

Shelter Tasmania

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK TO THE HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN



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Introduction

Shelter Tasmania is pleased to present this submission to the State Government's Tasmanian Homelessness Plan feedback Process.

Shelter Tasmania is the recognised non-government peak body for low income housing consumers, housing providers, homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness across Tasmania. We have a strong focus on the affordability of housing for low to moderate income households, inclusive of private rental, social housing and home ownership. Shelter believes that housing issues and homelessness solutions are the responsibility of all sectors in the community. This is reflected in our membership, which is diverse and provides a unique body of expertise in the housing and homelessness area.

Shelter welcomes the prioritising of homelessness and social housing by the Tasmanian Government, including the range of objectives announced in the recently released State Homelessness Plan. Shelter recognises this plan as a significant step forward in achieving the goals set out in the Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness – to halve primary homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all those who seek it, by 2020.

This submission represents the feedback of Shelter members, addressing the three key questions set out in the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan: "how can the actions that the Government has already committed to, be improved? What else can be done? And, who needs to be part of the solution?" Shelter held forums in Devonport (for North/NW members) and Hobart (for Southern members) to discuss the 'Plan' and provide an opportunity for members' to have input into this submission.

Shelter acknowledges that the 'Homelessness Plan' has been developed in consultation with a Reference Group compiled of key Government and Non – Government representatives. To ensure that the objectives of the 'Plan' are achieved, Shelter recommends that consultation with the sector and consumers be on-going.

The submission has been endorsed by the Shelter Tasmania Management Committee.

1 About Shelter

Shelter Tasmania is an independent not-for-profit housing peak organisation funded by the Department of Health and Human Services as a 'Housing Consumer and Provider Peak Body Service'. Shelter Tasmania is the key body that represents the interests of low to moderate income housing consumers and housing providers across 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. 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 low income housing consumers and housing provision.

Shelter aims to provide an effective Tasmanian voice on housing and related issues by fulfilling the following objectives:

- To promote and maintain the right of every person to access affordable, safe and secure long term housing that they identify as appropriate to their needs.
- To promote and maintain the right of every person to housing of a quality which enhances people's health, well-being, dignity and life opportunities.
- To promote the benefits of public and community housing in the community and across all levels of government.
- To publish, research, collect and disseminate information on matters relating to the provision of housing, particularly for people on low to moderate incomes.
- To create opportunities to support, establish, resource and co-ordinate non-government organisations and agencies with similar interests and objectives to the Association.
- To promote opportunities for members of the community to

access housing provision free from discrimination due to age, gender, ethnicity, health status or disability.

- To promote and support consumer and community participation in decision making in relation to their housing and to promote access to avenues of appeal across all housing tenures.
- To provide a structure that enables the members to inform policy development in a manner that is consistent with the objectives and visions of the Association and also reflects the needs of homeless people and people who live in poverty and on low incomes

Objective 1 ***Prevention and Early Intervention***

Summary

Shelter acknowledges that prevention and early intervention are important objectives in reducing homelessness.

The strategies listed under this objective involve:

- mainstream services to focus on prevention;
- homelessness services to focus on early intervention;
- increasing awareness of homelessness within the community, and
- improving information about services.

Feedback from members related to a need for clarity in relation to this objective. Shelter recommends consulting with existing services to determine what is already in place and what the current limitations are within the sector and mainstream services. Many Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) are already providing early intervention assistance. Under resourcing of services however, has meant that in prioritising workloads, a larger percentage of effort has had to be put into crisis response.

Feedback on Actions already committed to:

Action: Review Housing Tasmania Assessment System.

Shelter welcomes the action but recommends that time frames and details of implementation strategies and terms of reference are established.

In addition, there is a need to closely consider Housing Tasmania's current 'Suspension Policy' as part of this review. This action refers to reviewing the system "so that target groups most at risk of homelessness are prioritised". The overwhelming majority of feedback received from members classified those suspended from the Housing Tasmania waiting list, as those who were the most disadvantaged and unlikely to find safe affordable housing within any other tenure.

Action: Review of existing housing assistance programs, e.g. Private Rental Support Services (PRSS), CTP and SHS

Shelter acknowledges the need to review existing support services in the context of the current reforms. It is important however, that this review is undertaken in consultation with the services in question and consumers of homelessness programs. The strengths of these services need to be recognized and built upon, rather than reducing their capacity and undervaluing their good work. Similar feedback

was provided in response to the Australian Government's Green Paper on homelessness and acknowledged in the White Paper that followed i.e. the (then) SAAP Services hadn't failed in responding to homelessness, they were however, severely under resourced.

Action: Homelessness education, awareness, training and resource package

Shelter agrees that there is a need to increase awareness of homelessness and supports the action to develop a homelessness resource package. There is however, a concern relating to the success and delivery of such a package. Strategies will need to be put in place to monitor the effectiveness and utility of the information provided. There needs to be a commitment of ongoing support for main stream services to incorporate information into their day to day practice. If this is not provided, there is a risk that the information will soon be forgotten, as was the case with the SAAP/Mental Health Protocols. These protocols were developed after considerable consultation and commitment from both sectors. Unfortunately, little was done on an ongoing basis to ensure that all parties were aware of and using the process. In 2010, many staff in SHS and Departmental Mental Health Services are not even aware of the existence of such protocols.

Members have expressed the need for a 'cultural shift' for mainstream services, which education packages could assist with. These packages need to be incorporated as part of an induction process for new employees. This will ensure they become well integrated into main stream services.

Action: Social Inclusion Community Liaison Officers:

Members have expressed the need for more clarity in relation to the function and scope of these roles. For example, what will be done with the research undertaken & how will this contribute to the overall response to homelessness?

Feedback on "Possible Actions for Discussion"

To enhance the capacity to identify risk factors and to respond appropriately, it is recommended that key 'first to know' agencies are identified. In addition, a generic assessment tool designed to identify 'at risk' triggers needs to be developed to ensure appropriate referrals are made. Assessment points could include schools and colleges (e.g. school social workers), Centrelink, employment services and GPs.

Other Actions – WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?

In relation to increasing the focus on early intervention members have made the following suggestions:

- That options for respite are explored for parents of children with challenging behaviour and resources made available to support families
- That services are co-located, e.g. Centrelink in close proximity to SHS (an example of this are the HOME Advice Services that have Centrelink Social Workers co-located with the NGO providing the service)
- Ensure more involvement from mainstream services in all processes
- Ongoing and increased resources for existing tenancy support services, particularly for CALD clients.

The issue of resourcing SHS for early intervention work has been raised and the option of capped case-loads have been suggested. Members are reluctant to cap case-loads if this means people who are homeless are unable to access support. SHS need to be adequately resourced to respond effectively to clients' needs, including the ability to provide early intervention services.

Who should be a part of the solution?

Government – Australian and State, Social Inclusion Unit, SHS, main stream services, specialist services, consumers, schools, GPs, and community groups.

Objective 2

Improved Connections to Family and Community

Summary

Shelter recognises that improving connections to family and community is a valuable response to the issue of homelessness. Shelter welcomes the Tasmanian Government's Social Inclusion agenda that informs the strategies and actions listed under this objective.

Shelter acknowledges that the Social Inclusion strategy for Tasmania focuses on "areas of common cause and common strategies that can be leveraged to benefit all groups ..." (Adams 2009, p.6). Members have however expressed concern about the focus of the plan on specific target groups, at the expense of others. The Homelessness

Plan in general focuses heavily on children & young people. Groups such as women and their children escaping DV, single men, men supporting children, couples, and older women are not specifically targeted. This is an interesting omission given that women and their children escaping DV are the largest homelessness cohort. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) groups were also not targeted specifically by the 'Plan'. Members suggested however, that special consideration in planning for actions to improve connections with family and community applied to this cohort.

Shelter supports strategies to improve connections with, or reconnect people with their families. It needs to be noted however that this is not always an appropriate option. For example, there are some cases where extreme violence in the home may put a young person or other family members at risk.

Feedback on Actions already committed to:

Action: opportunities for increased economic participation

Shelter supports strategies for increasing economic participation for people who are homeless or at risk. This has been demonstrated as one of the effective pathways out of homelessness. For this to be successful (or even possible) there needs to be a commitment of funding and resources to enable services to provide appropriate support. Those who have been chronically homeless for example, often need intensive, long term support to address the issues that led to their homelessness. This support needs to be provided before they could even consider employment, education or training options. For some people, even when these issues are resolved, employment may not be a realistic prospect for some time.

Feedback on "Possible Actions for Discussion"

Community Capacity Building grants.

Members have expressed concern that the Community Capacity Grants are already oversubscribed and that new funding opportunities should be made available to incorporate a dedicated response to the issues of homelessness, its triggers and pathways to resolution.

Other actions - WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?

Building on the strengths of existing services and programs

In response to the request for feedback to the initial 'Green Paper', members gave ample evidence of the strengths of current programs and services. Similarly, Shelter recommends that prior to further steps being undertaken to develop new programs, existing services need to be carefully considered. Shelter further recommends that a strategy

be put in place that seeks to build on the strengths of existing programs and services, and that creating opportunities for growth are part of the overall response to homelessness. This needs to be done in full consultation with the sector and with consumers of homelessness services.

Volunteers Assistance Program.

Shelter recognises the significance of family support such as cases where young families involve grandparents to assist in the care of children and other household needs. Currently there are programs in place for financial assistance, such as Kinship Care and Relative Care Assistance. Members highlighted the need for a similar program to be established to train volunteers to support families at risk of homelessness. This would also connect families and individuals to communities and encourage communities to take responsibility for those in need.

Re-inventing Social Spaces and community centres

Members' feedback highlights the need to rethink social spaces so that these become more conducive to connecting individuals to communities. There has been extensive research undertaken into what makes a community; what sustains a community; and in what ways a community can address homelessness, its triggers and pathways to resolutions.

Future planning of community centres and social spaces should incorporate a dedicated response to the issue of homelessness. Local Government in particular need to be aware (educated) on how social space can have a positive influence on the overall wellbeing of a community, including those who are disadvantaged.

This action would support the Social Inclusion Agenda through providing community space which encourages participation from the whole community including those most marginalised.

Education – personal development/social skills

Shelter supports the action to provide opportunities for people to develop life skills (as listed under strategy 2.2). Feedback from members however, highlights a need for educational initiatives that focus on basic personal development and social skills. For many people who are homeless, assistance with basic skills such as grocery shopping and cooking is more of a priority.

Shelter supports improving relationships between Polytechnic (and other training bodies) and the sector however this needs to be done in a way that recognises consumer needs. For example, while clients may wish to pursue education, they may not be in a position to commit to participating per course requirements. In some cases they not be able to commit to a course that has an extended duration. It is recommended that courses are developed to cater to the specific needs of clients supported by SHS, and those who are at risk of homelessness. There needs to be flexibility of participation such as a 'drop in/drop out' approach.

SHS for Children -

The effects of homelessness on children can be severe. It can impact on all aspects of their development and lives - family, social, psychological and educational. Children often experience varying levels of trauma during homelessness which can present in behavioural issues or withdrawal. Members recommended that all SHS funding should include the provision for specialist children workers. These staff can undertake comprehensive assessments (including referral to Gateway services or counselling), develop comprehensive case plans focusing on the children and provide consistency during a time of transience. These staff would be particularly beneficial in transitional and case planning/transitional services.

Capacity Building for SHS

In order for SHS funded under the NAHA to function effectively in the areas outlined in the plan, it is recommended they are appropriately funded to do so. Current funding arrangements do not enable services to undertake capacity building.

Who should be a part of the solution?

Local Government in consultation with the sector, Social Inclusion Unit, main stream services and specialist services, consumers, schools, GPs, and community groups.

Objective 3 ***Improved Access to Appropriate Housing***

Summary

Shelter is committed to the principle that every person has the right to affordable, safe and secure long-term housing that is conducive to health and well being and appropriate to those who need it. Shelter therefore welcomes the dedicated focus on improving access to appropriate housing and recognises this as an effective response to the issue of homelessness.

Feedback on actions already committed to:

Action: Increase Supply of Affordable and Social Housing

Shelter recognises that increasing the supply of Affordable and Social housing is a necessary step to meeting the current demand for housing in general, particularly for those who are on low incomes.

Throughout the consultations undertaken by Shelter, members sought clarity about where the new 'affordable' accommodation units would come from and who they were for. Shelter recommends a more detailed analysis of the "2,000 new units". It is unclear what "units" actually stands for. In some cases it appears that units equalled beds, for example, a new Supported Residential Facility may contain 30 units of accommodation, i.e. beds. Many members were under the impression that "units" equated to individual properties.

Shelter would like to see more clarity in the plan about social housing stock, i.e. what is being replaced; what is additional to the current supply; and what new accommodation units are counted as part of the action plan to halve primary homelessness in Tasmania by the end of 2010.

In relation to 'affordable housing', members have expressed concern that the NRAS does not necessarily support people on low incomes. Highlighting this concern are the "19 brand new affordable housing units available under the NRAS" in Warwick Street, Hobart. Clearly, these types of new accommodation units are inaccessible to the range of target groups listed under this objective.

Rent for properties at Warwick Street:

- Three bedroom units with balconies for \$316 per week.

- Two bedroom units with balconies at front and back for \$272 per week.
- One bedroom units with a private courtyard \$204 per week.

As per NRAS requirements these rents are set at 80% of the market price. If 30% of income (the recognized bench mark for housing stress) is dedicated to rent, a family/individual would need to be earning at least \$1,054 per week, in order to afford a 3 bedroom unit. For a 2 bedroom unit they would need to earn around \$900 per week and at least \$680 per week to afford the one bedroom unit. The salaries required to make these NRAS properties affordable are not consistent with people on low to moderate incomes.

Consistent feedback from members also identifies the need to increase options for young people to have access to appropriate housing and support options. SHS services reported that the plan does not clearly address the following issues:

- Young people who are unable to live at home have very few safe, secure and affordable housing options.
- The chronic lack of public and community housing means that exit options for young people are limited further and that persons aged under 16 are not able to access public and community housing.
- The private rental market is not an option for young people due to low income, high rents, and the legality of signing a lease.
- Many young people for a variety of reasons do not want to live on their own. They may also not have the necessary skills to manage an independent tenancy. For this target group there is a need for semi supported options that provide a level of independence with support. Facilities such as Bilton Lodge would provide the right type of service yet they have a target group of 18+. Further, there is only 1 dedicated Youth facility which is located in the North. There are concerns are that this will not appropriately house young people under the age of 16 anyway.
- There is a lack of placement options available through DCFYS and other community provider's for young people who are unable to live independently.

Because there are so few long term housing options for young people SHS services remain their only option (as demonstrated by high numbers of clients re-accessing SHS accommodation within this age cohort). SHS services are not currently designed to sustain long support periods.

One accommodation service reports that over the past 3 years, a recidivism rate of 26% has been observed. Over half of the clients who re -accessed have had 3 or more visits.

Other actions - WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?

A review is needed of special benefit payments for young people under the age of 15.

Better linkages are required between Centrelink, Specialist Homelessness Services, Family Support Services and DCYFS.

DCYFS needs to stop viewing SHS services as an exit point or partially fund SHS services to broaden their role.

Strategies are required to ensure that young people under the age of 18 are appropriately supported and provided with a safe long term accommodation options.

That the age range for access to the new dedicated facilities and housing initiatives are 16+ and other appropriate accommodation options be identified for those under the age of 16.

Increase in long term housing and support options for young people under the age of 18.

Increased funding for Specialist Homeless Services for the provision of staged or step down accommodation and support options; that allows SHS services to provide accommodation ranging from immediate emergency to long term supported/independent - better meeting client need.

Action: 5 new Dedicated Homelessness Facilities

Shelter Tasmania members identify the need for ongoing consultation during the initiatives development process. Members noted that the dedicated homelessness facilities and other accommodation units listed under this objective will not be appropriate for some key target groups such as:

- men with children,
- couples with children,
- women and children escaping domestic violence or
- some CaLD groups.

This raises concerns regarding the number of facilities that will be delivered within Tasmania for a limited target group; given the existing 4 residential facilities already in operation through the 2005 Affordable Housing Strategy.

Members stated that they had significant concerns relating to the suitability of the location of the Ulverstone facility. Devonport had been previously seen and announced as the most appropriate location. Ulverstone is not considered as appropriate due to the low number of potential applicants and lack of transport and support services in the area. Members are concerned that this location will require applicants to move away from their community and social supports to take up residency in the suggested facility.

Common Ground projects – members would like to see more clarity in relation to the scope of the Common Ground model. In particular, more detail of how they are to function including who the target group will be and how support will be provided to tenants.

Members felt that in terms of managing risk a preferred option would have been to trial the Common Ground model in one facility rather than committing both southern facilities to a model that has not been proven within the Tasmanian context.

Concerns were also raised about the membership of the Common Ground Board, and the board's capacity and experience to adequately deliver a service for homeless people. Whilst it is acknowledged that the Common Ground model relies heavily on private business and know-how, the lack of a Community sector representative with expertise in the area of homelessness is alarming. In addition, ongoing funding would be required for appropriate tenant support or existing tenancy support services would need to be appropriately resourced to meet the facilities' needs.

Other Actions – WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?

Residential Tenancy Act 1997 reforms to be linked into the THP. The Residential Tenancy Act 1997 is currently under review. Through the review Shelter hopes to see increased protection for tenants and

the introduction of minimum standards for rental properties, both of which would have a direct impact on the reduction of homelessness. Shelter recommends that the Homelessness Plan consider requirements under the Act and use the reform process as an opportunity to regulate the private rental market; reducing risk of homelessness

Centrelink Payments

Members have reported that suspended Centrelink payments continue to have direct impact on a tenant's ability to meet their tenancy obligations (meeting rental payments). This is a particular issue for tenants on Newstart and Youth Allowance who have no capacity to enter into payment plans to address debt, once they fall behind in their rent.

Review of Housing Tasmania Policy on Suspended applications

Members have requested that Housing Tasmania re evaluate their policy on suspending tenancy applications for previous tenants with Housing debt. In addition, that a housing debt no longer prevents a person from being active within the Housing Tasmania wait list.

Ongoing funding for PRSS and PRTSS

That the Government commit to ongoing funding for the PRTSS and PRSS. Both services have demonstrated how vital they are in meeting the needs of tenants within the private rental market. There has also been research undertaken of similar programs interstate and the utility they have in preventing homelessness.

Who needs to be part of the solution?

Housing Tasmania, Private rental sector including Real Estate Agents and private landlords, businesses, mainstream services, SHS, consumers, Local Government, and the Tasmanian and Australian Governments.

Objective 4 ***Effective Service Responses***

Summary

Shelter acknowledges that achieving effective service responses is fundamental to addressing the issue of homelessness and welcomes the strategies and actions listed under this objective.

The strategies identified within the plan focus on integration and coordination of mainstream and specialist services to more effectively meet the full range of needs of target groups. As such, the intent of these strategies are generally welcomed by members.

Shelter understands that the motivation behind the plan is the recognition that homelessness is a whole of Government and whole of community responsibility. Further that homelessness services are currently stretched beyond capacity to deal with demand.

Shelter members believe that the current service system (the Integrated Continuum of Support) is a strong and integrated system that needs to be funded adequately. This would ensure that services' capacity to respond would improve considerably and achieve more effective and long term outcomes for clients. In addition, any system changes should be aimed at adding to, rather than taking away from the service system.

The integration of mainstream services suggested within the Homelessness Plan appears to be an extension of the existing system which will have an impact on homelessness. Some concerns have been expressed about time-frames and the successful implementation of an integrated and coordinated service system. This is particularly the case given the current experience is that people seeking assistance is increasing. Unfortunately, previous involvement of services outside of the SHS system has not been that successful. Particularly given all mainstream areas report strain on available resources and limited capacity to meet the needs of their existing obligations.

Shelter recommends that a mechanism be put in place to monitor and evaluate the implementation of new measures. Furthermore, members have suggested that regular, 'round-table' discussions are held where consumer, mainstream, SHS and Housing Tasmania representatives can discuss issues and concerns arising out of the new integrated and coordinated approach to homelessness. These forums would also foster open communication and improve linkages.

Other feedback from members highlighted the need for more clarity within the actions listed under this objective. Shelter understands that the detail in many of the strategies is still in a developmental stage but would encourage further consultation with all stakeholders. For example, actions such as establishing an “integrated waiting list” and new assessment process to support the “no wrong door” approach need to be clearly articulated in terms of method and purpose within the expanded service system.

Feedback from members also emphasises that the initiative for effective linkages and improved communication between all services (including GPs, relationship counselling, mental health, and disability services) is coupled with a mechanism that enables a timely response across services. At the same time, members have identified a tension between effective service delivery i.e. focus on improved client outcomes and the expectation to move people through the system quickly. These sorts of issues need careful consideration when planning steps to implement actions.

Feedback on Actions already committed to:

Action: integrated waiting list and property register

Shelter welcomes this action, but reiterates the need for transparency when it comes to allocation of social housing and waiting lists. It is also recommended that considerable work be undertaken in consultation with the sector regarding tenant application, assessment, category, and allocation processes.

Action: develop a bed register

Members have expressed concerns about the utility of a bed register. Recognising that a register would be resource intensive and challenging to maintain. Further, that services need to be able to manage client need and risk within IEA services including times where it is not appropriate for clients to be accommodated with existing residents. For a bed register to be effective, it will need to be up to date and resourced for 24 hour monitoring. The service that maintains a bed register will need thorough understanding of the homelessness service system. Members have considerable concerns that a bed register would be managed by the current ‘Gateway’. This is considered inappropriate. Members were also concerned that a bed register may cause confusion and generate false expectations of access for clients. In addition, services are currently operating at full capacity with bed vacancies filled almost as soon as they become

available. Thus, the maintenance of a bed register could be quite resource intensive with little benefit for clients and services.

Should such a register be developed, it would be useful for it to be integrated into a larger database. That would ensure it also provides information about what services clients are currently working with.

Action: Specialist Intervention Tenancy Services (SITS):

Members have expressed concerns around the scope of these services in meeting a continuing demand for support given that SITS teams will only have caseloads of 25 and the support periods may be up to 2 years. Questions such as “what will happen when the program is full?” and “what happens to remaining clients with complex needs?” have been raised by members. For this reason it is vitally important that the capacity of these new services is appropriately aligned with consumer needs. Members also report a need for the SHDL properties to be in areas most suitable for the individual client need, be close to services, and in low risk locations.

Feed back on “Possible Actions for Discussion”

A referral and information sharing protocol:

Members were supportive of protocols that increase opportunities for clients. Previous experience of SAAP protocols highlights the need for ongoing review and maintenance to ensure currency. In addition, all service systems need to ensure new staff are informed of protocols, particularly within the mainstream service system.

Members’ were supportive of shared information across service systems that aim to reduce ‘systems abuse’ to clients but also recognises a clients right to choose what information is shared.

Other Actions – WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?

Develop a services data base

Members’ feedback highlighted the need for a comprehensive data base with comprehensive information, including photos and a basic outline of services. Existing information available on the DHHS website about services could be added to and made more comprehensive. Furthermore, the focus on integration and coordination and information relating to services should be readily available and easily accessible by service providers and consumers alike. (This possible action also ties in with strategy 1.4 listed under objective 1, Prevention and Early Intervention).

Who needs to be part of the solution?

Main stream and specialist services, the community, consumers, Housing Tasmania, peak bodies including Shelter Tasmania, Mental Health Council of Tasmania, TasCOSS and other Peaks

Objective 5 ***Continuous Improvement and Quality***

Summary

Shelter commends the Specialist Homeless Service system for the quality services provided to those who are experiencing homelessness. Members recognise that continuous improvement and quality service delivery is fundamental to the overall response to homelessness. Shelter appreciates that a key means to achieving this is through ongoing support to the sector to assist in developing the workforce and improving the quality of services.

Feedback on "Actions already committed to":

Action: Quality Futures

Shelter Tasmania supports a commitment to ensuring quality services are provided to clients. Funding agreements now require services to comply with 6 monthly mandatory reporting against Quality and Safety Standards. Whilst there is ample support in terms of easily accessible templates, fact sheets and information members report that financial support is required to assist with the administrative burden placed on some services. Compliance for many of the smaller services in particular has resulted in less resources being available for clients.

It is recommended that funding is adjusted to meet additional reporting requirements relating to quality. Services state that it is not the continuous quality improvement processes that have added this burden but completing the administrative templates and systems. SHS Services have undertaken recent quality reviews through QMS. Some organisations have quality assurance accreditation (such as ISO). The new quality and safety frameworks is now the 3rd impost on some services within a 2 year period where reporting is required using differing formats. In addition, work is currently being undertaken on a National Quality Framework for homeless services which could require services to comply with a 4th set of standards. It is hoped that there will be some parity with the State and National frameworks. For Housing support programs who were not part of the QMS review process, the introduction of the Departmental standards has increased

their administrative work load without any increase in administrative funding.

Action: Workforce Capacity Audit and Development Plan

Shelter recommends that the quality and standard of training provided to the sector is carefully considered when implementing the workforce development plan. Shelter understands that this action will not commence before 2011, as is dependent on the implementation of other key initiatives. Currently, training opportunities for the housing and homeless sector has been called into question with a range of complaints being made by the sector. Feedback from members has been that the training is not at a suitable standard, that the skill level to which the training is provided is too low and that the current service provider has not adequately met the needs of the sector. Members strongly recommended that new training service providers are sought that are better able to meet the needs of the community sector.

Action: Consultation and Engagement Strategy (consumers)

Shelter Tasmania welcomes a Consultation and Engagement Strategy to foster active participation of people who are or at risk of or who have experienced homelessness. Shelter recommends that this action is implemented with the establishment of a homelessness advisory committee to provide advice on implementing and monitoring this initiative.

Action: Action research and evaluation

Shelter is pleased to see a dedicated evaluation and research component in the action plan. To enhance this action, Shelter recommends ongoing dialogue between all stakeholders. In addition it is recommended that this is sustained beyond the current consultation timeframes established for the release of the Homelessness Plan. Channels of clear and open communication need to be developed between all parties for the duration of the implementation. It is also recommended that the research and evaluation component in the action plan is extended beyond its function to evaluate homelessness initiatives, but to also align with the National Research Agenda. This would also tie in with the previous action to establish a consultation and engagement strategy with consumers. Once again, Shelter emphasises that this is more effectively done collaboratively, with input from Government and non-government representatives.

Feed back to “Possible Actions for Discussion”

Development of further standards for mainstream services:

In response to Objective 2, ‘Prevention and Early intervention’, members suggested that a standard could be developed in relation to the education packages that are to be distributed by mainstream services. This will ensure that a focus on homelessness becomes integral to mainstream services. See also feedback under objective 1.

Other Actions – “WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?”

Establish a Homelessness Advisory Committee to ensure ongoing consultation with the sector and consumers

Shelter Tasmania welcomes the action that a consultation and engagement strategy will be developed to foster active participation of people who are at risk of or who have experienced homelessness. Shelter recommends that this action is implemented in conjunction with the establishment of a homelessness advisory committee that includes representatives from the community sector. A key function of this committee would be to provide advice on the implementation and integration of the social housing and homelessness reforms, and to provide input into evaluation and research processes.

Recognition of experience and accreditation for staff and volunteers.

Members’ feedback highlights the need for a mechanism to be put in place whereby volunteers can become accredited.

Members raised concerns for the future work force. Social and Community Service’s appears to be an aging workforce with low numbers of graduates coming through from Diploma courses. Students with degree qualifications are choosing higher paid positions in the public or other support sectors. Increasingly members report difficulties in recruiting staff and recommend that some work be done to attract more young people into the field (perhaps in partnership with training providers) and to increase attraction to positions through increased salaries.

Review of funding under the NAHA to reflect workforce development outcomes.

Shelter acknowledges the benefits of work force development and recommends that services are appropriately funded to meet higher award levels that an improved workforce will attract.

"Who needs to be part of the solution?"

Housing Tasmania, main stream and specialist services, peak bodies including Shelter Tasmania, TasCOSS (etc), training institutions,