative's ethical and professional codes will not be expressed in the course of work for the Co-operative.
- Staff and Board members will not abuse their personal or organisational power in relationships with each other or clients.
- Staff and Board members will make a commitment to furthering their professional development by taking advantage of opportunities to access appropriate training, broadening and developing necessary skills and seeking relevant qualifications.

Maintaining standards of service delivery

The Co-operative will provide housing that is appropriate, secure, affordable and of an acceptable standard, and work co-operatively with other housing and non-housing organisations to ensure that people in housing need receive high quality services.

**Maintaining and improving the quality of the Co-operative's services requires:**

clear responsibilities and benchmarks:	through planning; developing and adopting standards; developing and implementing policies and procedures; and being clear about rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups involved
agreed methods for having performance assessed:	including the use of performance criteria; data and statistics for monitoring and overviews; and evaluations
clear methods for reporting:	both internally and externally
agreed methods for responding:	when accountability relationships fail or raise issues that need to be dealt with, for example staff grievances or tenant complaints

**In order to achieve these desired outcomes:**

agreements that clearly state client's rights and responsibilities:	applicants and tenants have realistic expectations of the services the organisation can deliver and understand their rights and responsibilities
providing services to specified standards:	by adherence to written and publicly available policies and procedures
providing accountability mechanisms:	such as complaints and appeals systems that are effective and accessible
Effective service evaluation and planning:	through client satisfaction surveys, consultative meetings, informal client comments and suggestions etc.

**Service standards require staff to act with:**

reliability:	consistency of performance and dependability eg. keeping to advertised office hours and attending appointments on time;
responsiveness:	willingness, readiness and timeliness eg. showing interest and facilitating the most appropriate and effective solutions;
competence:	possession of the required skills and knowledge; accessing available training and support, and referring matters to senior staff if they are outside your expertise to deal with;
courtesy:	being polite and treating applicants and tenants with dignity;
appropriate communication:	listening and using language that is appropriate and understandable
credibility:	providing information about the service that accurately reflects what is available;
understanding:	making an effort to understand underlying needs eg. how a situation of domestic violence might affect a tenant's pattern of rent payment;

Source: Queensland Government Agent Program Standards Manual 1994 and HATPIN Module 3

Declaration

I have read and I understand the Statements of Code of Ethics, Equal Opportunities and the Code of Conduct and I agree to abide by and to implement these statements.

Signed on ..... day .....Month..... Year  
.....

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Position: .....

Date: .....

Signature of witness: .....

Witnessed by : .....

Position: .....

Date: .....

## **PART 10: TENANT RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION**

Objective: To ensure that tenants are able to participate in decisions concerning the management of the organisation and their tenancy.

The Co-op supports the rights of tenants to be involved in the Co-op and will seek the views of its tenants on matters that affect them

### **General Statement on Tenant Rights**

- All tenants have the right to fair and non-discriminatory treatment and to be treated with respect.
- All tenants will be provided with appropriate information about the activities of the Co-operative at the commencement of, and throughout their tenancy.
- All tenants will have the right to participate in the activities of the Co-op, as well as the right to decline to participate.
- We will always abide by the terms and conditions of the Residential Tenancy Act and any other relevant legislation designed to protect the rights of tenants.
- Tenants will have security of tenure within the guidelines of their Residential Tenancy Agreement, our policies and procedures and CHD funding guidelines.

### **Confidentiality & Privacy**

We will abide by all relevant state and federal privacy legislation and, except where specific consent is given for release of information to other parties, we will maintain the confidentiality and privacy of tenants in all matters relating to their tenancy. The only persons who will have access to tenant files or tenant information will be:

- Staff
- The tenant
- The full Board of Directors in limited circumstances (e.g. disputes/ serious breaches of policy that may lead to termination of the tenancy)
- External support agencies or individuals where the tenant has consented to the provision of information being given to that agency
- The Department of Housing where the tenant has consented to exchange of information.

Tenants may access their own files at any time by giving reasonable notice. Copies of any information held on their files shall be provided to tenants unless the provision of information may compromise the confidentiality of third parties – in such circumstances staff will rely on the principles of The NSW Freedom of Information legislation to determine access.

Tenants will be provided with a written statement about privacy when they sign up to become a tenant and will be asked to sign a form agreeing that they have sighted the statement and understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to privacy.

### **Exclusions to this Confidentiality Policy**

The only time that we shall disclose information about a tenant without their explicit consent is when we are legally obliged to do so (e.g. to Centrelink following formal request or as directed by a Court Order) or in circumstances whereby we have a duty of care to do so (e.g. notification to Department of Community Services).

#### **Board Access to Information**

Board members shall only be given access to a tenant's information where this is acceptable under the Privacy legislation or where a tenant has consented to the release of information. Generally, the only circumstances where information about tenants will be released to the Board of Directors is:

- At a disputes and appeals resolution meeting where the tenant has consented to release of information.
- Where required under law or where there are reasonable grounds (e.g. duty of care) for information to be disclosed.

### **Information about Rights**

Where there are legislative or policy changes which may affect tenants rights, tenants will be advised through our website; the quarterly newsletter and notices placed in the office

### **Tenant Involvement**

We are committed to tenant involvement and will promote the interests of tenants and those in the community who seek and require access to affordable rental housing. We acknowledge however, that there are barriers to participation and Metro will seek to implement strategies to support tenants to give their views or become involved.

We recognize that many tenants may choose not to participate in the Co-op. This right is respected and it is recognized that participation is a voluntary activity.

### **Volunteers**

The co-op welcomes tenants who volunteer their services. Volunteering can provide opportunity for tenants to develop skills and confidence. We recognize our obligation to provide volunteers with meaningful work that involves clearly defined tasks, appropriate training, and ongoing evaluation.

External volunteers (that is non tenants) are not used at the Co-operative.

Student and work experience placements will be considered on a case by case basis by the Manager.

### **Provision of Information to Tenants**

We encourage the involvement of tenants in the planning, delivery, evaluation and review of our services. The Co-operative will ensure that tenants have the opportunity to participate in decisions concerning the management of the Co-operative and of its tenancies. Tenants will be kept well informed of the operations and policies of the Co-operative by:

- The production of a quarterly newsletter for tenants.
- Ensuring that policies and procedures are fully explained to tenants
- Making documents about the policies and procedures of the Co-operative publicly available (ie on our website).
- Allowing tenants the right to make reasonable decisions about the management of their own dwelling;
- Formal feedback through satisfaction surveys, evaluations, suggestion boxes, etc.
- Encouraging informal feedback from tenants Providing opportunities for input into formal consultations

### **Resourcing**

Metro will:

- Meet the costs of the Tenant meetings, e.g. mailouts, meeting costs & training
- Provide administrative support, e.g. minutes and agenda typing, record keeping, mailing, preparation of newsletters, etc
- Provide background papers and other documents
- Provide information and assistance in relation to meeting procedures, planning, priority setting, roles of office bearers, member responsibilities, etc as required
- Ensure staff attendance at meetings
- Assist with the development of suitable training opportunities for individual members where appropriate

### **Strategies to Involve Tenants**

1) Support of the Social Housing Tenant's Network

2) Assistance to attend Board Meetings

3) Open Board meetings

Tenants are invited to at least one Board meeting each year and are informed that meetings are open to tenants to attend whenever they wish upon request to the Board of Directors.

4) Tenant Newsletter/Social events - tenants will be encouraged to contribute to the newsletter and to make suggestions for or organise social events. Surveys will ask tenants for feedback about areas of interest/concern.

#### 5) Communication with Board members

There will be at least one event each year where tenants will be invited to meet the staff and Board of Directors – this will generally coincide with the Annual General Meeting. Our website will include e-mail addresses for tenants to contact Board members directly.

#### 6) Tenant Survey

We will survey tenants bi-annually to ensure that our services are meeting tenants' needs.

#### 7) Training/Information provision

All tenants will be given a Tenant Manual with information about our policies and can view our Policies & Procedures online or request a copy.

We will ensure our office is accessible for people with a disability and is close to public transport (See Policy Occupational Health & Safety). The office will be physically accessible to tenants on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm; on Wednesdays from 1 to 4pm and on Fridays by appointment.

Phones will be answered everyday between 9.30am and 5pm. If for any reason the office is unattended or staff members are unable to personally answer calls an answering machine will allow clients to leave messages. As a minimum the phone message shall include details for tenants about emergency repairs

### **Communication**

We will ensure that:

- All non-translated written information such as letters, newsletters, etc will be written in clear English.
- All written policies and procedures will be available to any person upon request.
- Where staff write letters to tenants whose first language is not English, a multilingual advisory sheet "This is an important document" will be enclosed with the correspondence.
- Key tenant information will be translated into appropriate community languages.

#### Access to publications/information

We do not have the resources to have all our publicly available information translated into community languages. However, where tenants have been identified with special communication needs (e.g. inability to read English or illiteracy) arrangements will be made to ensure that any information is understood. Such arrangements may include:

- Liaison with welfare/referral services;
- Availability of the documentation in community languages if possible
- Use of interpreters (e.g. telephone interpreter service)
- To improve the access of people from non-English speaking backgrounds, professional interpreter services will be used wherever appropriate and possible.

Clients are welcome to bring friends, family or advocates of their choice to any meeting with the Co-operative but it is the preference of the Co-operative, wherever possible, to use professional interpreting services.

Where our tenants insist on the use of a non-professional interpreter known to the tenant, staff must be satisfied that the use of the interpreter selected by the client is in the best interests of the client.

## **PART 11: WORKING WITH OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Objective: To establish and maintain good working relationships, effective referral sources and support links with local organisations.

### **Referrals and Information**

The Co-op shall provide for its applicants and other clients, appropriate information and (where appropriate) referrals to relevant services. We will facilitate this by communicating with and actively working with local community support services, local government and government agencies with whom we share common clients.

### **Information about the Co-operative**

The Co-op shall distribute a copy of its Annual Report to relevant government and non-government agencies, and invite partner agencies to attend our Annual General Meeting.

### **Support Partnership Agreements**

Where the Co-op enters into a formal partnership with a support agency, both parties shall sign a formal, written agreement. Such an agreement shall outline the roles and responsibilities of both the housing provider and the support provider. The agreement shall include a review period and conflict resolution procedures.

All tenants housed through a Support Partnership Agreement shall be fully informed of their rights and responsibilities under the agreement, and shall be asked to sign a form acknowledging that they are aware of, and accept the conditions of the agreement.

### **Joint Ventures**

The Co-op shall develop joint venture partnerships where appropriate, and where a need has been established, with local community organisations. Request for new partnerships will be approved by the Board of Directors.

In all such partnerships, the above procedure must be followed.

### **Participation in Community Issues**

The Manager or delegated staff shall attend key forums and actively participate in, and promote the co-operative at such events. These will include local interagency meetings and specific working parties or client focused network groups.

### **Peak Organisations**

The Co-op shall be represented on key working parties organised by the peak Community Housing body, the N.S.W. Federation of Housing Associations.

Staff or board members will attend seminars, working groups, conferences etc. organised by the FoH and other peak housing bodies, and participate in the wider policy debate on social housing. Where relevant, the Co-op shall write submissions to Senate Inquiries etc. on behalf of its tenants and other clients.

## **PART 12: EVALUATION AND SERVICE REVIEW**

Objective: The co-operative is committed to monitoring and evaluating all aspects of service delivery that impacts on tenants, applicants and stakeholders. This will include regular review of our financial and administrative systems at board meetings, strategic planning; annual business planning and review of the Strategic and Risk management plans.

### **Policies and Procedures**

The Co-op shall review its policies, procedures and personnel systems every alternate year, either at a Board meeting, set aside specifically to endorse required policy changes, or at the annual planning day held in conjunction with the development of the Business plan.

### **Strategic and Risk Management Plans**

The Board will maintain a “rolling” 3- year Strategic Plan reviewed annually and a Risk Management Plan also reviewed annually

### **Business Plan**

The Board will meet annually to conduct a planning meeting to develop a yearly Operational Plan, as per Board Calendar of Activities. The Business Plan and Risk Management Plan will be reviewed quarterly or in response to changes in operating environment or organisational demands.

### **Local Community Partners**

Every two years the Co-op will survey, or use focus groups/meetings to seek feedback from community organisations about the quality of service we provide. Such reviews will be reported to the Board and recommendations to improve performance will be reflected in and implemented through the Business review process.

### **Tenants**

Tenants shall be consulted about service performance. The Co-op shall seek tenant feedback via:

- Tenant Surveys
- Newsletters
- Tenant Meetings

### **Maintenance (Cyclical)**

The Co-op will maintain a (minimum) Ten Year Cyclical Maintenance Plan, which will be 'rolled over' on an annual basis after the Asset Officer conducts inspections of all capital properties.

The Cyclical Maintenance Plan and expenditure shall be monitored and reviewed by the Manager and Board of Director's at least quarterly.

### **Contractors**

The Co-ops maintenance contractors' performance shall be monitored at least annually. Contractors shall be selected as 'approved' at least every two years and the insurance and licence details of contractors shall be updated annually.