



nsw Federation of
Housing Associations inc

Housing Associations Meeting
- Report -

Friday 20th August 2004
Medina Executive Sydney Central

Contents

1. Overview

2. Federation update

3. Sector discussion of registration system

4. Presentation of Certificate IV in Social Housing

5. Federation Strategic Plan

6. State Council composition and elections

7. Future sector development

- Government response to the inquiry
- Funding
- Information Technology (IT)

8. Rolling out registration

9. Feedback

10. Attendance

11. Next Housing Associations Meeting

1. Overview

The Federations' second housing associations' meeting for the year was held in Sydney at the Medina Executive Sydney Central on the 20th August. It was attended by 33 representatives from 27 housing associations across the state.

There was a full agenda with key sessions on registration and funding. There was a focus throughout the day on seeking input and advice from members. This input will inform the Federations' position and thinking on these issues.

Along with sessions on current sector issues, the meeting was also an opportunity for members to provide input into the Federation strategic plan and discuss State Council initiatives.

2. Federation update

(Presenter: Adam Farrar)

A full Federation update was sent to members prior to the meeting. The update outlines work that the Federation have been doing and plan to do in the coming year. It also discusses some key sector developments over that period.

Adam highlighted a number of key areas of work for the Federation. He started by noting the work that Federation staff and State Council did in moving premises of the Federation last financial year.

State Council

One of the key initiatives of State Council was in developing the Federation Strategic Plan. This involved the State Council examining their relationship with the sector and ways of engaging with members. As part of this, the session on State Council composition and elections session later in the day discussed options for looking at the structure of State Council. State Council is continuing to look at their relationship with the sector and ways of more directly engaging with it.

Sector Coordination

A major part of the work the Federation does is sector coordination. The Conference held in May was the main piece of work in this area. Adam mentioned that the feedback on that from the sector was good. While there will be no conference in the coming year the Federation will be conducting a number of seminars on a range of current issues. Along with the ongoing sector coordination activities such as regional meetings and housing association meetings, one initiative the Federation is developing is the Housing Associations Directors Network. It is hoped that this will facilitate direct peer support between directors.

Advocacy

Adam noted that the Federation had heard members' expectations of its roll in advocating on issues of concern for the sector, most notably on concerns around registration. Adam acknowledged the work that Jenny Stewart and

Lesley Oatley had done as sector representatives on the registration working group. The advocacy role of the Federation was described as one of coordinating and opening the door to government for the sector to advocate. The approach to this housing associations' meeting was one of providing the opportunity for the sector to do this directly with the Office.

Along with registration, the Federation had worked with the Department and the ministers' office in ensuring that the important issues considered as part of the Community Housing Inquiry were progressed. Other areas of advocacy included undertaking relationship building with developers in affordable housing new release areas.

Federation training

Adam mentioned that the Federation is currently up for re-accreditation as a Registered Training Organisation. He noted that training is becoming more difficult to deliver due to barriers around distance and getting training out to people. The importance of ensuring the financial viability of delivering training in regional areas was stressed. The Federation is also looking at developing distance training to try to address this. The Federation is also looking at ways of expanding our training market so that we have more of a capacity to deliver training. We have been reviewing our training to ensure that it is the best that it can be and that it continues to meet the needs of the sector. Of particular note has been the asset management training which has used the expertise of the sector to develop and deliver.

Discussion

A number of general comments were made and questions asked in relation to the Federation Update, particularly around the advocacy role of the Federation.

One member asked why in view of the new OCH complaints policy, external appeals system and accreditation is the Code of Practice still operating. Adam mentioned that it allows a wide range of people to complain. Also, as adoption of it is voluntary and it was developed by the sector, it is a statement by the sector of the standards that it upholds. However, he mentioned also that the ongoing role of the Code will be reviewed this year in view of the changed environment from when it was developed.

Another member suggested that if the sector wants the Federation to play more of an advocacy role, the sector might need to look at ways to fund the Federation so that it is less reliant on funding from OCH. Adam explained that the advocacy role is already cross subsidised from other sources within the Federation. The more the Federation is supported through other funds, the more we can do in relation to advocacy.

Another member mentioned that they had been talking with the Australian Services Union around Occupational Health and Safety issues related to working conditions that the sector is faced with. The Union is prepared to lobby on behalf of the sector if the sector is prepared to join together to lobby on the issue. Adam asked if this was a proposal for the Federation to run a campaign with the union around staffing and working conditions to take to State Council. This was agreed and a sector working group was proposed to look at the issue. A number of members indicated a willingness to join the

group including Jenny Stewart (The Housing Trust), Jason Emmins (South West Community Housing), Barb McKenna (MACH) and John Musumeci (Upper Hunter Tenancy Scheme).

Action: The Federation will work with this group and the Australian Services Union to develop a campaign on sector working conditions.

3. Sector discussion of registration system

(Facilitator: Adam Farrar)

This session was an opportunity for providers to discuss the Performance Based Registration System (PBRs) as a sector prior to the afternoon registration session. Key points from the discussion appear below.

Sector representatives who were on the registration working group indicated that they were not happy with the finalised Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

A major concern of members was that housing associations may not have the necessary IT to collect the data and would be penalised because they couldn't supply it. The point was made that registration cannot work unless the sector has IT, staff and time resources to provide the information. The suggestion was that if the sector cannot provide the data that they just say that they can't until they have the necessary IT to do so. In that case, schemes would need to have a clear idea of whether they can provide the data or not.

There was a strong feeling among members that retrospective data cannot be provided. The issue of whether associations would receive their funding in the future if they didn't provide the data was raised as a critical concern. It was suggested that the sector could ask for a period for organizations to investigate whether they can comply with the data collection requirements.

One member expressed concern that a lot of KPIs are qualitative raising the issue of how the sector can be sure that they are evaluated consistently. The point was made that the system cannot be a heavy inspection model and that it must use information collected through accreditation. One member suggested that the sector should only agree to the roll out of registration if there is an assurance forthcoming from OCH that funding is not going to be affected and until IT is in place.

4. Presentation of Certificate IV in Social Housing

Adam Farrar presented Kirston Pike from Inverell Community Tenancy Scheme with the Certificate IV in Social Housing which she had recently completed.

5. Federation Strategic Plan

(Presenter, facilitator: Adam Farrar)

A full briefing paper was distributed to members outlining the Federation Strategic Framework. The plan was developed in consultation with the sector by State Council. The purpose of this session was to gauge whether it reflected the sectors' input and priorities for the next 5 years and to seek their further input on the plan.

Adam outlined the process of consultation via a consultant at the February housing associations' meetings, through interviews and focus groups and a survey of members and other key stakeholders. Adam went through the Strategic and Tactical goals in the plan seeking input from members.

All members endorsed the draft Strategic Framework.

6. State Council composition and elections

(Presenter: Karen Andrew, Facilitator: Adam Farrar)

The briefing paper noted that State Council has been looking at ways that it can relate more effectively with members and involve members in State council initiatives. This has led them to consider how to increase the number of members who stand for State Council. This has also become more of a priority as a large number of State Council members complete their terms at the coming election.

Karen Andrew, who is on State Council, outlined the problems with the number of people that are willing to serve on State Council. Some of the issues contributing to this were mentioned, such as: the increased skill level required to be on State Council; a possible fear of public competition through the election process and; the time commitment, particularly as many providers are struggling to keep up with the work load in their own organisation. Karen pointed out that State Council is trying to address some of these issues. For example, by trialling teleconferences.

A further way of addressing these issues might be through changing the process for electing State Council members. This could encourage more to stand and ensure that the governance needs of the organisation are met.

Karen outlined some ways that this could be done:

- develop a selection criteria for nominees linked to the skills required to govern the organisation
- nominations for ordinary members only, with office bearers elected by State Council at the first meeting following the AGM
- nominations to be made in writing and address the selection criteria
- State Council to appoint a suitable qualified returning officer (or panel) to assess nominees against the criteria and check referees
- Hold a ballot at the AGM if there are more approved nominations than positions available.

Discussion

Karen then sought input from members on the above. While members did not endorse a particular model for changes, a number of suggestions were put forward as possible changes. These included: setting aside geographically based positions; setting aside specific skill based positions; encouraging sector board members to stand; and ensuring that changes do not make the process more complex.

Members proposed that State Council further explore the options available for changing the process for elections and composition of State Council.

Action:

State Council will further explore options to change the Rules of Association. These will be presented for sector wide debate and agreement on special resolutions at the February 2005 HAM. Resolutions will be accepted at the August 2005 HAM with a Special General Meeting to accept them. State Council will be elected in accordance with new Rules at the AGM in November 2005.

7. Future sector development

(Presenter: Lynne Ready, A/Executive Director, OCH. Facilitator: Adam Farrar)

Government response to the Inquiry

Adam introduced the session and pointed out that the government response to the inquiry had been largely non-committal. He noted that the timing of the release of the report was not conducive to the government responding in detail to the recommendations. At the time state cabinet were considering the sustainability of the social housing sector. Adam indicated that since its' release, the Federation had been working with the Minister and his advisors, Lynne Ready and the Department.

Adam then introduced Lynne Ready to outline what the Office is now looking at doing in view of the government response to the inquiry.

Lynne commented that the Inquiry was favourable to the community housing sector and the role it can play in social housing. All the findings and recommendations were supported by the Office and the Department.

Lynne then listed some of the actions that were underway which were recommendations in the Inquiry report such as: finalising the Performance Based Registration System; formulating a tenant participation policy; reviewing asset management programs; promoting formal support agreements; extending the Housing Appeals Committee to community housing; establishing Accreditation and Review as a separate function and; implementing a complaints handling policy.

Lynne went on to outline some priorities for the Office over the next 12 months that were recommendations in the report. These included:

- developing a strategic policy framework (SPF) in consultation with the sector to look at title, service delivery models and development of innovative services and tailored strategies to meet local needs;
- research roles and responsibilities of the private sector in community housing;
- development of regulatory framework and consider legislative changes;
- develop guidelines for tenants whose properties transfer from public to community housing;
- trial alternative rent modes (joint projects with Centre for Affordable Housing; and
- include crisis accommodation in the SPF.

Adam commented that it is good to see that the Office is acting on a number of recommendations and conveyed the importance of progressing the important recommendations such as those around title and legislation.

Funding

A briefing paper highlighting some of the key issues related to funding was distributed to members prior to the meeting. This session involved a brief presentation followed by discussion of the issues. Adam mentioned a number of these such as Capital contributions, transfers, staffing costs (particularly for small associations), dependence on fee for service work and the falling and unpredictable income streams. One member added that the funding formula and economies of scale are also critical issues when discussing funding. Another member conveyed that bed-sits cost a lot more to look after in terms of staff and maintenance and this needed to be taken into consideration.

Lynne Ready outlined what the Office plans look at as part of the funding review. She conveyed to members issues that the Office had identified late last year to inform the broad direction of the review. The Office is re-commencing work on the review over the coming months. This preliminary work looked at staff loading; leasehold maintenance allowance; allowance for leasehold vacancies and arrears; capital portfolio issues (including capital contribution and provisions for maintenance); and CHLP and Performance Management Framework consistency issues.

Discussion

One member asked that providers concerns are properly considered in the consultation process. Lynne mentioned that they are aiming to make it a process where everyone is engaged and OCH will speak to the sector about how best to do that.

One member asked when a timeframe would be in place. Lynne conveyed that the Office has mapped areas of what needs doing, started work on the timeframe with the first step being to form a sector working group and consult them as to what the process should be.

Adam reported that a number of small associations met to discuss the issues around funding prior to today's meeting and invited them to raise any issues. A representative from the group said that a working group of small associations had been formed. The representative then put forward a motion on behalf of the group.

The motion asked that:

'A working group be established to dialogue with the OCH on the issues affecting the viability of small associations and an invitation will be extended to the Federation to support and advocate on our behalf.'

Lynne welcomed the motion and undertook to consult with the group. She indicated that the Office is currently mapping out the key areas that they will look at for the review. It will then establish a consultation process with the

sector. It was agreed that the Federation would re-convene the CHLP review reference group to provide advice on the consultation. The Office is hoping to complete the review by end of financial year so that it is in place for the new financial year.

EOI

It was then asked what the process is for Expressions of Interest for growth. Lynne conveyed that the Office looks at priorities for certain areas noting that there is limited growth funding available for next year. It is therefore likely that there will be a limited EOI process. The Office is continuing work with public housing on a process for transfers.

A number of questions around registration, accreditation and how they affect funding followed. Lynne indicated that whether or not an association is currently accredited or registered will not affect funding, although it may in the future.

Information Technology (IT)

A briefing paper sent to members outlined the background on the push for an integrated housing management IT system along with the current state of play of IT development. It noted that the Federation has initiated a reference group to identify options for a system that would meet the sectors needs.

Adam introduced the session and mentioned that the capacity of providers to deliver the data required by for the registration system was a threshold issue for the sector in relation to registration. That is, if they do not have the IT to deliver the data, they cannot participate.

Lynne noted that there have been various attempts by the Office to procure IT funding for the sector all of which have been unsuccessful. With the Performance Based Registration System (PBRs) being rolled out, the issue is now on the agenda again and there is support within the Department and indicative funding for sector IT. However, Lynne reported that the first business case for part of those funds has been to develop an IT system in the Office to be used for the PBRs data. She noted that this has laid the basis for better understanding within the Department of the need for housing management IT systems. A second business case will be developed to fund this and she believes it has the best chance yet of success. OCH is aware that providers are in urgent need of IT. She noted that OCH will work with the Federation IT reference group on what a system should look like.

Discussion

One member commented that given that it is going to take some time, the Office should give an undertaking that the sector does not have to provide data for registration if it doesn't have adequate systems for it. Lynne answered that if providers are unable to collect data for registration because of IT issues, the Office will not expect them to spend a lot of their time collecting it. Another member suggested that the IT system they were currently using can't do what it needs to now let alone collect information for the Performance Based Registration System. There was general agreement

with this sentiment and concern about the strain that collecting data without adequate IT would place on providers resources.

8. Rolling Out Registration

(Presenters: David Firth, Manager, Performance Management Systems, Denise Dwyer. Senior Performance Officer. Facilitator: Adam Farrar)

A briefing paper describing the purpose of this session was distributed to members prior to the meeting. Also included was a summary of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and a Definition of Terms to inform members.

Denise began the session by outlining the guiding principals and goals of the Performance Based Registration System (PBRS), noting the benefits for the sector. She conveyed that the system will involve quarterly reporting and analysis of performance data; annual review of providers performance; registration grades awarded by Performance Management and Review Team (OCH); and internal and external appeal mechanisms to review and adjudicate registration decisions or disputes.

A range of factors that the Office had identified for successful implementation of the system were then discussed. Some of the key factors mentioned were: that 3 years will be devoted to trialling the new system; that no providers will be disadvantaged if they do not have adequate IT systems in place; that the Office will look beyond the statistical data to make a fair and balanced assessment of performance; that the KPIs and benchmarks will be reviewed periodically; that the Office will seek to improve the registration system on a continuous learning basis.

Denise then discussed the work in progress and next steps in the implementation process. Further work is currently being undertaken on the assessment methodology from which a paper will be distributed to providers for consultation. Preliminary work is underway to design training to be delivered in the coming months in preparation for participation in the PBRS in 2005. OCH is continuing work on an IT solution to facilitate data collection.

Discussion

One member asked whether the roll out of registration commenced this year. David conveyed that the delivery of training and finalising the assessment methodology were the first steps, along with developing the IT to collect the data. It was also noted that the first organisation would not be registered before July 2005.

Another member asked what the relationship is between the Performance Management Systems and accreditation and why the sector should bother with accreditation with a registration system in place that includes qualitative assessment. David answered that accreditation is the sectors' and is voluntary, whereas registration will be compulsory. He commented that each organisation would have to make that decision. One provider asked why accreditation data couldn't be used to tick some of the boxes for registration. David pointed out that accreditation is currently being reviewed and that

associations will have to give permission for information from accreditation to be disclosed.

Discussion then continued around the benchmarks, the difference between superior performance and sound performance. One member suggested that as a third of the KPIs were qualitative assessments they should use peer assessors as it would require strong operational knowledge. There was general consensus around this suggestion. David noted that the grading methodology hasn't been finalised and that some further thinking might be required around assessment. Denise reiterated that the benchmarks would only be a guide. Members felt that if the system has a benchmark then once it is passed it should be the end of assessing the organisation against that KPI.

Overall, there was much concern about the lack of appropriate IT for providers to collect the necessary data and the time that it would take to generate it without new IT systems. A number of providers conveyed that they were already under strain trying to deliver housing without the added burden of a cumbersome data collection process. David said that they would look at what cannot be delivered by organisations.

A list of key points raised was passed on to OCH. These were:

- that the timeframes need clarification;
- that peer evaluators should be used to enable qualitative assessment;
- that registration should draw on and not duplicate accreditation;
- that the KPIs should be reviewed now;
- that KPI 7.2 is internally inconsistent;
- that the benchmarks (eg 2%) do not work for small associations
- the 'benchmarks' should either be used as benchmarks (ie if an organisation meets a benchmark, then they are assessed as successful for that KPI) or they should all become 'signposts'

9. Feedback

Feedback on the meeting was received via a small number of evaluation forms completed by those in attendance. These provide an indication of what members thought of the meeting. It will feed into the planning process for the next meeting.

In relation to the overall level of satisfaction with the meeting, on a scale from 'poor' to 'excellent', the range of responses included ok, good and excellent with a majority indicating it to be good or excellent. Equally, in rating the usefulness of the presentations and discussion, members rated them between 'ok' and 'excellent' with a majority indicating them to be good or excellent. The favourite session for members was 'Rolling out Registration' with members reporting that the discussion was particularly useful as it identified a number of sector concerns and the need for further work to be done prior to the data collection stage.

Overall, members thought that the emphasis on sector discussion and questions throughout the meeting was especially useful, with one member

suggesting that a permanent session for members to discuss issues of concern to the sector should be scheduled.

10. Attendance

Organisation	Name
Albury Community Housing Association	Karen Power
Argyle Community Housing Inc	Brian Murnane
Argyle Community Housing Inc	Chris Benton
Argyle Community Housing Inc	Lesley Oatley
Broken Hill CTS	Fran Vartuli
Burwood Area Community Housing	Charles Deligianis
Central Tablelands Housing Association	Karen Andrew
Coastal Community Tenancy Scheme	Anne Grice
Coastal Community Tenancy Scheme	John Grice
Coastal CTS	Lesley Bennett
Community Housing Lower North Shore	Kathy Wight
Homes Out West	Geoff Mann
Hume Community Housing Association	Lesley Wyatt
Hume Community Housing Association	Pat Martin
Inverell Community Tenancy Scheme	Kirston Pike
Lithgow Community Tenancy Scheme	Bev Wiggins
Marrickville Area Community Housing	Barb McKenna
Monaro Tenancy Scheme Ltd	Robin Eisman
Parke Forbes CTS	Margaret Robinson
Ryde – Hunters Hill Community Housing	Framy-Anne Browne
Sapphire Coast Tenancy Scheme	Sue Olgier
Shoalhaven Community Housing Scheme	Marg Bicskos
South West Community Housing	Jason Emmins
St George Community Housing Co-operative	Patrick Yeung
SWISH	Mark Powell
Tamworth Community Housing Association	Jackie Hudson
The Housing Trust	Jenny Stewart
Upper Hunter Tenancy Scheme	John Musumeci
Upper Hunter Tenancy Scheme	Maria Musumeci
Wellington Community Tenancy Scheme	Christine Robinson
Western Plains Housing Scheme	Barbara Brown
Western Suburbs Housing Cooperative Ltd	Paul Reid
Women's Housing Company	Bobbie Townsend
NSW FHA	Adam Farrar
NSW FHA	Andrew Meehan
NSW FHA	Adam West
NSW FHA	Lindall Katz
OCH	Lynne Ready
OCH	David Firth
OCH	Denise Dwyer

11. Next Housing Associations Meeting

The next housing associations meeting will be held on Friday the 25th February.