

A Compact for Renewal: What tenants want from Renewal

**Report from stage one of a project conducted by Shelter NSW,
Tenants' Union of NSW and the City futures Research Centre UNSW**



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Introduction

In 2016, Shelter NSW, the NSW Tenant's Union and the City Futures Research Centre at UNSW agreed to partner in a project to develop a Compact for Renewal between agencies undertaking urban renewal and social housing tenants affected by renewal. The Compact would represent an agreement about how urban renewal was to be conducted in social housing areas and how social housing tenants were to be treated and engaged. The need for a Compact arises from the variable experience of tenants to date with renewal and the widely varying policies and practices affecting tenants applied by agencies undertaking renewal.

It is widely recognised that renewal of public housing areas can be highly disruptive, cause high levels of stress and trauma and lead to significant adverse health impacts for social housing tenants. These effects are compounded because tenants are often highly disadvantaged and disempowered. Moreover, the renewal process is imposed from above; tenants typically have little or no say in the process. This compact therefore seeks to develop a set of ground rules that would make renewal less disruptive, traumatic and dislocating for tenants and would support their active involvement in the renewal project. Ideally, it will also increase the chances that tenants may feel able to lend their active support to renewal projects.

During 2016, a series of focus groups with social housing tenants was conducted to understand tenant's experience of renewal and to identify what tenants want and need from renewal. Focus groups were held in 8 estates in Sydney that have experienced renewal programs within the last 10 years or so or were scheduled to do so in the near future. Across these areas, the experience varies widely from generally positive through to the traumatic. The focus groups included a number of tenants who have been highly involved in the renewal processes in their area, some for 15 or more years. The focus groups thereby brought a wealth of experience and rich perspectives on renewal approaches and what works for tenants. A summary of the issues from these focus groups, reported under the 8 key questions asked, has been published as *Tenant's Experience of Renewal in Social Housing Areas*.

This document now seeks to draw on the issues raised by tenants in the focus groups to develop a comprehensive list of what tenants need and want from renewal projects.

The next stage in the project following this is to present these findings to renewal agencies in NSW, including Government and community sector agencies and seek their feedback on the extent to which those agencies believe they can deliver what tenants want. Subject to the willingness of agencies to engage with the project, we seek to negotiate a set of ground rules by which agencies agree to manage renewal projects in social housing areas. In this negotiation, the project partners emphasise their willingness to understand what's important for the agencies about the renewal process and to work through the list of what tenants want from renewal to identify a set of ground rules both parties are comfortable with.

The following are identified as the key things tenants want from renewal, under these headings:

1. Principles for renewal
 - *Respect for Tenants*
 - *Acknowledgment that renewal has damaging and disruptive impacts*
 - *Impacts will be mitigated and minimised*
 - *Commitment to real engagement*
 - *Tenants to receive a fair share of the benefits of renewal*
2. Implementing the Principles
 - Relocation and resettlement
 - Managing change and the adverse impacts of renewal
 - Planning and setting up the renewal project
 - Community engagement

1. Principles

Respect for Tenants:

While tenants understand their communities have a range of problems and issues, they want agencies to demonstrate respect for tenants, for their opinions and for their communities. They want them to talk positively about tenants and social housing communities and not speak of them using the language of disadvantage and deficit. They want officers to treat tenants with respect and consideration in all their dealings with them. They want officers to be 'on their side' and to strive to understand their circumstances, the challenges they face and the resilience they have shown in their lives so far. They want agencies to understand the many strengths of their communities including social and neighbourhood connections, friendships, support networks and community organisations that champion and serve the community. They want acknowledgement of their community's efforts to support the most vulnerable and to address neighbourhood problems. And they want their community leaders to be accorded due respect for their past contributions and the contribution they can make into the future.

Acknowledgement that Renewal has Damaging and Disruptive Impacts:

Tenants want agencies to understand and acknowledge that renewal of an area will turn tenants' lives upside down and, for most, involves significant losses. Moving house is one of life's most stressful events, but when that move is not of your own choosing and is largely out of your control, the stress is multiplied. Extra stress is placed on vulnerable households and those with fewer supports or resources. Tenants want the impacts on their health, mental health and wellbeing to be recognised and addressed by agencies. They want agencies to also acknowledge the impact of the loss of their familiar community and the friendship, social and support networks in the community on which many rely. Tenants want the emotional toll and burden of change to be better appreciated by agencies and they want a real commitment by the agencies to mitigate the impacts and provide the support that tenants need to manage and cope with the scale of these impacts. They also want agencies to know that social mix has the potential for negative, as well as positive, implications for existing residents because it involves the loss of neighbours, community structures and networks that they value. The impact is exacerbated by the strongly held belief among long term tenants that their social housing home was provide for life

Impacts will be mitigated and minimised:

Tenants want agencies to do all in their power to avoid, minimise and mitigate the adverse impacts of renewal on them. They want tenants and communities to be given every opportunity to influence and shape the change process and to be consulted about how best to avoid, minimise and avoid the impacts. They want tenants to be given choice wherever possible and as much control as possible over their circumstances. Agencies should also ensure a significant level of support is made available to tenants to manage the physical and emotional impacts and to better cope with change.

Commitment to real engagement:

Tenants want a commitment by renewal agencies to genuine engagement and deep consultation with existing tenants within a renewal area. They seek acknowledgement that they are an important stakeholder and that their views and preferences should have an influence on projects. They want a commitment from agencies that they will provide quality information about the project and regularly update residents about the project and particularly the project timeframes. They want an acknowledgement that they know the existing area best and that their ideas and views can improve the design and implementation of projects. They want the agencies to listen deeply to tenants views and preferences and to reflect back to them what they have heard. They understand that they will not get everything they ask for and that there are a range of other stakeholders whose views also need to be taken into account. But they want their views to be seriously considered in decisions by the agencies. Where the agency does not agree with the tenants, they want the agency to come to them and explain why.

Tenants to receive a fair share of the benefits from renewal:

In acknowledgement of the scale of the impacts on tenants of renewal, tenants believe they should get a fair share of the benefits. They understand that Government wants a number of things from renewal including a good financial return (in order to pay for new social housing) and improved asset values. Government may also seek reduced management, operational and service provision costs and to realign the social housing stock better to need. However, tenants want to experience a level of benefits that acknowledges the impacts on them. This 'offer' to tenants should include the opportunity for a better or new home, the opportunity (wherever possible) to stay in the same area and consideration of their needs in planning the housing style and size of the new social housing stock. It should include the needs of existing tenants/residents (not just new residents) being taken into account in the design of new open space, community facilities and services and provision of new opportunities (for example in skills, education, training and employment), wherever possible, to materially benefit their lives and future life chances. Tenants want agencies, as part of planning for renewal, to retain the facilities, services and community assets, including green space and trees, that are most valued by residents. Tenants should be assured that the project will be managed such that the need for off-site relocation is minimised and where this is unavoidable, tenants want additional support to settle into the new neighbourhood, to connect to services and support networks, to manage the stress and impacts of change and to access opportunities.

2. Implementing the Principles

2.1 Relocation and Resettlement

- Tenants want adequate notice that their property is to be redeveloped and they will need to relocate to an alternate property. Tenants should normally have no less than 6 months notice of the need for them to move. Tenants can however elect to relocate earlier than 6 months, if such an opportunity is available.
- Tenants want agencies to select relocation officers for their superior ability to empathise and communicate with tenants. They want agencies to support staff to 'go the extra mile' on behalf of tenants and to measure success in rehousing by how satisfied tenants are with the process.
- Tenants want renewal projects to be planned to minimise the need for double moves. As far as possible, tenants should be able to move from an existing property into their permanent new property. Wherever possible, relocating tenants should be given the opportunity to relocate within the existing area, so they can continue to access existing services, supports and networks.
- Tenants want agencies to not move tenants to areas that may be redeveloped in the foreseeable future. At a minimum, agencies should flag the potential for future renewal with tenants so they can make a choice to move to this area or not. This should constitute 'reasonable grounds' for refusal of an offer of relocation.
- Tenants want those content to leave the local area to be able to choose the area they want to be relocated to. Where this is to a high need location or an area with little public housing stock, tenants want to be able to nominate a second preference in an area with more availability. They want housing officers to explain the choices and trade-offs available, and to assist tenants to consider their options. Under no circumstances should tenants be relocated to an area they do not wish to go.
- Tenants want agencies to explain early in the project the opportunities and limitations for tenants to relocate locally. If this opportunity cannot be extended to all tenants then selection/eligibility policies (for tenants to stay in the area) should be subject to consultation with affected tenants and their representatives.
- Tenants required to move as a result of renewal should have a very high priority on the Housing Register so they generally have first option for properties becoming available within their eligibility and area of choice.
- While tenants cannot expect to be allocated a property outside their eligibility (for example more bedrooms, even where they had a larger property prior to relocation), they should be able to expect that their particular needs and circumstances will be fully and sensitively considered when eligibility is determined and offers made.
- Where tenants have regular arrangements to care for grandchildren or have a carer or support person (who may stay in the home at times), tenants want these arrangements to be taken into account.
- Tenants should not be disadvantaged when moving to another social housing property. Overall, the replacement property should, all things considered, provide at least the same and preferably a better standard of amenity and convenience (even where it is smaller than the property they are moving from).
- Staff will endeavour to match tenants requirements and preferences for the replacement property and will consider any improvements above the normal, if it will secure the tenant's likely satisfaction with the home.
- Agencies will provide support with sorting and packing where it is needed or requested. The frail aged and vulnerable households should be actively encouraged to access these services.

- Tenants want agencies to fund a service to assist households with sorting, downsizing and de-cluttering their goods, furniture and effects. This service should be made available to all households who need it and offered in particular to all frail aged, single parent and larger families. This offer should be made soon after notice is given because it may take many months to go through the process.
- Tenants want greater support from agencies to resettle in a new location. Officers should outline location options to tenants and supply them with good quality information about the locations on offer. This should include a map showing the location of social housing, shops, medical facilities, parks, playgrounds and children's services, youth, aged and community services, and transport routes. Tenants should be provided with reliable contact information and referrals to local services and have access to a service which can provide resettlement support to those who want it, including how to access necessary services and informal support networks.
- Agencies will ensure there is an accessible and adequately resourced, independent tenant advocacy service available within a renewal area. The service needs to provide both individual advocacy and broader advocacy, on behalf of tenants, in relation to the project as a whole. The individual advocacy service should be available in all the major non English languages spoken in the area. Tenants should be provided with the relevant contact for the independent tenant advocate who can negotiate with officials on their behalf, should they wish. Tenants should be able to choose to have the advocate involved in any interviews or discussions with housing staff.

2.2 Managing change and the adverse impacts of renewal

- Tenants want a comprehensive range of practical, emotional and professional support services to be available to tenants to assist them to manage change, community dislocation and the adverse impacts of renewal including physical illness, anxiety, depression, grief, loss and trauma. These should include a range of informal and community based supports, professional services, including counselling and referral to mental health services. These support services should be flexible and capable of being tailored to the individual needs of tenant households.
- Wherever possible, tenants want these services to be provided by respected expert and independent community services providers, preferring those already working with affected tenants.
- Tenants want agencies to acknowledge that grief and loss are significant issues for many tenants affected by renewal. Tenants want housing relocation staff to be trained to properly deal with grief, loss and trauma and specialist services to be made available, as part of a continuum of services, to manage their impacts.
- Recognising that renewal is likely to exacerbate pre-existing health and social problems, agencies should work with other agencies and funding bodies to ensure resources are available so that social and community services can meet increased demand.
- The value of community based practical and emotional assistance provided by trusted local and community organisations, including faith based organisations, should be recognised by agencies.
- Recognising the significant adverse impacts of a loss of choice and control in the renewal process, tenants want agencies to extend choice and control over as many aspects of renewal as possible. These aspects include choice in relocation areas, replacement homes and home improvements, and control in the timing of relocation to suit life circumstances, the packing up and moving process and being able to relocate close to family or support people, including neighbours.

- Tenants want agencies to support them in recognising and honouring the social history of the place being renewed and to provide assistance to tenants, with local organisations, to document its significance for future generations.
- Tenants want agencies to consult them about the management of construction, and work with them to develop better strategies to manage and mitigate disruption, service outages, road closures, noise, dust and vermin etc and to improve site safety.
- As a means of mitigating the impacts of change and loss, and extending the benefits of renewal, tenants want to be afforded new and improved opportunities to pursue their life goals and to take new directions, including in relation to skills, training and employment, volunteering and community leadership

2.3 Planning and setting up the renewal project

- Tenants want renewal projects to be planned (particularly in relation to density, house types and sizes) so that as many existing tenants as possible will be able to remain in the area, and to minimise adverse impacts.
- Tenants want agencies to conduct a social impact assessment (SIA) of the renewal plans to identify the social impacts and the strategies required to manage and mitigate those impacts. This should be a mandatory part for all renewal planning processes. Existing tenants and local agencies working with tenants in a renewal area should be key informants for the SIA.
- Social planning for renewal should involve identification of the , services, social and community structures and organisations that are valued within the existing community and developing, with those groups and tenants, a plan for retaining and transitioning them.
- Tenants want valued facilities and environmental assets (including trees, green space and wildlife) to be retained (and upgraded as required) in the renewal area. Tenants want new parks and community facilities to be designed for all groups in the community, including old (mostly public) and new (mostly private) residents. Designs should encourage and facilitate social interaction across all groups. All residents, including children and young people and the aged, should be consulted in the design process, using highly engaging and innovative processes.
- Tenants want a social or community plan to be developed alongside a physical masterplan, setting out the community facilities, support services and community services which will be provided for the new community. The plan should aim to actively mitigate social impacts, build social cohesion in the new community and support old (existing) residents through the change process. The plan needs also to outline the strategies for retaining and transitioning valued community assets, including schools, child care and other services. In addition, it should outline the opportunities to be provided as part of the renewal project to support and assist tenants to build new skills, community leadership and capability, retaining and expanding volunteering opportunities and for tenants to take advantage of change to pursue new positive life goals.
- Tenants want a secure and respected community voice in the planning and management of renewal projects. A Community Reference Group is one model that has been effective in a number of renewal projects (that are well regarded by tenants). Agencies need to support the CRG in its role and in building its capability to provide considered advice to the project. Tenants also want support from agencies for a fully independent tenant group (tenant action group), which can represent tenants interests to the renewal agencies.
- Tenants want the renewal team to include staff whose job it is to engage with tenants, who are skilled in listening and who are 'on their side'. This team should include bi-lingual staff whose job it is to engage the main Non English speaker populations. They want a project director/leader to acknowledge them as key

stakeholders, listen to them and to meet them as equals. They want project decisions to be informed by an understanding of the impacts on tenants and for the leader to ensure their needs and views are known and considered when decisions are taken.

- Tenants want an on-site office for the renewal project, a place where tenants are always welcome, where they can get information and their questions can be answered face to face. Tenants also want project information to be regularly disseminated and updated, through a range of means, including information sessions, street meetings, community events, BBQs and a monthly newsletter or similar.

2.4 Community Engagement

- Tenants want renewal agencies to engage and consult tenants and the community regularly throughout the renewal project about all aspects of the project, including (but not limited to) initial design and policy parameters (where possible), the 'offer' to tenants, the community engagement plan, the rehousing/relocation plan, the social or community plan, social impact assessment, the urban masterplan, project staging, implementation and management, plan for mitigation of impacts, the tendering process and selection criteria for project partners. Consultation should be based on sound principles for engagement, such as those of the IAP2.
- An engagement plan should be prepared for the project and tenants want agencies to consult them on the plan before it is finalised. Officials should report back to the community on the plan at regular intervals and the key consultative body (CRG or similar) should be involved in reviews of the plan.
- Tenants want agencies to seriously consider the views and preferences of tenants in reaching project decisions. While tenants cannot expect that they will always get the decision they prefer (given there are other stakeholders and interests) they should be able to expect that their views will be carefully and seriously considered. Where decisions do not reflect tenant views, the reasons should be explained and tenants given the respect to fully understand and be able to question the decision.
- Tenants want a strong residents' voice in all aspects of the project design and implementation. Agencies should support and offer some resources for the development of an independent tenants' group (where it does not already exist) with a role in informing and mobilising tenants about the project. Agencies should engage with the group, by invitation, but not attempt to control or unduly influence it. Trusted local community groups and services should be encouraged to support the independent tenants group, while respecting its independence and autonomy.

Information:

- Tenants want agencies to commit to the provision of accurate and timely information throughout the process. Tenants should be provided with a reasonable timeframe and appropriate support to process and consider the information given and respond to it.
- Project information, including stages and timeframes, should be updated regularly. Tenants want written information to be in plain English and written with sensitivity and respect for tenants. Information should also be made available in all the main community languages spoken in the area.
- Tenants also value and want the opportunity for regular face to face communication with informed agency staff, through a local project office, street meetings, events and home visits. Tenants also expect their relocation coordinator to be in regular contact with them and to be able to provide accurate information and answers to their questions.

Consultation:

- Tenants want to be provided with a diverse range of ways in which they can be engaged and consulted. One key consultation body (existing or newly set up for the project) will provide one important vehicle for engagement. But there will be a range of other ways tenants can participate, including through one off consultation events/displays, street meetings, surveys, etc.
- Consultation should seek to reach out to all groups in the affected community, including harder to reach groups such as NESB, children and young people, single parents and seniors. Consultation approaches and techniques should be creative and varied to appeal and attract participation from the full range of population groups. Agencies should work with community partners to reach out to all groups, design consultation appropriate to each group and to encourage maximum engagement.
- The team conducting the community engagement should be continuously monitoring levels of engagement to identify groups who are not being actively engaged and designing new approaches that will attract those groups.

Participation:

- Tenants want opportunities to get involved in the engagement program, to contribute ideas, help run the processes and to do outreach into population groups. Tenants have a contribution to make to team planning processes and to the planning and implementation of community events. Tenants want support from agencies to assist participation and to build skills.

Capacity building:

- Tenants want support from the agencies and community partners to build their capacity, knowledge and skills to participate more fully and meaningfully. Targeted training, workshops and bus trips have been used successfully to build capacity in topics such as urban design, open space design, town centre design, community facilities design, masterplanning and house design. This capacity building will also build confidence and leadership among tenants to improve the level and quality of participation.

Community events:

- Community events offer opportunities to build community engagement and participation, bring the community together, disseminate information and promote social cohesion. These include community festivals, fairs, cultural celebrations, regular street markets and the like. Tenants want agencies to actively support and contribute to these events.