

Shelter Tasmania

Response to the Office of the Community Sector

Draft Strategic Plan 2008-2010

people working in partnership

August 2008

Shelter Tasmania is an independent community organisation
committed to the principle of accessible, affordable,
appropriate and secure housing for every person and
the elimination of homelessness



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Shelter Tasmania's Response to the Office for the Community Sector Draft Strategic Plan 2008-2010

Shelter Tasmania is the peak organisation for housing and homelessness in Tasmania. Shelter's membership consists of a wide range of organisations across Tasmania such as: tenants groups, community housing providers, homelessness and crisis accommodation services, local government, research organisations and a range of individuals and services interested in housing and homelessness issues. All of the funded Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs in Tasmania are members of Shelter.

Shelter is an affiliated member of National Shelter and is part of a network of organisations representing consumer issues in relation to housing and human rights. The Council of Homeless Persons (Tasmania) is a subcommittee of Shelter. The Shelter Management Committee is made up of 12 elected members from across Tasmania. The Management Committee members represent a range of agencies and individuals with a broad knowledge and experience of issues facing people experiencing homelessness and low income housing consumers and housing provision.

Shelter welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Office for the Community Sector (OCS) Draft Strategic Plan (Plan) 2008-2010 *people working in partnership*. As noted, the intention of the paper is to be a 'starting point' for the development of the community sector. Shelter would like to congratulate DHHS and OCS for this important initiative; in particular, the commitment to working in partnership with the community sector on creating a planned framework and vision for the community sector in Tasmania.

Shelter would like to recommend that the Plan could be refined and strengthened by taking into account two timely and parallel processes on strategic directions for the community sector in Tasmania and nationally. The frameworks and work already undertaken on these strategies reinforce many of the points raised by Shelter members.

- The first is the Tasmanian Community Sector Industry Plan 2009-12, which is currently being developed by the community sector to define the priority issues that the industry, government and other stakeholders must address to ensure quality services in Tasmania continue to be delivered on behalf of the community.
- The second is the Commonwealth's National Compact with the not-for-profit sector. This Compact is part of the Commonwealth's overarching Social Inclusion Framework, which is also linked to the National Reform Agenda and will have significant impacts on the way services are delivered across the nation.

The Tasmanian Government also has announced the importance of Social Inclusion as the basis for social policy. Shelter has recently worked with the Social Inclusion Unit on homelessness research and an associated report, and utilised a Social Inclusion Framework for Shelter's submission to the Green Paper 'Which Way Home- A New Approach to Homelessness'.

Taking into account these strategies, plans and feedback from members Shelter would like to recommend that the OCS considers the following;

Independence and Advocacy

Shelter recommends the need for recognition in the OCS Plan to clearly support and articulate both the independence, and the important role, of advocacy by the community sector. This could be added as a dot point in the definition of the community sector and in the principles. It is important that the government recognises and documents the autonomy of the community sector and recognises its independence and its right to advocate on behalf of services and consumers.

Mutual Accountability

The Plan requires more than just the strategic appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the community sector. The Plan needs to be expanded to reflect that accountability is demonstrated by all parties. Shelter strongly supports the improvement to accountability practices for the community sector, as well as clear performance measurements for government. Members commented on the high turnover and loss of corporate knowledge in government, even though under Strategic Development the Plan notes the risk "*-lack of capacity within the community sector to take up increased demand for services. This includes infrastructure and workforce constraints*". The success of the Plan will depend on clear accountability, capacity and governance measures for both the government and the community sector.

Consultation and clarity of message

Consultation

Shelter recommends that a range of consultation measure be utilised. Shelter supports the continuation of the Agency Sector Forum along with ongoing regional information forums. Members note the importance of face to face consultation in all 3 regions. There is also scope, via the Peak Network, to agree on a communication strategy with the sector and to target specific service providers where appropriate. For instance, Shelter has a comprehensive membership of SAAP and housing funded services and is able to provide various mediums of communication with that sector, as well as appropriate timing and timelines for any consultation and feedback. Members noted there can be specific times in the year when sectors may have to prioritise service delivery obligations, which makes it difficult to participate in additional consultations.

Clear messages

Currently there are a range of reform processes for the housing and homelessness sector. The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program will be brought under a new National Affordable Housing Agreement to be implemented in January 2009. The White Paper on a 'New Approach to Homelessness' will be released in September 2008 and will guide homelessness policy for the next 10 years. With all these multiple agendas coinciding with the draft OCS Plan, Shelter notes that it is important to make a distinction between these processes and the impact on the community sector and individual services. Members report uncertainty about their future funding and this exacerbates the difficulty of workforce recruitment and retention. This is a key concern expressed by members and linked directly to the capacity of the sector to deliver services. In addition, what service/business units are in or out of the OSC Plan needs to be made explicate. For instance, the draft Plan states all new service agreements will be changed but there is some confusion whether SAAP services will be included.

Evaluation, learning and research

Shelter recommends that a fourth strategic area be added to the Plan which would cover evaluation of the Plan as well as ongoing learning and research. This would assist in the transition to outcome-based funding and enable an ongoing process of service improvement.

Appropriate Resourcing

The draft OSC Plan implies additional activities for peak and services. For instance, members reported that the introduction of the quality framework across the SAAP service was inadequately resourced and did not reflect the true cost to services. With the expansion of the quality and safety framework to other sectors adequate resourcing is crucial. Shelter is aware that there have been recent discussions at the ASF that unit pricing will be introduced. It is crucial that to grow and sustain the community sector funding must be appropriate. This includes adequate indexation. Without indexation the real value of the grant decreases and with it the capacity of the organisation to deliver services to the community. Shelter recommends that the government needs to commit to a formal indexation policy for all grants.

Compact- sign off and implementation

Shelter supports the adoption of a partnership approach and a compact between the government and community sector. If this is adopted there would need to be an agreed sign off on the content and detailed implementation plan. The Agency Sector Forum could develop and oversee the implementation plan.

Brief comments to the consultation questions

Other strategies the Department should focus on?

Building the capacity of the community sector - For the OSC Plan to be successful more emphasis needs to be given to investing in capacity building, particularly for smaller organisations.

Other stakeholders the Department should be taking into account?

Commonwealth - The draft Plan does not take into account the link between State and Commonwealth initiatives, including the Social Inclusion Agenda.

Key issues – Other

Shelter supports the key issues noted, especially the need to secure a sustainable community sector workforce now and into the future.

Unmet need - Another issue identified by members is the current unmet demand for services. The OCS Plan needs to take into account the wider context and changing trends in the: social, economic, demographic and environment in Tasmania. Then develop strategies/policies on the management of unmet need between the government and community sector. Shelter, in a range of recent submissions and survey of members, noted that community services are currently operating in an environment where demand outstrips supply. Services report high turn away rates with evidence of growing waiting lists for emergency and longer term housing. Research and data indicates that demand will continue to grow with expected increased numbers of people experiencing homelessness and shortage of affordable housing.

Consumer Participation

Members noted the need for a stronger statement on the importance of consumer participation in creating responsive and appropriate services and better outcomes for people.

Value of the community sector - Under Goal 2 the OSC draft Plan needs to outline the positive value and contribution of the community sector. An additional success measure needs to be added on the partnership/relationship between government and the community sector.

Shelter looks forward to viewing the next version of the Strategic Plan. As it is for the community sector we anticipate that it will have taken into account concerns and recommendations raised by the community sector.

For further information, please contact.

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