



Guidelines for the Maintenance and Upgrade of Supported Accommodation Facilities

Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services
(DCYFS)



Guidelines for the maintenance and upgrade of Supported Accommodation Facilities Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services

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I Background

Housing Tasmania supplies over 350 properties throughout Tasmania for use as Supported Accommodation facilities. These properties operate in a number of different settings: Disability Group Homes; Family Group Homes; and Young Persons Residential Care Units.

The services provided at these properties are primarily funded by Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services (DCYFS) and delivered either directly by DCYFS or by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) under funding agreements with DCYFS.

The majority of these properties are leased from Housing Tasmania under tenancies known as Community Tenancies. Some properties are also leased as Direct Tenancies.

Many of these Supported Accommodation facilities were originally acquired by Housing Tasmania as standard residential dwellings. While some of the properties have been modified to make them more suitable for use as Supported Accommodation facilities (ie wider doorways, specialist bathrooms, toilets and other fittings and fixtures), the properties were not originally constructed to be used for this purpose. As such, the fabric of the buildings, including the fittings and fixtures, may not necessarily be as robust as that which would be found in a property that was 'purpose built' for use as a Supported Accommodation facility.

Due to the nature of their circumstances (disabilities, complex and challenging behaviours), residents in Supported Accommodation tend to place far heavier demands on the fixture and fittings of residential dwellings. As a result, when used for Supported Accommodation, the physical condition of a standard residential dwelling may deteriorate more quickly than a property that has been purpose built.

2 Wear and Tear in a Supported Accommodation Setting

The use of a standard residential property for Supported Accommodation requires a recognition that the property may be subject to far heavier wear and tear than would normally be the case in a standard residential tenancy.

If a property has not been constructed to a standard that is designed to specifically withstand the rigours of a supported accommodation setting, the property may sustain higher rates of hardware failure and in some circumstances, high levels of damage. Although not typical, from time to time, the damage may be substantial.

Damage caused by residents in these settings may extend to intentional acts that are typically the result of complex and challenging behaviours. Examples of this damage include:

- Holes in walls;
- Holes in doors;
- Broken light fittings;
- Broken power outlets;
- Broken door hardware;
- Smashed glazing;
- Broken window opening and closing mechanisms;
- Blocked drains and toilets;

- Broken tap hardware;
- Extensive soiling of floor coverings;
- Broken kitchen drawers and cupboards;
- Graffiti;
- Intentional burns to carpets and walls; and
- Removal of bricks and other masonry fixtures from internal and external walls.

While intentional property damage is not typical of all supported accommodation settings and while damage to properties can be limited by the provision of appropriate supports for residents, it is not always possible to prevent the damage from occurring.

While recognising that damage may occur in Supported Accommodation settings, the DHHS program areas and NGOs that are responsible for Community Tenancies must take reasonable steps to:

- i) avoid damage to the home;
- ii) keep the home and grounds in a reasonably clean and neat condition;
- iii) ensure residents and visitors to the property do not damage any part of the internal or external aspects of the property.

3 Who has responsibility to repair damage?

As the owner and supplier of the property, it is generally thought that Housing Tasmania accepts responsibility for all types of repairs and maintenance at Supported Accommodation facilities. This is not the case.

Under the provisions of each Community Tenancy agreement, Housing Tasmania is responsible only for maintenance that is due to the failure of building hardware through normal use and for 'reasonable wear and tear'.

For Housing Tasmania purposes, 'reasonable wear and tear' is defined according to Section 5 of the Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading document; Residential Tenancy Guidelines (17 November 1998). According to this document:

- *If the deterioration to the premises is caused by natural forces, the 'damage' will be considered 'reasonable wear and tear'.*
- *If the deterioration is caused by an act of the tenant within his or her control and outside the normal functioning of the household, the damage will be considered to be unreasonable.*
- *Deterioration to the premises by rain, wind and the sun would appear to be the responsibility of the owner.*
- *Deterioration to the interior by way of stains to the carpet, damage to the walls, glass breakages etc. is outside what can be considered reasonable wear and tear.*

In recognition that the definition of 'reasonable wear and tear' applies primarily to standard residential tenancies and in recognition that heavier demands will be placed on the hardware, fabric and fixtures in Supported Accommodation facilities, the opportunity to raise issues particular to a site is available to all organisations. The Department, through the Accommodation Options Unit, will negotiate with the residents and the non

government organisations, to determine the most appropriate course of action to address the maintenance issue. This negotiation will consider the capacity of individuals to contribute, for the non government organisations to contribute and where the Department is able to prioritise funding to contribute to such maintenance.

4 Reporting Maintenance and Property Damage

As a general principle, Housing Tasmania ensures that all houses are safe and well-maintained;

It is the responsibility of all tenants to report all maintenance issues to Housing Tasmania. This includes all DHHS program areas that are responsible for Community Tenancies and NGOs that are lease holders under Community Tenancies.

Program areas and NGOs should develop clear internal procedures for reporting maintenance and property damage.

All maintenance (routine, emergency etc) must be reported to the State-wide Maintenance Services (ph 1300 665 663).

Housing Tasmania has internal processes to ensure that referrals are directed appropriately to and from State-wide Maintenance Services.

If the request relates to property damage and State-wide Maintenance Services deems that it falls outside the definition of 'reasonable wear and tear', the matter will be referred to the Accommodation Options Team for assessment and liaison with the appropriate program area. If agreed that the repairs should be undertaken, the Manager, Accommodation Options will authorise State-wide Maintenance Services to obtain quotes and undertake the repairs (subject to the requirements of financial delegations).

DHHS program areas and NGOs must not make any alternation or additions to a Housing Tasmania property without written approval.

5 Emergencies

Emergency maintenance refers to maintenance that is required if resident/tenant safety is at risk, or is required to prevent further damage to the home. For example if the roof has blown off in a storm, or there is a house fire.

Emergency repairs are to be immediately reported to State-wide Maintenance Services by calling 1300 665 663 (during normal business hours). If an emergency occurs after hours or on weekends, call 1800 005 588.

6 Urgent Maintenance

Urgent maintenance refers to maintenance that is required if essential services STOP working. For example water, sewerage, electricity, heating, cooking stoves or the hot water service.

Urgent maintenance is to be immediately reported to State-wide Maintenance Services by calling 1300 665 663 (during normal business hours).

If help is required after hours or on weekends, call 1800 005 588.

7 Timeframes

If a maintenance request is approved, Housing Tasmania will:

- a) undertake emergency and urgent repairs as quickly as possible; and

- b) undertake other repairs within 28 days, but sooner whenever possible.

8 Intentional or Wilful damage

There are occasions where damage to properties will result from deliberate or wilful acts. All program areas need to develop policies and procedures for responding to such acts, including where appropriate, reporting the damage to Tasmania Police.

In many cases, while the damage may have been caused by a deliberate act, the person or persons who may have caused the damage has most likely presented with very challenging behaviours, which greatly impacts on their ability to self regulate their emotional state. Responses in these situations should consider any underlying conditions or circumstances that may have contributed to incident. Responses should also take into consideration the provision of appropriate diversionary supports to minimise the risk of any repetition of the behaviour.

Where damage to properties has occurred as a result of an intentional or wilful act (such as deliberate acts of vandalism), the damage must be reported to Housing Tasmania, as detailed in Section 4 above.

While some damage may be the result of complex and challenging behaviours, DCYFS program areas and NGOs should liaise with the Accommodation Options Team to determine if the tenant / resident will be made responsible for the costs of the repairs. Subject to the circumstances, costs could be passed on if a tenant / resident has:

- intentionally damaged a property;
- failed to take reasonable care to prevent damage;
- failed to keep the property in a reasonably clean and neat condition; and
- allowed damage to be incurred as a result of the actions of the members of the household or invited visitors.

In making a determination to pass costs on, program areas must seek professional guidance regarding the ability and or capacity of resident / tenant to self-regulate his or her behaviour and advice regarding any likely detrimental impacts for the resident / tenant if costs were passed on.

9 Property Upgrades

DCYFS program areas and NGOs must not make any alternation or additions to a Housing Tasmania property without prior written approval. This includes renovations and structural improvements. Chattels, fixtures or fittings must not be removed from any premises without written approval.

Staff from DCYFS and NGOs often make requests that relate to the upgrading or complete refurbishment of properties.

Examples of this include requests to:

- Upgrade heating where it is perceived that the heating is inadequate (particularly where the level of heating within a home meets Housing Tasmania standards, but does not meet the specific needs of the residents, such as the need to regulate temperature within different rooms);

- Replace curtains and carpets;
- Paint rooms to create a more homelike environment;
- Upgrade bathrooms to provide better outcomes for clients and support staff through the installation of grab rails and installation of roll in showers; and
- Modify walls, doorways and benches to better accommodate wheelchairs and reduce the damage caused by wheelchairs.

The upgrading of properties falls well outside the scope of general maintenance guidelines. Decisions regarding property upgrades will need to take into account various issues such as:

- The age and condition of the property;
- The current and future intended use of the property;
- The lifecycle of the materials within the property;
- The circumstances of the residents / tenants; and
- The availability of funding, including funding priorities.

10 Requesting a property upgrade

A request for a property upgrade must be initiated through the Housing Tasmania office that is managing the community tenancy.

The request must be in writing to the appropriate Officer who will note the request and forward it through to the appropriate HT Area Manager for consideration.

A Technical Consultant may be required to attend the property to explore the details of the request and establish if the upgrade is technically feasible.

The HT Area Manager is to refer the request to the Manager Accommodation Options Unit to ensure the request is appropriate within the context of asset planning and is consistent with the service delivery model at the site. The responsible program area or NGO may be asked to submit a written proposal outlining the need for the property upgrade. In some instances, the matter may be referred to the Accommodation Options Steering Committee for discussion.

If funding is available and if the proposal is approved, Strategic Asset Management (Housing Tasmania) will advise if the upgrade works can be considered using current contract arrangements or if external contractors should be sought.

Written approval must be received from Housing Tasmania prior to any work being undertaken.

Once the work is completed, Housing Tasmania will attend the home to ensure the work has been undertaken in a professional manner.

11 Upgrade to private residences (non-Housing Tasmania properties)

Some DCYFS accommodation support programs are provided at properties that are privately owned. Under some exceptional circumstances, the Department may consider funding improvements at these properties, however this will occur only on case by case basis. Requests for property improvements to non Housing Tasmania properties, must be made via the responsible DCYFS Program Manager and discussed with the Manager, Accommodation Options.

12 Specialist equipment purchase and maintenance

At times, supported accommodation facilities have or require specialist equipment for the support of the residents. In the context of these guidelines, specialist equipment relates to items that are fixed to the building, such as ceiling tracking or specialist baths. Items such as slings for tracking do not fall within the scope of these guidelines.

Where the purchase of specialist equipment is required, the processes as outlined at Section 10: *Requesting a property upgrade*, should be followed. Relevant supporting documentation and reports (e.g. Occupational Therapists reports) should be included with the upgrade request.

Requests for maintenance of specialist equipment should be forwarded to Housing Tasmania Service Centre. The Service Centre will note the request and liaise with Accommodation Options. Accommodation Options will discuss with the relevant program area or organisations and where appropriate, initiate the work order.

The purchase or maintenance of specialist equipment will not be reimbursed to organisations, unless by prior agreement. Where a resident or organisation independently initiates a purchase or maintenance works, responsibility for the costs is with the non government organisation.

13 Fire safety and compliance.

Housing Tasmania is currently reviewing systems and processes to ensure that all Housing Tasmania supported accommodation facilities maintain the level of compliance in relation to fire safety. Currently (at January 2009) it is essential that all non government organisations meet the requirements of the Community Tenancy arrangement as outlined within the lease for the property.

It is essential that non government organisations advise Housing Tasmania in writing of any change to the tenancy arrangements, fire equipment or building. Without this information the compliance of the property may be jeopardised.

14 Appendix 1 Maintenance Process

