



## Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Submission to Christchurch City Council

### **Submission on proposal for funding the Christchurch City Council Social Housing Portfolio**

#### **Responses to Questionnaire:**

##### **1. Preferred option:**

We do not support any of the proposed options; instead we support the option below.

##### **2. Other options:**

The ANZASW support the proposal presented by the Christchurch Labour MP's and Hon Jim Anderton that the government contribute \$50 million over 10 years to the cost of the replacement and upgrade programme. The rent increase could then be reduced to 10% with subsequent rental increase being 4.46% for 3 years and 3% thereafter. It is understood that senior council staff have a copy of this proposal.

##### **3. Should Council approach central Government to help fund social housing?**

There is significant precedent to this proposal. Since 1999 the Government has purchased the Auckland City Council's social housing stock to retain this in public ownership. The government is currently assisting the Wellington City Council to refurbish its social housing stock.

Since 2002, with the passing of the Local Government Act, councils have been explicitly expected to promote the social and cultural as well as environmental and economic well-being of their communities. (Council's Social Housing Strategy p 10)

Housing New Zealand, advocates a stronger role for local authorities in meeting housing need. The New Zealand Housing Strategy seeks a collaborative approach to meeting New Zealand's housing needs over the next 10 years and outlines ways that central and local government, iwi/Maori, Pacific groups and the wider housing sector can work together. (Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2005). For example the Housing Innovation fund, established in 2003 is administered by HNZN.

##### **4. Should the Council, as suggested by COSS form a joint working group to find solutions to funding challenges within social housing?**

**Yes.**

##### **Comments:**

It is hoped that the working group can fully explore all funding options, including assistance from Council rates and government assistance.

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ANZASW agree that for the City Housing portfolio to be sustainable, rents require modest increases. Also it is reasonable that tenants who enjoy lower rents can also make a small contribution to the building of new units for future generations.

However we would question the current 'rates neutral' policy in the long term. In terms of priorities we note that Council is able to afford the purchase of the Ellerslie Flower show and \$17million of inner city properties.

The Age Profile of Council's Housing Stock (Council's Social Housing Strategy Figure One) shows that during 1973 to 1980 when the Housing Corporation was providing grants and low-interest loans to local authorities, the Council had a vigorous building programme. When the low interest loans were discontinued, the number of units reduced significantly.

The Housing Asset Management Plan indicates that since the 1980's, capital expenditure has been funded from surpluses generated by rents. It follows that development in line with that of the sixties and seventies could only be undertaken by Council if affordable loans are again made available to City Housing – either from the Government or the retail loan market. A steady rate of development is likely to be required, firstly to maintain the current market share of social housing in a growing ageing population and secondly to prepare for the high number of units due for replacement from 2015.

We consider, however, that to address major issues such as the replacement of the housing stock from 2015 the "rates neutral" policy should be open to change if required.

### **5. Should the Council review its "Social housing Strategy"?**

ANZASW believe that the Council should review its social housing strategy.

The Council's policy as stated in 1999 was unequivocal: "That the Council in fulfilling its role as a housing provider seek to provide a referral service to social service and welfare agencies for tenants who require additional or ongoing assistance."

However since then Council's housing policy has appeared uncertain and to vacillate. Following the recent High Court decision the Mayor's Press statement indicated that the Council could reconsider its role in social housing.

Council's Social Housing Strategy Principles ((p. 26) states that Council has a leadership role in the provision and facilitation of social housing in Christchurch.



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The Roles for Council (p. 26) include:

- Service provision, e.g. shared waiting lists, head lease tenancies.
- Funding, e.g. accessing Housing Innovation Fund, and providing community grants.
- Construction of housing.
- Land provision or leasing.

However unfortunately these roles are not always matched by their objectives: (p 26) - for example:

- Strengthen relationships,
- Foster sustainable tenancies ,
- Develop partnerships work with other key stakeholders,
- Support a city wide collaborative housing strategy

We submit that Council should be clearer and more purposeful about its objectives as a provider of social housing, following its longstanding traditions.

### **6. Should the Council review its Social Housing “Cost of Consumption” model used to calculate future costs?**

### **7. Other comments**

Canterbury District Health Board and a wide range of NGO’s work with clients for whom housing availability or standards are issues. The CDHB provides services for the top 3% of people with mental health issues including clinical and non-clinical support. Access to amenities including adequate housing is a primary need and City Housing provides a good service in Christchurch. There is also a need for good maintenance of stock and to keep accommodation available when clients are admitted to inpatient services.

#### *Support Services*

The Housing Officers provide a good service, but tenants advise social workers that there are now fewer Activities Officers attached to the complexes than previously. It would be helpful if City Housing facilitated and developed more wrap around support services for their tenants (e.g. linking tenants in with appropriate mental health providers, social supports, Work and Income New Zealand, employment, health and childcare services). For tenancies to be sustainable, social connections need to be fostered, along with a sense of belonging.

There is further potential for Council to work in partnership with community organisations through support and funding to assist them with service provision. For example, social work support is likely to be needed for people, especially with the increase in numbers of older, isolated people who might



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remain in their homes in an increasingly frail state (the 'Ageing in Place' principle).

Social housing is also about ensuring the adequate support of essential ancillary services so that social housing delivers to its optimum level. Without these services Council's key outcomes for social housing cannot be achieved. Therefore there needs to be continuing support for those ancillary services because social housing alone will not resolve the issues.

### *Housing and Care for the Elderly*

59% of City Housing's residents are over 60 yrs (Social Housing Strategy p14 ) Currently 14% of population are aged 65+years, (43,329 in Christchurch 2001) but this number is likely to double by 2026 with major growth expected to occur in 2011.

This means a rising demand from an ageing population for more accommodation with large enough units for the disabled, walking frames, wheelchairs, mobility scooters and good vehicle access to units.

Ageing tenants is likely to mean more frail tenants. A decline in availability of rest home care will mean more demand for social housing.

ANZASW submits that it would be desirable to have a role for Social Workers in City Housing complexes to provide support and monitoring for older adults.

### **Background to ANZASW**

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional body for Social Workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. It was formed in 1964 and currently has approximately 3900 members. The ANZASW Canterbury Branch currently represents over 500 members and the organising committee prepared this submission. ANZASW is a not for profit membership based organisation and does not receive Government funding. Members work as Social Workers in a wide range of organisations and specialisations throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **ANZASW contact details:**

**Dominic Chilvers,**  
Executive Officer, ANZASW  
PO Box 14230, Christchurch 8544  
Phone: (03) 358 6920 Fax: (03) 358 9503

***Members of ANZASW would welcome the opportunity to speak to the points raised in this submission at a hearing.***