



POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL



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An amendment has been made to the Transitional Tenancies section, pages 14 to 15.

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 are automatically entitled to apply for membership 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 and provide information outlining how their membership "will advance the interests of the co-operative". Members can apply as an individual or as a representative for an organisation, and they must reside in NSW. Members must be over eighteen years of age to hold office or vote. Each member is entitled to one vote only.

Members must also meet the "active membership" provisions to retain membership. This requires members to attend the Annual General Meeting or one board meeting per annum. If members do not meet this criteria they will be removed from the membership list after two years.

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).

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:

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

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, Risk and Audit – 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. To ensure that Risk Management plans are appropriate to the scale and operations of the organisation and appropriate preventive and remediation strategies are in place to manage risks that may affect the operations or financial viability of the organisation. This Sub-committee will include the Treasurer, Chairperson and Manager.
- Policy – board members will be delegated 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 generally review policies every two years. The relevant board member will ensure processes are in place to consult with tenants/stakeholders in relation to

significant changes. Policy changes or new policies will be brought to the full BOD for endorsement.

- 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>

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 relation to transitional tenancies. For further information about the common waiting list eligibility criteria please refer to:

www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au.

Supported Transitional Tenancies

Approximately 30% of Metro tenancies are offered through the Supported Housing Program, for a period of up to two years. These allocations are managed separately from the NSW Housing Register. Suitable clients are nominated by support providers who have entered into a partnership agreement with Metro Community Housing. The nominations are then assessed through a collaborative process involving the support agency and Metro Community Housing.

Suitability for the Supported Housing program is assessed with the following criteria:

- Client has an urgent need of housing
- Client meets the income eligibility criteria for Housing NSW
- Client has the capacity to sustain independent living
- Appropriate support arrangements are in place to meet the needs of the client
- Appropriate risk assessments done.

It is a requirement that clients housed through the transitional housing have a negotiated, mutually agreed support plan and continue to engage with their support provider as per the support plan agreements.

Where tenants disengage from support, or the provider determines that they are no longer able to continue to support that person, the tenant will be issued a '90 days no grounds' termination notice. Clients will be required to sign an agreement at the beginning of their tenancy outlining the terms of this agreement.

Offers of housing will be made for an initial fixed-term period of three months and the maximum term of a Transitional Housing tenancy will generally be for 24 months (see below).

Supported Housing Clients must make a social housing application through Housing Pathways no later than 60 days after the commencement of their tenancy.

Where tenants are not approved for the Housing Register they will be served either a 90 days "no grounds" termination notice or a termination notice for the end of the fixed term lease, and advised in writing that their tenancy has been ended as they do not meet Housing NSW/Community Housing eligibility criteria.

Tenants who are "priority" approved on Housing Pathways will be offered a two year lease but if a client who is "priority approved" 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 continue to house those clients pending an offer of permanent housing through Housing Pathways.

Tenants who are not priority approved will be offered tenancies for periods ranging from 6 – 18 months, unless they are a full time student, aged 25 or under, and able to provide proof of their enrolment/continuing attendance in a tertiary or vocational course.

In these cases the young person will generally be allowed to remain in a transitional tenancy until they have completed their tertiary or vocational course.

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.

Establishing and Maintaining Tenancies

All offers of permanent housing to applicants will be made in accordance with the state-wide Housing Pathways offers policy. 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.

Allocation Policy

Metro Housing aims to promote successful and sustainable tenancies by matching clients to properties that:

- Are large enough for the client's household
- Meet any special needs of the client so far as these are known and appropriate evidence provided to Metro about these special needs (ie a letter from support provider or specialist medical practitioner).
- Assists the client to access specialist support services they utilise on a regular basis
- Makes the best use of available housing stock.

Matching a client to a property

Type of Property	Client	Additional comments/evidence requirements
Modified properties – properties modified to cater for the needs of a tenant with a disability	Clients who have demonstrated a need for a modified property	Minor modifications - Medical Assessment form completed by the client's doctor. Major modifications – an Occupational Therapists report on required specifications
Ground Floor property	Clients who have demonstrated a need for a ground floor property	Medical Assessment form completed by the client's doctor. Age of tenant also considered.
Properties with yards or a garden	Clients who have demonstrated a need for a property with a backyard and have confirmed their willingness to be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of lawns and gardens	Clients who have a demonstrated need for a companion animal or clients with supporting evidence regarding the behavioural needs of any children in their care to support need for a backyard/external area.

Accommodating Children:

We will consider the age and sex of children in the household when determining a household's bedroom entitlement as per these criteria:

Situation		Entitlement
Over 18 years		Considered to be an adult so entitled to a separate bedroom
Shared bedroom	Same sex children up to 18 years. Male and female children under 10 year of age.	Can be expected to share a bedroom
Children need their own bedroom	Client has demonstrated a need for additional bedroom due to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large age gap between the children• There are behavioural factors supported by documented evidence	Will be allocated separate bedrooms
Shared Custody	Client has shared custody of the child/children for more than 3 days per week	Normal bedroom entitlements apply
Access Visits	Child/children stay with client for less than 3 days per week	Child not considered to be part of household and not entitled to a separate bedroom unless further evidence of need for an extra bedroom is provided.
Future Needs	Child/children will need separate bedrooms in less than 2 year	Metro will take this into consideration when allocating properties but will make decision on case by case basis according to the size and type of housing available in the requested area.

Locational Need: Tenants applying for an internal transfer are approved for a transfer to an *Allocation Zone*, not a specific suburb.

Requests for transfers to a specific suburb will be considered in light of a demonstrable need to reside within that suburb and the need for Metro to contain expenditure on rents.

Requests to be transferred to a specific suburb will be considered in light of:

- a) *A demonstrated need to access specialist support, educational, or medical services that cannot be easily reached from outside that suburb/surrounding suburbs. Tenants will need to provide evidence about this. Metro staff can provide information about the type of evidence that will be required.*
- b) *Affordability of rents in that suburb*
- c) *The availability of suitable properties in that suburb*
- d) *Affinity with and long term connections to that suburb*

Offers of Housing

Where Metro has a vacant property (properties) within the allocation zone for which the tenant is approved these will be offered to the tenant first. Tenants will be made two reasonable offers within that allocation zone. Refusal of two offers that are considered suitable will mean that the tenant is removed from the transfer list.

Where Metro does not have an available property, the tenant will be given permission to search for a suitable property within the allowable budget for each property type and in accordance with Allocation Policy (page 18) regarding bedroom size entitlements:

The budget caps for properties is:

Studio units:	\$400.00
One-bedroom units:	\$450.00
Two-bedroom units:	\$520.00
Two-bedroom houses:	\$550.00 (tenants will be approved for houses, i.e. properties with yards or garden, as per the Allocation Policy (page 18))
Three-bedroom houses:	\$650.00

Metro staff will undertake this task if the tenant is unwilling or unable to do so. The tenant must view the property before an application is submitted for it. This means the tenant must be contactable and available to view properties at short notice.

Reasonable Grounds for Refusal of an Offer

A tenant can reasonably refuse an offer of a property if it does not conform with the property type, property size or allocation zone for which the tenant has been approved.

If the tenant's circumstances have changed or if they wish to present additional evidence in support of their need for a property type, size or location which differs from the property type for which they were originally approved, Metro will allow them 21 days in which to provide this information in the case of 1st offers or 7 days in the case of 2nd offers.

Not meeting the tenant's personal preferences for a property does not constitute reasonable grounds for refusal. The type of things that would be considered to be personal preferences include:

- Preferences about building materials – ie want property made of brick, with tiled roof etc
- Wanting gas, not electricity (or vice versa)
- Wanting a bathtub not a shower
- Wanting to be matched to a property of the basis of the needs of a pet
- Not liking the neighbourhood
- Wanting carpets not wooden floors (or vice versa).

Tenants/applicants can present evidence from a specialist medical practitioner where there is a medical reason (such as asthma aggravated by dust) why they should not live in carpeted properties.

Appealing Decisions

If a tenant/applicant believes we made a wrong decision they should ask for a formal review of the decision. To do this a tenant or applicant needs to complete an Appeals form stating why they disagree with the decision. A copy of our Appeals and Complaint Policy is available from our office or can be downloaded from our website at www.metrohousing.org.au

If a tenant/applicant is unhappy with the outcome of an appeal to Metro they can lodge a second tier approval with the **Housing Appeals Committee**.

The Housing Appeals Committee is an independent agency that review certain decisions made by Community Housing providers and Housing NSW. For information about the Housing Appeals Committee, call 1800 629 794 or go to www.hac.nsw.gov.au

Timeframes for Accepting/refusing an offer

- Tenants/applicants will have 72 hours to view a property once an offer has been made.
- Once the property has been viewed, tenants/applicants will have 72 hours to confirm whether they wish to accept or refuse the offer.
- Once the tenant/applicant has accepted the offer they have 5 working days to sign the lease for the property
- Metro tenants transferring from one of our properties to another will have 7 working days to complete their move, clean the property and complete the outgoing inspection with their Housing Worker.

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 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.

Where a tenant in receipt of Commonwealth benefits as their primary source of income and does not have sufficient funds to pay 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 pay at a minimum contribution of one week's (rebated rent) towards their bond at the time they sign their lease and 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 by the requested date (generally four weeks after rent review letters are sent out) 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 30 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. This number cannot be exceeded.

Additional Occupants

Tenants are required to complete an “Additional Occupant Declaration Form” to advise us if another person moves into the property. Tenants may have visitors for periods of up to three weeks without declaring that person as an additional occupant. Any person who resides at the premises for longer than three weeks is considered an additional occupant and must be declared for rent assessment purposes.

The head tenant (the person who has signed the lease) is responsible for ensuring that

- 1) Income details, or a written consent for us to download Centrelink income details for the additional occupant are provided to Metro.
- 2) The correct rent is paid to Metro once an additional occupant has been declared.

Whilst additional occupants may choose to set up direct payments to Metro for their share of the rent, and this is strongly encouraged, we are unable to take enforcement action for non-payment of rent by additional occupants. It is therefore the responsibility of the head tenant to ensure that the correct rent is paid and failure of additional occupants to pay their correct share of the rent will not be accepted as a reason not to take action against the head tenant to recover the rental arrears.

Failure to provide timely advice about additional occupants constitutes rental fraud and may result in

- 1) The tenant no longer considered eligible for a rental rebate and required to pay market rent.
- 2) Market rent being backdated to the date the additional occupant commenced residing at the property
- 3) Action being taken to terminate the tenancy.

Tenants will not be approved for an internal transfer based on overcrowding or the need for an additional bedroom as a result of having an additional occupant.

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. Tenants must seek permission for any absences over six weeks. Rent must continue to be paid through Centrelink direct deduction where Centrelink payments are not discontinued/suspended during the person's absence (ie a person on Newstart/Youth Allowance/Abstudy will have payments suspended if not meeting reporting obligations. Where Centrelink payments are suspended rent must be 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).

Tenants will only be approved for absences if these are for a period no greater than 12 months over a five year period.

Tenants must identify an agent who will act on their behalf during their absence. This may be an existing household member but if person is not already recorded as an additional occupant the tenant will need to apply to have them listed as an additional occupant for any period over 28 days.

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:

Housing Worker or Manager will write to client explaining reasons for decision and issue client with a 90 days “No Grounds” Notice to Terminate. When a property has been sold or at the end of the fixed term agreement 30 days notice will be given.

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.

New lease is signed. New lease will reflect conditions of previous lease (i.e. fixed term or ongoing).

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, or where Metro has been required to obtain NCAT order for termination/vacant possession due to tenant’s failure to vacate by end of notice period).

Requests will be considered on their merits taking into account the tenant’s circumstances but normally Metro will pay the following contributions:

- 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 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 had no CTTT orders made against them in the previous 12 months
- 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 level of need and urgency. Approved transfers will be assessed as either a wait-turn transfer or priority transfer. Priority Transfers include:

- ‘at risk’ situations
- Family breakdown
- Severe overcrowding
- Conflict management (ie where disputes between neighbours cannot be resolved)
- 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 outcomes/quality of life)

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:

- Complete *Tenant Transfer Request* form and attach copy of evidence
- 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.
- New lease is signed. New lease will reflect conditions of previous lease (i.e. fixed term or ongoing).
- Client is responsible for organising and paying for removalist in the case of Tenant Initiated Transfer.

Number of Offers

Tenants approved for a transfer will be made two reasonable offers of housing. A reasonable offer is considered to be a property 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

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 properties targeted to specific client groups/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.

Part 3: ASSET MANAGEMENT

Objective: This policy is to ensure that tenants reside in properties in a reasonable state of repair, that a prompt and effective maintenance service is offered to our tenants, and that we take all possible measures 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 2011 our property portfolio consisted of 92 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	31	32%
2 b/r houses	8	7.5%
3 b/r houses	15	14%
4 b/r houses	2	2.5%
5/6 b/r houses	4	5%

Repairs and Maintenance

General standards for all tenancies: In accordance with Clause 18 of the Residential Tenancy Agreement

- We will make sure that the residential premises are reasonably clean and it to live in (Clause 18.1).
- We will maintain the property in a reasonable state of repair, considering the age of, the rent paid for and the prospective life of the property (Clause 18.3).

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 SR Construction in the case of emergencies. SR 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)

Upon advise of required maintenance/repairs, enter repair onto Tenant Management System, generate work order and e-mail and/or fax work order to the Real Estate Agent or landlord and request repair. Note any requirement for work to be undertaken in accordance with timeframes for urgent repairs under the Residential Tenancy Agreement (Clause 19). Place copy of work order in property file.

Written work order requests should be followed up with the managing agent/owner by telephone.

If staff cannot reach the Real Estate Agent/Landlord, or agents are unable to arrange the repair within 24 to 48 hours, Metro staff should organise a suitably qualified tradesperson from the list of contractors to do repairs up to cost \$1000 and forward a request for reimbursement to the agent/Landlord within 14 days (in accordance with Clause 19.1 of the Residential Tenancy Agreement).

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.

All leases will provide the contact details for after hours repairs as provided by the managing agent/owner. The Metro answering service will advise tenants to consult their lease for after hour emergencies.

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 prospective properties to be picked up by Metro will be inspected by either a Housing Worker or our Assets Officer before Metro signs the Residential Tenancy Agreement to headlease a leasehold property.

All properties will be inspected annually (generally in response to advise of annual inspections to be undertaken by the managing agent/owner) and a written record kept on the property file.

Any required maintenance identified 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 Metro 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, 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 working smoke alarms
- be in a reasonable condition (reasonably clean and fit to live in as per the Residential Tenancy Act)
- be available for a minimum period of 12 months with a continuation clause (but wherever possible be for a minimum period of 2 years)
- 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. Any agreements to undertake work will be noted on the ingoing condition report and an agreement reached about the timeframe for such work to be completed.
- Include any agreed additional terms (e.g. permission for pets, payment of water usage, responsibility for 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.

Metro Community Housing acquires the majority of leasehold properties through real estate agencies but we are also offered properties for lease by private owners.

In order to avoid any potential conflict of interest, if the owner of the property is known by any Metro director or staff member then that acquisition will be referred to the Finance and Audit sub-committee (or to two other board members if the property owner is known by a member of the Finance/Audit sub-committee).

The acquisition of any property where the rent charged is more than 10% above the Rental Bond Board median for that respective quarter will also be referred to one member of the Finance/Audit sub-committee for approval.

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.

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.

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 to ensure the ongoing financial viability of the organisation. The Co-op will ensure the following processes 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
- Effective arrears and debt management processes

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, Audit and Risk Sub-committee, the Manager and the Co-operative's Accountant and will ensure compliance with our funding guidelines. The board will monitor financial performance against the budget on a monthly basis.

Finance, Audit and Risk Sub-Committee

No less than three Directors (one of whom shall be the 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 FAR Sub-Committee shall report back to the Board when decisions have been made on financial management. The 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 financial requirements of the funding body and other relevant authorities are provided within the specific timeframes 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 independently 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 \$400,000.00

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

Expenditure delegations

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.

For any amount above \$10,000.00, at least 2 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 dockets 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.
- The accountant will notify to the Board of Directors (through the Treasurer) any increase over 5% in the monthly payments to landlords.

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, Audit and Risk 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 FAR 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. Significant items of correspondence will be tabled 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 between 9.30am and 5pm. . When staff are not present, an answering 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 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.

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:

- a) Mobile phone
- b) First aid kit (vehicle)
- c) Torch (vehicle)
- d) Up-to-date street directory

Property visits

Metro will maintain a sign-out registry and all staff who are conducting home visits will record the address to be visited, time of visit, expected time of return and the mobile number they can be reached on.

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

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 any potential risks, 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, which provides written information about the risks that have been identified, who they effect and how 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 policies of the housing association. All policies will be publicly available.

All new Board members shall receive a 'Director's Kit' that outlines information relating to the history, structure and responsibilities of Metro Community Housing. All board members 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 relevant peak bodies or not for profit recruitment services. Advertisements will include: job title, responsibilities, selection criteria, hours of work, pay rate, 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 perform work in accordance with written job descriptions which clearly define their roles and responsibilities. Metro will prepare job specifications 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
- Sexual orientation or preference

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 confirming they have read and understood their obligations and responsibility to behave in organisation with organisational expectations.

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 requires the observance of legal and moral standards as agreed by the organisation and observance of best practice guidelines endorsed by the wider sector.

Legal awareness

All staff must be familiar with current Residential Tenancy legislation and aware of the requirements of relevant Anti-Discrimination legislation in their dealings with applicants and tenants. The Manager and all Board members must be familiar with and comply with relevant incorporation, company and employment legislation.

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 party/ies 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 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

As a not for profit organisation with *Public Benevolent* status, Metro Community Housing can receive donations. It is extremely important however 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 \$20.00 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

Fraud and Corruption Policy

Metro Community Housing is entrusted by government, the community and our tenants to manage its services and assets prudently and fairly. To ensure we meet these obligations, the organisation has a total no-tolerance approach to fraudulent or corrupt behaviour.

All board and staff members must ensure they are aware of their individual and organisational responsibilities to guard against fraud and corruption, to act at all times in a manner that will not negatively impact on the integrity or reputation of the organisation, and to behave in an ethical, manner at all times when performing their duties or when representing the organisation.

It is the responsibility of the Management and Board to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to assist in the prevention and early detection of fraudulent behaviour or corrupt conduct.

Definition of Fraud

Fraud is a deliberate or premeditated act which involves using deception to gain advantage

by a person in a position of trust or authority and includes

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

Examples of fraud:

- Accepting bribes or favours to gain or provide access to housing, preferential allocations, ie allocations that are not in accordance with internal or external policies or which provide benefits not available to all other tenants or applicants.
- Accepting bribes or favours to buy or lease certain properties
- Misappropriation of tenant rent or other payments
- Unauthorised use of organizational assets such as mobiles, computers, premises or other facilities.
- 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

Fraud and Corruption Prevention Plan

While no organisation can ever be immune from potential fraud, Metro Community Housing has put in place mechanisms to monitor and control those areas where fraudulent or corrupt behaviour can present significant risks to the organisation. These include.

- Clear guidelines articulating what constitutes a conflict of interest and strategies to manage these
- A requirement that at the commencement of their employment or appointment to the board, staff and board members must sign a Code of Conduct confirming that they understand their obligations to not engage in any behaviours that may lead to actual instances of fraud or corrupt behaviour, or which may give the impression that they may be open to actions or behaviours which could constitute fraud or corruption.
- A requirement that all staff members, volunteers and board members sign an annual declaration that they are aware of their responsibility to always operate with the highest level of probity
- Clear guidelines on acceptance of donations and gifts and recording any donations or gifts that are acceptable within the guidelines in a Register which is made available to the auditor/external monitoring bodies.
- Having no less than four meetings per annum of the Finance, Audit and Risk subcommittee of the board. This subcommittee will be responsible for oversight which includes identifying potential areas of risk and implementing appropriate controls to manage those risks.
- Having an independent auditor undertake an annual audit
- Implementing all recommendations made by the auditor in relation to organisational processes and practices.
- Ensuring adequate segregation of duties – particularly of financial functions, and using verification procedures for all payments. These include:

Activity	Responsibility	Regularity
Bank account balances are viewed regularly	Accounts Officer, Accountant/Supervising Account (1 of these), and Manager	Daily
Cheque requisitions/payment vouchers prepared by 1 staff member/checked by another (neither of whom will be signatories or authorised to transfer funds through internet banking).	Accounts Officer, Accountant	Daily
All cheques/netbank transfers checked/signed by staff who have not prepared requisition/payment vouchers.	Manager and 1 BOD, or 2 directors	Weekly or as required.

Schedule of Leasehold rent payments made by bank transfer checked and approved	Delegated board member (member of FAR sub-comm)	Monthly
Variations of more than 5% for total leasehold rent over previous month reported to BOD	Supervising Accountant, FAR sub-committee	As required
Acquisition of leasehold properties at rate 10% or more above median referred to BOD	Manager, FAR sub-comm	As required
Bank reconciliations are prepared and independently reviewed	Accountant/Treasurer	Monthly
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 FAR sub-committee	Quarterly
Supporting documentation is appropriately filed (ie cheque requisition forms)	Accounts Officer 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 tax payments	Accountant prepares payroll payment instructions. Payments made by Netbank transfer by Manager and Supervising Acct.	Fortnightly
The accountant securely maintains information and records relating to payroll matters	Accountant	Fortnightly

Requirement to disclose fraud or corrupt conduct

A staff or board member who suspects fraud or corrupt conduct must 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**.

If the suspected fraud or corrupt conduct involves **the CEO**, then it to be reported to the **Chairperson**. This can be done through the e-mail board@metrohousing.org.au

Where neither option is practical contact should be made with:

- The Registrar of Community Housing,
- The CEO of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations

Requirement to report matters to the Registrar of Community Housing

It is a requirement that the Registrar must be notified of any matters that may present a reputation risk to the organisation. Further information is available on the website of the Registrar. www.rch.nsw.gov.au. Further information is also set out in the Metro “Whistleblower” Policy.

Processes for 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 (if a staff or board member)
- Action to terminate a tenancy (if tenant)
- Cancellation of current contracts and reporting the matter to relevant regulatory or investigative bodies (if a contractor/supplier)
- Police prosecution (depending on the nature and seriousness of the matter).

Whistle-blower Policy

This policy aims to ensure that staff and directors can raise concerns 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, and places an obligation on these parties 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.

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 and actions taken to address the problem.

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 or not 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

Equal Opportunities Policy

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, and exercise fair and 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.

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

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 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 dayMonth..... 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 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 or the NSW Police 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 of Child at Risk 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

- Ensuring two Metro tenants are appointed to represent the organisation on The Social Housing Tenant's Network
- Ensuring tenant representatives receive appropriate support and financial assistance where appropriate to fully participate in network activities
- Assistance for tenants to attend Board Meetings (ie childcare/transport costs reimbursed)
- 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 upon request to the Board of Directors.
- 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.
- 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 the Chairperson directly.
- Tenant Survey - We will use an independent organisation to survey tenants annually to ensure that our services are meeting tenants' needs.
- Training/Information provision - All new tenants will be given a Tenant Manual with information about our policies.
- Our Policies & Procedures are available online or by request.

We will ensure our office is accessible for people with a disability and is close to public transport. 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 and information presented at the Annual General 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.

Policy and Procedure Amendments:

Date	Page	Subject	Reason	Authorised
Nov 2011	4	Membership of the Co-operative	Clarify the Active Membership provisions	BOD at AGM
March 2014	23	Bond payments for new/continuing tenants	All tenants (including in shared tenancies) to pay 4 weeks rebated rent. Clarify different arrangements for tenants in receipt of Centrelink benefits and waged tenants in relation to initial bond contributions/repayment	Manager
March 2014	30	Metro contribution to moving expenses	Confirm that tenants not eligible for contribution where move is a result of breach of lease and/or Metro was required to obtain NCAT order	BOD
Nov 2012	34	Acquisition of Leasehold properties	Improve risk management	BOD. Finance and Risk C/Tee
July 2011	44	Checks and Balances. Add item to advise Treasurer of variations of more than 5% in landlord rents	Fraud prevention strategy	BOD
Oct 2010	60	Reducing Risk of Fraud and Corruption	Fraud prevention strategy	BOD