

# **Creating better futures for residents of high-rise public housing in Melbourne**

**prepared by**

**ECUMENICAL HOUSING**

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# ACRONYMS

CBD	Central Business District
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
HCV	Housing Commission Victoria
HUD	United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
NPV	Net Present Value
SGS	Spiller Gibbon Swan (consultants)
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit (United Kingdom)
SHA	State Housing Authority



# OVERVIEW

## Introduction

High-rise public housing is a distinctive form of public housing in Victoria. In the inner city where house prices and rents have continued to rise, high-rise public housing plays a key role in providing affordable rental housing for low income households. The current and future importance of this role is again reinforced in a recent report by Burke and Hayward from Swinburne Institute of Social Research, *Melbourne's Housing Past Housing Futures* (2000).

However, it is clear that the availability of this affordable housing stock does not equate with the availability of safe, secure and appropriate housing for a number of tenants. Buildings that do not meet contemporary community standards, difficulty in keeping buildings clean due to anti-social behaviour, fears for safety and security by both residents and service providers visiting the sites and isolation are but some of the problems experienced across the high-rise towers as well as in other areas of concentrated public housing. Improvements are required in the quality of the life they provide for tenants and consideration needs to be given as to whether they have potential for achieving long term sustainable communities.

There are varied views about what should happen to high-rise public housing. Government and the community sector are continually developing initiatives to tackle specific issues. However, while these are important for ameliorating very evident and significant problems, in many ways they represent different ways of patching holes in a ship that has no real direction or destination.

The need to develop a clear strategic vision and role for the future of the high-rise towers is urgent. In developing this vision, Ecumenical Housing considers it essential that the wide diversity of views and insights into the issues currently confronting this form of housing are taken into account, as well as the diverse views about the possibilities for regeneration and future management of the towers.

## Background

*Creating better futures for residents of high-rise public housing in Melbourne* grew out of a concern amongst the Churches and many other organisations about the lack of debate and discussion possible with the former Kennett Liberal Government about the future of high-rise public housing. In response to this, Ecumenical Housing sought funding from philanthropic trusts to develop resource information to assist a better informed debate about the possible futures for inner city high-rise public housing. The funding received from trusts was supplemented by small contributions from six inner city Local Governments with high-rise public housing.

As the current Labor Government has been more prepared to discuss and consult on policy issues, the project moved to focus more attention on articulating a more positive future for high-rise towers and developing resources and tools to support a more strategic, comprehensive and consultative approach to planning for their future. While the Bracks Labor Government is more willing to discuss and consult on policy issues, the urgency for development of a clear future direction for high-rise public housing still remains and the complexity of issues that need to be considered have not reduced.

### The towers

This report has identified that there are a number of important facts that need to be understood about the towers and these need to inform planning for the future.

Overall, there are 44 high-rise public housing towers, providing just under 6,900 units of housing. These towers are a distinctive form of housing in Victoria and represent approximately 10 percent of all public housing stock in Victoria. The high-rise towers are only found in nine inner city municipalities, with the highest concentration in the City of Yarra. In three of these inner city municipalities (Yarra, Stonnington and Melbourne), high-rise public housing represents over 50% of all public housing in the municipality.

Two different types of towers were originally developed - older persons towers and family towers.

#### **Older persons high-rise towers**

There are thirteen towers that when first built, were for older retired people, predominantly women. Since that time, nearly forty percent of bedsitter units have been converted to one bedroom units and the target group widened to include people with disabilities aged 55 and over. Across the older persons towers 61 percent of residents are male, almost all residents live alone and just under half are aged over 70. However close to 12 percent are aged less than 55 years, an age group not formally included in the target group for this housing. Just under half the tenants are Australian born, 75 percent have lived there for less than five years and only 8 percent for more than 10 years. (It needs to be noted that the conversion of bedsitters has had some impact on recorded length of tenancies).

#### **Mixed household towers (originally family towers)**

Thirty-one towers were originally built to predominantly accommodate low income families with children and thus they consist mainly of two (57%) and three bedroom units (37%). Their current tenant profile is now far more diverse compared to the past. Forty-two percent of household heads are female (single parents and older single women), 39 percent of households are family households with children, while 36 percent are single person households. Just over two thirds of tenants are aged under 55 and just under a third are aged over 55 years. Only 16 percent are Australian born, while 44 percent were born in Asia. Just under a quarter (23 percent) of tenants have lived there for 10 or more years while just over half have lived there for less than five years.

#### **Diversity between towers**

There is considerable diversity in the characteristics of tenants between the towers. Some towers have far higher proportions of longer term tenants than others. Particular towers have very high concentrations of tenants from particular language and cultural backgrounds. In some mixed household towers more than half the tenants are aged over 55, while others have far younger populations. This diversity indicates the importance of understanding the particular characteristics of each tower when planning for their future. There is also considerable diversity in the local contexts in which the towers are located and the type of opportunities each has for regeneration. Some are single towers within a residential area. Some are grouped together or adjacent to areas of public housing walk-up flats. Some are located within or adjacent to commercial and retail areas, while others are located on the edges of residential areas.

## Unique characteristics

High-rise towers have some unique characteristics which are highly valued by many tenants and by others living in close proximity. They offer opportunities for higher levels of interaction among residents in contrast to most suburban areas. They offer an environment with a diversity of cultural and religious practices, interests, personalities and expectations. This potential is both a strength and a weakness. Positively, it is an important base for developing participation in communities. On the other hand, any traumatic incident will potentially impact on everyone in a tower. This unique characteristic is important to recognise in developing housing management policies and practices.

High-rise flats, by contemporary standards, are very spacious. The cultural, ethnic and socio-economic diversity enriches the life of local neighbourhoods.

## Current assessment

Despite particular initiatives to maintain the buildings and upgrade some aspects, overall the stock is rundown, with most flats having had little major upgrading since their construction. Little upgrading occurred during the 1990s and particularly in the middle and late years of that decade under the Kennett Government. This neglect, combined with increased targeting of public housing to those with higher and more urgent housing needs and the resultant concentration of people with more complex needs in the flats has changed the nature of life in many high-rise towers. This has occurred at the same time that the local communities in which the towers are located have gentrified significantly, resulting in greater disparities in the social and economic circumstances of public tenants and their neighbours.

## State Government policy directions

The Labor Government came to office in October 1999 with a policy commitment to retain current levels of inner city public housing stock and to review the impacts of a number of policy changes implemented by the previous government. Areas covered by these reviews include eligibility criteria for public housing, the segmented waiting list and broadbanding. The development of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy will also focus attention on public housing policy and provision.

The housing policy reviews currently underway may address some issues experienced in high-rise public housing. However, the unique nature of the high-rise stock and the particular challenges this presents will require a more diverse and comprehensive set of responses than those that will result from current reviews.

The challenge for government and the community is to identify whether and how high-rise public housing can be used to provide housing that is not only affordable in the inner city, but is also safe, secure and appropriate for its tenants, and where tenants have the opportunity to become valued members of the local community.

## Broad approaches to the future of high-rise towers

High-rise public housing is highly visible. Many people have strong and often entrenched views about what should happen to them. These views form the backdrop and starting point for any discussion about their future. Three broad approaches or mindsets each with a corresponding strategy or strategies characterise these starting points:

- ❑ **Approach 1: A negative approach** which assumes that it is all too hard to do anything systematic about the future of the high-rise towers and will only respond as crises arise. This approach reflects the starting point of many who recognise the value of high-rise

housing but have struggled with the complexity of high-rise issues and been overwhelmed by the enormous effort required by many parties to make them work.

- ❑ **Approach 2: An approach which wants to shed responsibility or opt out** and which believes the best thing to do is either to sell or demolish most or all high-rise public housing. Within this approach two different strategies are possible: sell to tenants or the private sector, or; demolish all or most of the towers and rebuild new housing on the site. This approach assumes that high-rise towers are inappropriate or unworkable as public housing or indeed as affordable social housing. The strategies diverge in that they have different visions for inner Melbourne and have reached different conclusions about the demand for affordable housing in inner Melbourne.
- ❑ **Approach 3: An approach which envisages a positive future** based on the belief that high-rise public housing is an important component of social housing and solutions to the current problems are possible. Within this approach two different strategies are possible: retain all or most high-rise towers as public housing, or; transfer ownership or lease the high-rise towers to another social housing provider. The two different strategies within this approach are based on different conclusions about the capacity of the Office of Housing to make them work.

To find a way forward which addresses urgent needs and issues and, is both realistic and implementable, it is important to recognise these starting points and work through the underlying assumptions of each. Four questions are critical to a re-assessment of each approach: trends within the inner Melbourne market; the demand for high-rise housing; how well they can work, and the cost-effectiveness of various strategies.

## Moving forward on the basis of a positive future

Ecumenical Housing considers that there are strong social, practical and financial arguments in favour of pursuing a positive future for high-rise public housing and a future that retains as much stock as possible for low income households.

- ❑ This stock plays a key role in maintaining access for low income households to housing in inner Melbourne where private rental prices are now beyond the reach of people on low incomes and increasingly beyond the reach of those on moderate incomes.
- ❑ The structure of the buildings is sound, they have a structural life of at least another 25-30 years and it is possible to reconfigure many of the floors to accommodate the increasing need for housing by smaller households.
- ❑ The estimated costs of finding replacement stock in the inner city if the towers are no longer used as public housing are overall likely to be higher than the cost of major refurbishment and improved management.
- ❑ High-rise living is increasingly becoming a more accepted form of living in the inner city with the development of many high-rise towers by the private sector. This means that to some degree, this form of housing has the capacity to become less stigmatised in the future, compared to the past.
- ❑ There are many possible tenancy and tower management practices and community development initiatives to respond to difficulties experienced with high-rise towers which have not yet been tried.
- ❑ It is possible to introduce changes to current housing policy that have the capacity to assist in addressing a number of the factors contributing to difficulties with high-rise towers.

It is recognised that there are many major challenges in the process of improving the towers so that they provide appropriate, safe and a quality living experience for tenants. There are many possible approaches that still need to be tried to redress difficulties being experienced in individual towers. However, if after a concerted effort to seek and implement creative and sound strategies for improvement major issues remain unaddressed within particular towers they should not be retained as housing for low income households.

## The key role of Government

Victoria needs a strategic vision for its high-rise public housing and a clear process for the State Government to work collaboratively with others to assess and address the issues facing individual towers. Without a clear strategic vision and a framework for planning for their regeneration, current efforts to address the issues facing high-rise public housing will remain partial, frustrating and in some instances a waste of funds.

- The ability to develop a more positive future for high-rise living for low income households will be strongly influenced by the **State Government** building a vision for inner Melbourne that is based on a desire to:
  - maintain a population that is socially, economically and culturally diverse
  - maintain access to a diversity of housing types and tenures for low income households
  - support maintenance and rebuilding where necessary of cohesive and resilient local communities that positively embrace social, economic and cultural diversity.
- The potential for a positive future for high-rise living for low income households will also be dependent on the **State Government's** willingness to:
  - exercise leadership in bringing together all the key stakeholders to work in a spirit of partnership to develop a positive future for inner city high-rise living for low income households
  - commit to implementing co-ordinated cross departmental and divisional responses
  - address issues associated with the concentration of low income households through a program of urban regeneration and community building
  - address issues related to the housing stock and housing management practices
  - advocate for Commonwealth Government commitment to support initiatives that enhance the quality of life and economic and social participation of low income tenants of high-rise housing.

**Local Government** also has an important role to play through exercising strong leadership and advocacy for maintaining social, economic and cultural diversity and a range of housing options to support this diversity within the municipality. It also has a key role in facilitating local neighbourhood planning processes that assist in identifying strategies to enhance community cohesiveness.

## Key elements of a high-rise housing strategic framework

In the Report, Ecumenical Housing proposes a number of elements of a strategic framework for the future of the current high-rise public housing and proposes the following vision for regeneration of this special form of housing.

It is proposed that the **broad goals for regeneration** are to:

- Provide safe, secure and appropriate housing for the full range of household types seeking inner city public housing
- Improve social conditions so that people want to live there and make it their home
- Maintain high levels of access to affordable housing in the inner city for a diverse range of low income households
- Build a more positive image for high-rise living for low income families
- Create enhanced opportunities for social and economic participation of tenants in the community
- Better integrate high-rise residents into the local neighbourhood, and
- Better meet the social, environmental and economic objectives of the Victorian Government.

More **specific objectives** are to:

- Improve their amenity, in particular the social conditions within each of the towers
- Improve the physical condition of individual flats and the common areas
- Better integrate high-rise towers into the local streetscape
- Better manage high-rise towers
- Improve tenants' sense of safety and personal security
- Enhance tenants' sense of control and ownership over their living environments
- Ensure that high-rise towers have a mix of tenants that provides for a sustainable community of tenants
- Ensure that high-rise towers are child-friendly environments and that they meet a range of cultural needs
- Ensure effective links between housing and support services for tenants who require this
- Strengthen ties between tenants and enhance the sense of community, and
- Enhance opportunities for employment and other activities.

**Other key elements** of the framework include:

- Effective involvement of the wide range of stakeholders with an interest in making high-rise living work for low income households
- Involvement of all spheres of Government – Commonwealth, State and Local – as well as relevant State Government departments and divisions to ensure co-ordinated, cross program responses are developed
- Transformation of neighbourhood areas which will provide opportunities for public and private sector involvement in residential, retail and commercial initiatives on the current sites.
- Setting priorities for managing and staging the regeneration of the towers over a specified time
- Undertaking detailed comprehensive assessment and planning for each tower to identify the most appropriate approach to regeneration
- Commitment of resources to enable effective planning and regeneration activities



- Tailoring housing policies so that they take into account the particular characteristics and issues associated with high-rise living, and
- Encouragement of innovation, piloting of different approaches and evaluation as a key component of the approach to the regeneration of high-rise towers.

## Resources to support the development and implementation of the framework elements

The last half of the report is devoted to outlining practical resources and tools to assist with implementation of planning for regeneration of high-rise housing. These include:

□ ***Resource 1: A planning process to identify the best future outcome for each tower***

This outlines an approach which incorporates:

- involvement of key stakeholders including the Office of Housing, Local Government, relevant Government Departments, tenants, local support agencies and the local community
- a local planning process that considers the future of high-rise towers in the context of other social housing in the area
- use of a tool for a preliminary assessment of each tower which ensures that physical, social and financial issues are considered in an integrated way.

□ ***Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of a tower***

This describes an approach for assessing individual towers/local areas which was developed to take account of the key issues of interest and concern to different stakeholders. It identifies seven different dimensions which contribute to the operation of a tower, outlines a set of standards and proposes 30 different indicators against which each individual tower can be assessed. It provides a comprehensive set of benchmarks and measures that assist in quantifying how well a tower is operating and where its strengths and weakness lie. A proforma for summarising the assessed performance of a tower is provided, as are two examples demonstrating how the proforma can be used.

□ ***Resource 3: Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise housing***

This section outlines and discusses the range of strategic options available to address issues with high-rise towers. These range from different tenancy management and tower management approaches, alternate management arrangements to community development initiatives and asset management strategies.

□ ***Resource 4: Learning from others – a review of the literature***

The literature review provides an account of some of the key reports and academic writing on issues relevant to regeneration of high-rise public housing.

## Recommendations

The State Government needs to show leadership in tackling the complex issues associated with our current high-rise public housing. The issues and challenges will only become more difficult if not addressed soon in a strategic and systematic way.

In order to start developing and implementing a positive future for our current high-rise public housing Ecumenical Housing recommends the State Government use the material in *Creating better futures for residents of high-rise public housing in Melbourne* Report and:

1. Adopt a positive vision for the future of inner city high-rise housing for low income households.
2. Approach the implementation of this vision as a collaborative process, in partnership with all key stakeholders.
3. Commit relevant government departments and divisions to work together positively and co-operatively to implement a positive future vision for our current high-rise public housing.
4. Commit sufficient financial and human resources to enable initial planning, initial scoping and assessment of all towers and prioritising of towers; on this basis develop a plan for consideration by the State Government for undertaking more detailed assessment and planning for high priority towers.
5. Establish a task force that includes representation from all key stakeholder groups to:
  - a) oversee the development of a framework for the initial assessment of all towers
  - b) oversee the process of initial systematic assessment of all towers and development of a priority ranking for all towers, and
  - c) develop a realistic framework and plan for undertaking more detailed assessment of priority towers and a proposed timeframe for addressing issues with lower priority towers.
6. Appoint an independent person to chair the task force who has:
  - a) strong leadership capacity
  - b) ability to gain the respect and trust of the wide group of stakeholders with an interest in the future of our current high-rise public housing
  - c) ability to work positively with a wide cross-section of stakeholders and ensure all views are heard
  - d) understanding of the complex issues associated with implementing a positive vision for high-rise housing for low income households, and
  - e) ability to ensure a committee is able to undertake and complete its tasks in a professional and timely manner.
7. Develop effective and practical strategies that positively resource and support tenants to have effective representation and participation in the assessment and planning process.
8. Advocate for a co-operative approach with relevant sections of the Commonwealth Government for exploring approaches to improve the futures of low income high-rise housing tenants.



**PART 1**

**REPORT**



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

In 1996, the Kennett Liberal Government in their housing policy proposed to demolish a high-rise public housing tower and develop a 20 year strategy for the remaining towers.

In June 1997, the Victorian Government announced some major changes to public housing policies which resulted in a change in the role of public housing. No longer was public housing to be targetted at those who were unable to gain access to owner-occupied housing, rather it was to be targetted at those who were unable to access and maintain housing in the private rental sector. This change in role was implemented through four major changes in public housing policy:

- changes to eligibility criteria to bring them in line with the eligibility criteria for rent assistance – only those on pensions and allowances would be eligible for public housing
- the introduction of a segmented waiting list whereby greater priority was given to those with the highest housing needs
- the withdrawal of security of tenure for public housing and review of tenancies every three to five years
- increased levels of rentals rising from approximately 20% to 25% of income.

By mid 1998, many church organisations were expressing concern to Ecumenical Housing about the impact of these policy changes on high-rise estates. Ecumenical Housing held a workshop for representatives of Churches and community service organisations focusing particularly on the impacts of recent policy changes. The workshop strongly urged Ecumenical Housing to undertake further research into this area.

In 1999, the Government demolished a high-rise tower in Kensington. The future for other high-rise towers was uncertain and the then Government was not amenable to debate about their future. The Government considered a strategy of demolition and redevelopment in line with their "targetting" policies. Scant regard however, was paid to the value of public housing in inner city housing markets and the impact of change on the estates themselves.

Consultancy and research work in which Ecumenical Housing was engaged heightened our awareness of the complexity and urgency of addressing the future directions for high-rise public housing. It alerted us that tenant groups, community organisations and local government needed to develop a better understanding of the complex issues associated with determining the future of high-rise public housing and engage the Office of Housing in serious debate before another high-rise was demolished.

In late 1999 the Bracks Labor Government came to power bringing with it a renewed commitment to discussion and participation in policy and planning for public housing. This overcame one of the initial barriers to the success of this project – the difficulty of engaging the Office of Housing in a discussion about the issues. The Bracks Labor Government also brought with it a commitment to maintain the level of public housing stock in inner Melbourne as well as a commitment not to demolish any more high-rise towers. However,

many of the complex issues about the future of the high-rise remain, with no clear vision for their future.

### 1.2 Aim

The overall aim of the Project is to create a better living environment for tenants in high-rise public housing. The Project has sought to achieve this by:

#### (i) Providing information about high-rise public housing

- to provide up to date information about the existing high-rise towers, particularly the characteristics of existing residents
- to report on the current issues for high-rise towers emerging from discussions with a cross-section of people with an interest in high-rise public housing, and
- to document what can be learnt from existing literature, both in Australia and overseas.

#### (ii) Identifying key policy and practice questions

- to raise some key policy questions, particularly concerning a strategic framework for the future of high-rise public housing, and
- to raise some key practice questions in relation to the management of high-rise towers.

#### (iii) Developing tools and resources

- to discuss processes for a collaborative approach between stakeholders to tackle the complex issues associated with high-rise public housing
- to develop a framework and tool for assessing the performance of individual towers
- to outline and discuss possible strategic options available to address the critical issues for a high-rise tower.

### 1.3 Starting point, focus and scope

As the Project progressed it became essential to define more clearly the starting point, the focus and the scope of this Project. Three issues were of concern:

- many tenants (and others) were concerned that the Project would threaten their homes of many years by recommending the demolition of high-rise towers
- the extent to which this Project would also discuss walk-up flats, and
- the extent of the issues which this Project would address.

Unlike the scoping study undertaken by Andersen Consulting for the previous government, this Project did not begin with a view that one or more high-rise should be demolished. Rather, our starting point was that the high-rise towers are significant public housing stock that we need to make work, if at all possible. The purpose of this Project was to work out what would make them work. Demolition and sale to the private sector were not excluded as possibilities; rather they were considered as options of last resort.

Many high-rise towers are part of a large complex consisting of either other high-rise towers or walk-up flats or some mixture of both. Thus a key issue for the Project was whether to focus specifically on high-rise towers or to focus on estates and thus a discussion about walk-up flats. The Project has as its primary focus the high-rise towers. However, it was clear that any discussion about high-rise towers also had to take into account the context in which they were located. This included not only the walk-up flats but also other public housing in the local area. Thus in this Project other public housing around the high-rise flats are discussed not so much in terms of their benefits, their issues and their strategies but rather to provide a context in which the future of a high-rise tower could be considered.

The final consideration was the extent of the issues which this Project would address. The potential scope of issues for high-rise public housing was enormous. For this reason and implicit in the aims as outlined above, we have narrowed the scope of the Project predominantly to housing-related issues. In other words, those issues which arise or are complicated by the design, construction and management of housing. Thus the scope of the Project is to a large degree defined by our view on the role and responsibilities of the Office of Housing. This issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

## **1.4 Methodology**

The project has developed through a number of stages and complementary approaches.

### **Establishment of a Reference Group**

Ecumenical Housing established the Public Housing High-Rise Reference Group which has consisted of key stakeholders including housing organisations, local government, community organisations and academics.<sup>1</sup> Despite numerous efforts, we were unable to appoint any tenant representatives onto the Reference Group due to the current poor state of tenant groups in Victoria. The Office of Housing, while not a member of the Reference Group, participated in Reference Group meetings.

The Reference Group met throughout the Project providing advice and feedback on a range of issues. Early in the project the Reference Group participated in a workshop to identify the critical issues on inner Melbourne public housing as well as possible responses, dilemmas and limitations.

### **Literature Review**

Literature on recent experience in the United States and the United Kingdom in the regeneration of high-rise and low-rise public housing was reviewed. Of particular interest was the material resulting from the work of the Social Exclusion Unit in UK and the Hope VI project in the USA. In addition, a renewed interest in urban renewal in Australia provided some new Australian material for examination.

### **Consultations**

A range of groups with an interest in the future of high-rise public housing were engaged in discussions about the future of inner Melbourne public housing. These were public tenants, community support agencies, local government, and various sections of the Office of Housing.<sup>2</sup> The discussions revolved around three key questions:

- ❑ What are the **benefits, positive features or advantages** of high-rise public housing in inner Melbourne?

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the members of the Reference Group.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for a list of people interviewed.

- ❑ What are the **critical issues** confronting high-rise public housing in inner Melbourne?
- ❑ What are the **key strategies** for addressing these critical issues in high-rise public housing in inner Melbourne?

### Preparation and refinement of report

A draft report was prepared and circulated to key stakeholders for their comment and suggestions. Five workshops were held with specific groups to obtain feedback on the report and specific issues raised in the report:

- local government
- housing policy and planning
- social infrastructure and service delivery agencies
- Office of Housing and Department of Human Services

Participants in the workshops are listed in Appendix II. The feedback from the workshops was incorporated into the final report.

### Development of accessible resource materials

Drawing on the contents of the report, a summary kit for use by tenant groups, community groups and Local Government was developed. The material will be formally launched and made accessible.

## 1.5 Funding assistance

This project has been funded primarily by the Lance Reichstein Foundation and the Stegley Foundation. An application was made to a third Trust for partial funding, but this was unsuccessful. The shortfall in funds was made up by small contributions from six local councils with high-rise public housing in their areas – Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong, Stonnington, Port Phillip and Yarra.

## 1.6 Structure of this publication

This publication is divided into two major parts:

**Part 1**, the Report, which provides background information about high-rise public housing in Victoria, the issues identified about high-rise public housing by various stakeholders and a proposed vision and strategic framework for the future of high-rise public housing.

- ❑ **Chapter 2 and Chapter 3** provide background information on high-rise public housing in Melbourne – a history and brief description, their role, their different area contexts, the characteristics of residents, past and current initiatives, the current policy context and the unique characteristics of high-rise public housing.
- ❑ **Chapter 4** identifies the key stakeholders with an interest in high-rise public housing and their diverse perspectives on high-rise public housing.
- ❑ **Chapter 5** outlines what each group of stakeholders view as the critical issues for high-rise public housing from these diverse perspectives.
- ❑ **Chapter 6** discusses future directions focusing on three broad approaches to the future. This chapter examines four critical questions underpinning any decision about their future and concludes by arguing that we need to move forward on the basis of a positive future.
- ❑ **Chapter 7** outlines a vision for the future by proposing a strategic framework for high-rise public housing. It discusses the role of the State and Local Government, some

implementation issues, including a process for an initial assessment of the towers and priority setting and, examines some key policy and practice questions. It concludes with some recommendations to the State Government.

**Part 2** provides a number of tools and resources for use by tenants, community groups and organisations and government. This includes:

- ❑ **Resource 1: A planning process to identify the best future outcome for each tower.** This proposes a process for planning the regeneration of high-rise towers which engages all the relevant stakeholders in developing a comprehensive and integrated approach to the critical issues for the high-rise towers.
- ❑ **Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of a tower.** This describes an approach for assessing whether an individual tower/local neighbourhood is working and its strengths and weaknesses. This tool was developed to take account of the key issues of interest and concern to different stakeholders.
- ❑ **Resource 3: Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise public housing** which outlines and discusses a range of potential options which could be used to address the critical issues facing a high-rise tower.
- ❑ **Resource 4: Learning from others – a review of the literature** outlines what we can learn from the experience of others both overseas, particularly USA and United Kingdom, and Australia. Some recent work on high-rise public housing in Melbourne is also reviewed.

These tools and resources will assist in planning the future of each high-rise tower.





# CHAPTER 2

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### 2.1 Brief history and description

Public housing high-rise towers were built in the inner suburbs of Melbourne between 1962 and 1976 as part of a slum clearance policy of the then Housing Commission Victoria (HCV). Most of the high-rise towers were built using pre-cast concrete panels manufactured by Holmesglen. At the time, the HCV was highly regarded for its high-rise engineering work and was a leader in concrete technology.<sup>3</sup>

Only four towers were built without using pre-cast concrete panels - the earliest high-rise towers at Dorcas Street, South Melbourne and Canning Street, North Melbourne and two red-brick towers on the corner of Elgin and Nicholson Streets, Carlton.

Melbourne has 44 public housing high-rise towers located in nine municipalities providing housing for over 10,000 residents. Thirteen of these towers are for older people and people with disabilities aged 55 years or more. These towers are located in eight municipalities. The City of Yarra, the municipality with the highest number of high-rise flats, is the only municipality which does not contain a high-rise tower specifically for older people.

The number of storeys in the towers range from 12 floors to 30 floors consisting of between six and 18 flats per floor. All the older-person towers are 12 floors consisting of between 12 and 18 flats per floor.

**Table 2-1: Summary of key characteristics of high-rise towers**

Characteristic	Older-person towers	Mixed household towers
Number of towers	13 towers	31 towers
Number of storeys	12 storeys	12 – 30 storeys, with most 20 storeys
Number of flats per floor	12 – 18 with most 17 flats	6 – 18 flats, with most 9 or 10 flats
Building period	Early 1960s to early 1970s	1960 – 1975
Type of construction	Pre-cast concrete panels	Pre-cast concrete panels (except 4 towers)

Until the 1990s all older-person high-rise towers provided only bedsitter accommodation. As indicated in Table 2-2, over the past decade the Office of Housing converted many of these bedsitter units to 1-bedroom units (with two bedsitter units converted to create one 1-bedroom unit). Approximately one-third (34%) of all units are now 1-bedroom units.

The remaining 31 towers consist of a mixture of 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom dwellings. As indicated in Table 2-2, they are predominantly 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom dwellings with over half 2-bedroom dwellings. Traditionally they were occupied by families.

<sup>3</sup> See *The High-Rise at a Glance: A Summary Profiling Ministry of Housing and Construction High-Rise Accommodation* prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Construction, Victoria, December 1990 for further description of the high-rise and construction techniques.

However, over the past decade they have been occupied by a more mixed group - families, couples, single people alone and single people sharing.

**Table 2-2: Size of dwellings in high-rise towers**

	Older-person towers		Mixed household towers		All towers total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Bedsitters	1,182	66%		0%	1,182	17%
1-bedroom	621	34%	280	5%	901	13%
2-bedroom		0%	3,054	57%	3,054	43%
3-bedroom		0%	1,998	38%	1,998	28%
<b>All dwellings</b>	<b>1,803</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,332</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7,135</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Office of Housing, Property Services<sup>4</sup>.

High-rise flats are a very dominant form of public housing in inner Melbourne. Table 2-3 below outlines high-rise flats as a proportion of all public housing by local government area. It distinguishes between high-rise flats which are for older persons and other high-rise flats.

**Table 2-3: High-rise flats as a proportion of all public housing by local government area**

Local Government area	Older-person high-rise flats		Mixed household high-rise flats		All high-rise flats	
	Number	% all older-person stock	Number	% all other stock	Number	% all public housing stock
Yarra		0%	2,380	75%	2,380	54%
Stonnington	442	48%	396	64%	838	54%
Melbourne	247	37%	816	56%	1,063	50%
Moonee Valley	258	22%	1,212	52%	1,470	42%
Port Phillip	265	22%	420	35%	685	29%
Hobson's Bay	132	33%	108	18%	240	24%
Maribyrnong	180	22%		0%	180	9%
Moreland	136	20%		0%	136	8%
Darebin	143	13%		0%	143	5%
<b>ALL LGAs</b>	<b>1,803</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>5,332</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>7,135</b>	<b>33%</b>

*Source:* Office of Housing database and Office of Housing Property Services

Ninety per cent of all high-rise flats are in the five inner city local government areas of Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Yarra, Stonnington and Port Phillip. Overall 33 per cent of all

<sup>4</sup> Two types of statistical material are presented in this report. The first refers to **housing stock** provided by Office of Housing, Property Services. This material is used in Table 2-2 and Table 2-3. The second refers to **current public housing tenancies**. Thus, it excludes dwellings which are not currently occupied, dwellings which are managed by another organisation and dwellings which are used as community facilities. This material is used in Table 2-1, Table 2-1, Table 2-1 and Table 2-2.

public housing in inner Melbourne are high-rise flats. This proportion ranges from a low of 5% in the City of Darebin to a high of 54% (for the City of Yarra and the City of Stonnington). In three Municipalities – Yarra, Stonnington and Melbourne - high-rise flats are more than 50% of all public housing stock. The City of Yarra has the highest overall number of high-rise flats, 2,380 flats. It does not have high-rise flats for older people and the high-rise flats represent 75% of public housing in the municipality.

High-rise flats for older persons, as a proportion of public housing for older persons, ranges from 13% (Darebin) to 48% (Stonnington). In three municipalities – Maribyrnong, Darebin and Moreland – the only high-rise flats are for older people.

## **2.2 Past and current role**

The past and current role of high-rise public housing is tied up with the past and current role of public housing generally.

### **Traditional roles**

The role of the high-rise within public housing has been through a number of phases. In the first phase – 1960s and early 1970s – high-rise flats had two target groups: low income working families with two adults and children, and older retired people, predominantly women. At this time the eligibility criteria were generous compared to current criteria.

In the 1970s and 1980s two major changes occurred in Australia: a dramatic increase in the number of sole parent families, and; an increase in the number of unemployed people. This changed not only the target group for public housing but also the financial viability of public housing as revenues reduced significantly and unfunded rental rebate bills expanded. Both the increase in sole parent and unemployed families placed additional pressure on the then Housing Commission Victoria to provide priority access to public housing.

In the 1990s Office of Housing began to focus on new target groups, in particular independent single people with disabilities. Thus the population of older persons in high-rise public housing became more diverse in two ways:

- ethnically, as post-war migrants aged and moved into high-rise public housing, and
- the minimum entry age shifted from the retirement age (60 for women and 65 for men) to 55 years, allowing people on a disability pension to be allocated high-rise public housing.

### **Housing waves of immigrants and refugees:**

Mixed estates housed immigrant families in their early years in Australia and a succession of groups moved into public housing, as follows:

- 1960s Northern and Southern Europe (England, Ireland, Scotland, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia)
- 1970s Turkey
- after 1975 Vietnam and East Timor
- 1980s South America
- mid-1990s Horn of Africa
- late 1990s Bosnia-Herzegovina, Former USSR and Baltic States

### Crisis accommodation

High-rise public housing has tended to have a higher turnover than most other forms of housing stock. As a result it was easier for those seeking immediate housing to access high-rise housing rather than wait extended periods for a house in other areas. Therefore, high-rise public housing has often been used to house public housing applicants seeking priority housing. A large proportion of these applicants are in crisis.

With the introduction of the broadbanding policy and the segmented waiting list, the extent to which the high-rise have been used for crisis accommodation has not reduced but rather other types of housing have also been used more for crisis accommodation. Recent material provided as part of the Segmented Waiting List Review indicates that in 1998-99 approximately 43% of high-rise allocations were from the first three segments, while in 1999-2000 the proportion had reduced to approximately 27% of allocations.<sup>5</sup> However, each high-rise tower has a different turnover rate and the current data does not indicate the distribution of allocations among the high-rise towers.

### 2.3 Different local area contexts

The context of high-rise flats varies from:

- single towers for predominately older people located within a predominately private housing environment (owner occupied or private rental). Eight of the 13 older-person towers meet this criteria: Gordon Street, Footscray; Barkly Street, Brunswick; Holmes Street, Northcote; Crown Street, Flemington; Inkerman Street, St.Kilda; Floyd Lodge, Williamstown; Layfield Court, South Melbourne, and; Loxton Lodge Windsor. Two towers for older people located together at King Street, Prahran largely meet this criteria as well;
- towers for older people which are located within a mixed housing complex. Three of the 13 older-person towers meet this criteria: Melrose Street, North Melbourne; Lygon Street, Carlton, and; Ormond Street, Kensington;
- a single tower for families located with in a predominately private housing environment such as Park Towers, South Melbourne and Nelson Heights, Williamstown;
- extensive public housing estates with a number of high-rise towers, such as the five towers that make up the Richmond estate, the four towers which make the Fitzroy estate and the two towers on Elgin/Nicholson Street estate in Carlton, and;
- extensive public housing estates with a mixture of high-rise towers and walk-up flats such as the North Melbourne, Kensington, Flemington, Carlton, Collingwood, Prahran and South Melbourne estates.

The size of each estate varies. The proximity of each estate to other residential dwellings, to retail centres, to open space areas etc. also varies. The characteristics of the local area within which each of these estates is situated also differ. Most of the inner urban area has been subject to gentrification whereby professionals and others on relatively high incomes but in smaller households (singles or couples) have progressively taken over from traditional working class families. The progress of gentrification has impacted on the local areas differently, highlighting to differing degrees the social and economic disadvantage of the estates.

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<sup>5</sup> Victoria. Department of Human Services. Office of Housing (2000) *Segmented Waiting List Review: Consultation Paper* p.13

## 2.4 Characteristics of high-rise tenants

This outline of the characteristics of high-rise tenants distinguishes between the older-person towers and the mixed household towers. The first section presents the overall characteristics for each group of high-rise towers, while the second section presents the characteristics on a tower by tower basis. This highlights the diversity found between towers.

### (1) Overview of all high-rise towers

#### Mixed household towers

Table 2-1 outlines some key characteristics of tenants in mixed household towers. The points to note are:

- the relatively high proportion of tenants (47%) who have lived in high-rise towers for more than 5 years, with more than one in five having lived there for more than 10 years. Despite the apparent high turnover in high-rise towers, these figures indicate a very stable core of tenants;
- the high proportion of single and couple tenants (44%) living in “family” towers;
- the highest proportion of tenants (35%) are aged 25-39 years but a significant proportion are more than 70 years of age (14%);
- women are the predominant household head in 42% of all households;
- tenants are predominantly from Asia (43.5%), in particular Vietnam (28%), China (6%) and Indonesia (6%); and
- tenants in high-rise towers come from very diverse cultures and list birthplaces from approximately 90 different countries throughout the world.

**Table 2-1: Characteristics of tenants in mixed household towers**

Length of tenancy		Age of tenants	
Less than 5 years	53%	Younger than 25	7%
5 – 10 years	24%	25 - 39 years	35%
10 - 20 years	17%	40 - 54 years	26%
20 - 30 years	5%	55 - 69 years	17%
30 or more years	1%	70 years or older	14%

Household type		Household head	
Small family	20%	Female	42%
Single person	20%	Couple	23%
Medium family	19%	Male	18%
Group	17%	Group	17%
Older single	16%		
Older couple	8%		

**Note:** Table continued on the next page.

Table 2-1: Characteristics of tenants in mixed household towers (continued)

Geographical area of birth		Major overseas country of birth	
Asia	43.5%	Vietnam	28.3%
Australia	16.3%	China	5.9%
Eastern Europe	11.3%	Indonesia	5.9%
Africa	11.0%	Turkey	4.6%
Western Europe	5.4%	Former USSR and the Baltic States	4.2%
Middle East	2.7%	Ethiopia	4.2%
Central and South America	1.9%	Somalia	3.6%
Pacific and New Zealand	1.0%	Southern Europe	2.3%
UK and Ireland	1.0%	Other Africa (excluding North Africa)	2.1%
Other	6.0%	Egypt	1.8%
		Greece	1.1%
		Chile	1.0%

Source: Office of Housing database. <sup>6</sup>

### Older-person high-rise

Table 2-1 outlines some key characteristics of tenants in older-person towers. The key points to note are:

- the relatively high proportion of older persons who have had tenancies for less than 5 years (75%) compared to 53% for the mixed household towers. The high rate of conversions from bedsits to 1-bedroom units is known to have influenced this figure, as people shifting due to conversion are likely to have been counted as a new tenant;
- until recently the older-person high-rise were mainly bedsitter units. As a result, they have provided housing for mainly older single persons (87%);
- the predominant household head is male – they occupy 60% of units;
- older-person towers cater primarily for people on aged pensions. However, in recent years a larger number of persons receiving disability pensions have been housed in these towers, with over 1 in 10 residents less than 54 years of age;
- the area of birth for tenants in older-person towers is significantly different from mixed household towers, with the largest group being those born in Australia (47%). Notably the number of tenants from Asia, Central and South America and the Middle East are very small;
- the major countries of birth other than Australia are the former USSR and the Baltic States (6%), Southern Europe (5%) and England (4%);
- like the mixed household towers, the older-person towers have tenants from a broad range of cultures – with tenants born in approximately 70 different countries.

<sup>6</sup> As noted in footnote 4, two types of statistical material are presented in this report. The material in the following tables refers to **current public housing tenancies**. Thus, it excludes dwellings which are not currently occupied, dwellings which are managed by another organisation and dwellings which are used as community facilities.

Table 2-1: Characteristics of tenants in older-person towers

Length of tenancy		Household head	
Less than 5 years	75.1%	Male	60.8%
5 - 10 years	16.9%	Female	37.0%
10 - 20 years	6.2%	Couple	1.2%
20 - 30 years	1.6%	Group	0.4%
30 or more years	0.1%	Unknown	0.6%

Type of household		Age of tenants	
Older Single	86.9%	Younger than 25	0.1%
Single Person	11.5%	25 – 39	0.4%
Older Couple	1.2%	40 – 54	11.1%
Group	0.4%	55 – 69	40.0%
		70 or older	48.4%

Geographical area of birth		Major overseas country of birth	
Australia	46.5%	The Former USSR and the Baltic States	5.8%
Eastern Europe	15.9%	Southern Europe	5.0%
Western Europe	14.0%	England	4.4%
UK & Ireland	7.9%	Poland	3.2%
Asia	6.8%	Italy	3.0%
Middle East	1.7%	Greece	2.7%
South and Central America	1.2%	Vietnam	2.4%
Pacific and New Zealand	0.8%	China (excl. Taiwan Province)	2.3%
Africa	0.5%	Scotland	1.8%
Other or not stated	4.6%	Hungary	1.6%
		Russian Federation	1.1%
		Ireland	1.2%

*Source:* Office of Housing database

## (2) Diversity between high-rise towers

Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 below outline some key characteristics of mixed household high-rise towers and older-person high-rise towers. As each tower has a different number of units, the tables outline percentage figures. This allows for some comparison between towers. The following characteristics are outlined for each tower:

- the number of units in the tower
- the proportion of tenants who have had tenancy agreements in the one unit for more than 5 years
- the proportion of women-headed households



- the proportion of tenants aged more than 55 years (mixed household towers)
- the proportion of tenants aged less than 55 years and the proportion aged more than 70 years (older-person towers)
- the proportion of 1-bedroom units in each tower
- the proportion of 3-bedroom units in each tower (mixed household towers only)
- the proportion of single tenants and couples (mixed household towers only)
- the proportion of tenants whose birthplace is Australia
- the highest proportion of tenants whose birthplace is outside Australia and a broad indication of the birthplace
- the proportion of tenants whose preferred language for communication with the Office of Housing is English.

These variables have been chosen in such a way as to present a snapshot of each tower. The shaded percentages in each column highlight those towers with the highest proportion for that characteristic. The bottom of each column outlines the average proportion for each characteristic across all towers, the maximum percentage among all the towers and the minimum percentage among all the towers. These averages, maximums and minimums indicate the diversity found amongst the residents of high-rise towers. For example, while 47% of tenants on mixed estates have been tenants for more than 5 years, the spread between different estates is quite large, with the maximum among all estates at 69% (at Elgin Street, Carlton) and the minimum among all estates at 35% (at Derby Street, Kensington; Wellington Street Collingwood, and; Hoddle Street, Collingwood).

The tables highlight the diversity amongst towers. No two towers are exactly alike and thus it is important to assess and develop strategies for each tower individually.

### **Mixed household high-rise towers**

The interesting features of Table 2-1 are:

- while on average almost half of all tenants in the high-rise towers have been tenants for more than five years, in 6 of the 31 towers (South Yarra, South Melbourne and the two towers on the corner of Nicholson and Elgin Street, Carlton) over 60% have been tenants for more than 5 years. On the other hand, 6 towers (Williamstown, Kensington and Collingwood) have less than 40% of tenants with tenancies more than 5 years.
- this stability among tenants may be linked to the relatively high proportion of single people and couples – an average of 44% across all towers with two towers (Dorcas Street, South Melbourne and Surrey Road, South Yarra) where the proportion of singles and couples is more than 75% of tenants. Traditionally, the towers in Table 2-1 have been referred to as “family” towers. Given the high proportions of single tenants and couples, it is apparent that they are no longer just “family” towers but house a mixture of household types.
- while the average proportion of women-headed households across all towers is 42%, 3 towers (Williamstown; Elgin Street, Carlton; and one of the Richmond towers) have more than 50% women-headed households. Only one tower (one of the Richmond towers) has 30% or lower women-headed households.
- a high proportion of tenants are aged 55 years or more. In one tower (Surrey Road, South Yarra) three-quarters of tenants are aged 55 years or more. In over half of the towers, more than a quarter of tenants are aged 55 years or more.



Table 2-1: Some key characteristics of mixed household high-rise towers

	Number of units	% Tenancy more than 5 years	% Women-headed households	% Aged more than 55 years	% 1-bedroom	% 3-bedrooms	% Singles and couples	% Birthplace in Australia	% Highest other birthplace	% English Language
235 NELSON PLACE, NORTH WILLIAMSTOWN	98	37%	61%	24%	11%	21%	46%	52%	8% W.Europe/Africa	87%
56 DERBY STREET, KENSINGTON	105	35%	42%	26%	0%	34%	31%	14%	34% Asia	39%
12 HOLLAND COURT, FLEMINGTON	178	47%	43%	33%	11%	22%	44%	12%	51% Asia	39%
120 RACECOURSE ROAD, FLEMINGTON	174	44%	37%	20%	0%	34%	29%	9%	48% Asia	34%
126 RACECOURSE ROAD, FLEMINGTON	173	41%	42%	22%	0%	34%	35%	10%	45% Asia	32%
130 RACECOURSE ROAD, FLEMINGTON	180	48%	34%	28%	0%	33%	33%	10%	53% Asia	30%
12 SUTTON STREET, NORTH MELBOURNE	179	46%	44%	31%	11%	22%	42%	16%	40% Asia	50%
33 ALFRED STREET, NORTH MELBOURNE	149	42%	46%	23%	0%	91%	23%	10%	42% Africa	42%
76 CANNING STREET, NORTH MELBOURNE	155	40%	38%	20%	0%	0%	50%	19%	49% Asia	56%
140 NEILL STREET, CARLTON	178	38%	46%	22%	11%	22%	51%	19%	25% Asia/Africa	62%
480 LYGON STREET, CARLTON	177	48%	47%	39%	11%	22%	62%	22%	21% Africa	52%
510 LYGON STREET, CARLTON	148	41%	43%	27%	0%	91%	31%	13%	34% Africa	49%
141 NICHOLSON STREET, CARLTON	98	68%	42%	54%	33%	33%	70%	26%	22% West.Europe	58%
20 ELGIN STREET, CARLTON	98	69%	53%	46%	33%	33%	67%	27%	27% West.Europe	52%
90 BRUNSWICK STREET, FITZROY	199	41%	49%	23%	0%	40%	41%	14%	64% Asia	37%
140 BRUNSWICK STREET, FITZROY	197	42%	42%	20%	0%	39%	39%	15%	63% Asia	32%
95 NAPIER STREET, FITZROY	198	41%	40%	22%	0%	40%	51%	25%	49% Asia	47%
125 NAPIER STREET, FITZROY	196	40%	45%	17%	0%	40%	39%	14%	54% Asia	41%
240 WELLINGTON STREET, COLLINGWOOD	193	35%	45%	21%	1%	37%	37%	22%	44% Asia	44%
229 HODDLE STREET, COLLINGWOOD	177	35%	41%	16%	11%	23%	47%	27%	38% Asia	56%
253 HODDLE STREET, COLLINGWOOD	176	36%	48%	20%	0%	34%	41%	24%	45% Asia	52%
106 ELIZABETH STREET, RICHMOND	197	47%	36%	31%	0%	40%	40%	8%	74% Asia	30%
108 ELIZABETH STREET, RICHMOND	199	46%	50%	24%	0%	40%	36%	11%	73% Asia	28%
110 ELIZABETH STREET, RICHMOND	198	46%	30%	30%	0%	39%	32%	6%	85% Asia	24%
112 ELIZABETH STREET, RICHMOND	201	53%	40%	35%	0%	40%	39%	7%	79% Asia	28%
139 HIGGETT STREET, RICHMOND	220	52%	40%	37%	0%	40%	37%	5%	80% Asia	22%
1 SURREY ROAD, SOUTH YARRA	107	64%	38%	75%	11%	22%	76%	20%	39% East.Europe	33%
2 SIMMONS STREET, SOUTH YARRA	144	64%	37%	53%	0%	92%	41%	12%	33% East.Europe	38%
259 MALVERN ROAD, SOUTH YARRA	144	63%	40%	45%	0%	92%	36%	17%	36% East.Europe	32%
200 DORCAS STREET, SOUTH MELBOURNE	119	66%	38%	59%	26%	0%	84%	27%	42% Other	53%
332 PARK STREET, SOUTH MELBOURNE	297	55%	40%	56%	20%	20%	67%	21%	37% East.Europe	39%
<b>Average for all high-rise towers</b>	<b>5,252</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>43% Asia</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Maximum % among all towers</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>85% Asia</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>Minimum % among all towers</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>5%</b>		<b>22%</b>

Table 2-2: Some key characteristics of older-person high-rise towers

	Number of units	% Tenancy more than 5 years	% Women-headed households	% Age less than 55 years	% Age more than 70 years	% 1-bedroom units	% Birthplace in Australia	% Highest other birthplace	% English Language
63 HANMER STREET, NORTH WILLIAMSTOWN	117	36%	26%	16%	43%	12%	62%	16% UK & Ireland	97%
127 GORDON STREET, FOOTSCRAY	168	31%	27%	22%	35%	15%	42%	20% Western Europe	82%
29 CROWN STREET, FLEMINGTON	98	34%	36%	12%	38%	45%	42%	17% Asia	72%
94 ORMOND STREET, KENSINGTON	95	22%	40%	23%	38%	64%	48%	21% Asia	67%
159 MELROSE STREET, NORTH MELBOURNE	138	25%	25%	21%	34%	34%	52%	14% Asia	80%
530 LYGON STREET, CARLTON	130	18%	28%	19%	52%	39%	45%	23% Western Europe	73%
351 BARKLY STREET, BRUNSWICK	133	27%	33%	20%	33%	59%	55%	19% Western Europe	83%
1 HOLMES STREET, NORTHCOTE	139	23%	35%	0%	53%	52%	58%	19% Western Europe	83%
25 KING STREET, PRAHRAN	120	21%	55%	1%	67%	39%	47%	28% Eastern Europe	83%
27 KING STREET, PRAHRAN	126	36%	54%	2%	63%	23%	36%	33% Eastern Europe	66%
49 UNION STREET, PRAHRAN	143	15%	46%	7%	55%	38%	38%	27% Eastern Europe	73%
150 INKERMAN STREET, ST KILDA	140	14%	50%	2%	65%	37%	31%	42% Eastern Europe	61%
150 VICTORIA AVENUE, ALBERT PARK	97	25%	28%	3%	54%	43%	53%	9% Western Europe	95%
<b>Average for all high-rise towers</b>	<b>1,644</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>15% Eastern Europe</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Maximum % among all towers</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>42% Eastern Europe</b>	<b>97%</b>
<b>Minimum % among all towers</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>31%</b>		<b>61%</b>

- the low number of 1-bedroom units in the high-rise towers. The four towers with a relatively high proportion of 1-bedroom units are correlated with a high proportion of tenancies of more than 5 years, tenants aged 55 years or more and singles and couples.
- across the high-rise towers only 16% of tenants were born in Australia. However, this varies significantly between towers with some towers (Richmond and Flemington) having less than 10% born in Australia and one tower (Nelson Place, North Williamstown) having more than 50% born in Australia.
- there is diversity across towers in overseas birthplace with the highest proportion of tenants in the Richmond and Fitzroy towers predominantly born in Asia (mainly Vietnam and East Timor). In South Yarra and South Melbourne towers, tenants are predominantly born in Eastern Europe (mainly the former USSR) while in a North Melbourne tower, tenants are predominantly born in Africa (mainly Horn of Africa).
- despite the relatively low levels of tenants born in Australia, at least half of all tenants have nominated English as their preferred language for communicating with the Office of Housing, but this ranges from a high of 87% for Williamstown to a low of 22-30% for the Richmond towers.

### **Older-person high-rise towers**

The interesting features of Table 2-2 are:

- the relatively low proportion of women-headed households in older-person high-rise towers with an overall average of only 37%. The 3 towers in Prahran have the highest proportions ranging from 46-55% women-headed households, while 5 towers (Williamstown, Footscray, North Melbourne, Carlton and Albert Park) have less than 30% women-headed households.
- overall 12% of residents in older-person towers are aged 55 years or less. In some towers, the proportion of those aged 55 years or less (assumed close to 55 years) is relatively high with four towers (Kensington, Footscray, North Melbourne and Brunswick) housing more than 20% of tenants aged less than 55 years. Some towers (Northcote, Prahran, St.Kilda and Albert Park) house very few, if any, tenants under 55 years.
- nearly half of all older persons in high-rise towers are aged more than 70 years with the highest concentrations in Prahran and St.Kilda.
- some estates (Kensington, Brunswick and Northcote) now have over 50% of 1-bedroom units.
- nearly half of all tenants were born in Australia. The largest other group is from Eastern Europe (mainly from the former USSR). Broadly the major groups are differentiated by region with people from Eastern Europe the largest group in the southern region, people from Western Europe in the northern region and people from Asia in the Western region. It is notable that while people from Asia are predominant in Richmond for the mixed household towers, they are predominant in the West for older-person towers. This may reflect the lack of older-person high-rise towers in the City of Yarra.
- more than three-quarters of older persons use English as their preferred language but this ranges from a high of 97% and 95% in Williamstown and Albert Park respectively to a low of 61% in St.Kilda.

### 2.5 Initiatives over the past 20 years

#### (1) 1980s and early 1990s initiatives

Over the past 20 years a number of initiatives have been taken by the Office of Housing to improve the conditions of high-rise public housing, particularly during the 1980s. In 1988, the then Ministry of Housing developed an estate improvement strategy which outlined a range of issues to be addressed and strategies for improvement.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1980s, in particular, a broad range of physical improvements were made to high-rise public housing. These included:

- balcony enclosures
- lift upgrades – third lift at 12 Holland Court Flemington
- foyer upgrades
- laundry upgrades
- entrances
- fencing
- car-parks
- playgrounds

On the management side a number of initiatives were also piloted including:

- different types of security guards such as custodians
- resident liaison officers/caretakers, and
- management by estate officers who were not residents on an estate.

Unfortunately, many of the lessons of these changes have not been documented nor their cost effectiveness evaluated, thus leaving many gaps in our understanding of which strategies work and which strategies don't.

In the late 1990s, the Office of Housing relocated the tenants of 72 Derby Street, Kensington and demolished this tower.

#### (2) Recent initiatives

In the last 12 months, there has been a renewed interest in high-rise public housing, particularly in the City of Yarra where high-rise estates have been experiencing the most difficulties. As a result, a number of new initiatives have commenced to address some of the social issues on estates.

##### **Yarra-Wide Public Housing Network**

High-rise public housing is the dominant form of public housing in the City of Yarra. The Yarra-Wide Public Housing Network brings together a range of the agencies working in public housing such as:

- City of Yarra – various sections
- Victorian Office of Housing, Area and Regional Office
- Public tenant organisations
- Health services
- Tenancy advice services
- Support services
- Welfare services
- Local schools

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<sup>7</sup> See *1988 Estate Improvement Strategy*. Estate Improvement and Technical Services Group, Ministry of Housing, March 1988.

- Community development organisations
- Neighbourhood Houses.

This network is a strategic umbrella group which:

- provides an opportunity for agencies to share information
- advocates on behalf of public housing tenants and service providers
- facilitates an integrated approach to service provision, and
- assists in developing projects on public housing estates with a view to developing sustainable communities and better integration with the wider community.

### **Wired high-rise**

The Infoxchange (an Internet Service Provider), Swinburne Institute for Social Research and the Victorian Office of Housing are jointly undertaking a project which involves:

- wiring a high-rise tower for a computer network
- providing each dwelling with a computer
- developing a community website or intranet for the tower
- providing tenants with access to the internet

The Project is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, the Victorian Office of Housing and the City of Yarra.

The Infoxchange will provide each dwelling with a computer and the required software as well as develop a community website. Swinburne Institute for Social Research will evaluate the usage, social outcomes and social and information policy implications of the computer access for the residents. This Project will commence in early 2001.

### **Community development project**

Jesuit Social Services have been funded by the Victorian Office of Housing for a Community Development Project on the three high-rise public housing estates in the City of Yarra. This is a three-year Project which commenced in early 2000. Jesuit Social Services have employed a team of three community development workers and aims to:

- enhance the well being of individuals and families through social interaction and community integration
- enable the community to construct proactive responses to the issue of problematic drug use
- address identified tenant concerns relating to the estate environment - public health and safety issues
- improve access to information about services and activities for residents, and
- enhance the education, training and employment opportunities available to residents

Partnership with residents and co-ordination with local services and agencies are strong themes of the Project.

## **2.6 Policy context**

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Office of Housing has operated in a difficult fiscal environment. Since the mid-1980s, funds for public housing have continued to decrease in real terms, with the Commonwealth Government giving preference to expanding the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Program. During this period the role of public housing changed substantially from the main alternative to owner-occupied housing to a third tenure

targetted at households who were unable to access or could not maintain private rental housing.

The expansion of public housing has slowed dramatically throughout the 1990s with a renewed focus on upgrading and redeveloping existing public housing. Current limited resources are now focused on the worst public housing physically, particularly walk-up flats. Facing an unknown future, high-rise towers have generally been ignored with little work undertaken.

In 1997, after some years of discussion about future housing assistance directions, the Commonwealth Government opted for the more conservative and less costly approach of major changes to public housing policies. In addition the Victorian Office of Housing also made significant changes to housing policies. Five housing policy changes are thought to have had a major impact on high-rise estates:

- ❑ **Broadbanding:** The broadbanding of public housing waiting lists means that applicants for public housing can only choose a broad area in which to be housed. Previously an applicant could choose the area or estate in which they wanted to be housed, the type of stock they wanted – high-rise flat, walk-up flat or house – and even the floor they wanted. Under the broadbanding arrangements, applicants have no choice of location within that area nor any choice of housing type.
- ❑ **Refusals:** Wait-turn applicants for public housing are only allowed to refuse one offer of housing – after a second refusal the applicant returns to the bottom of the waiting list. Priority applicants only have one offer of housing. Previously a wait-turn applicant could refuse two offers of housing and a priority applicant one offer of housing.
- ❑ **Segmented waiting list:** The Office of Housing introduced a segmented waiting list whereby applicants for priority housing are ranked into one of three segments, thus providing priority to those with the highest needs. Prior to the segmented waiting list applicants were divided into priority applicants and wait-turn applicants.
- ❑ **Rent indices:** Public housing rents were increased from 20% of income to 23% for existing tenants and to 25% for new tenants. The proportion of income paid in rent by non-dependant residents of households rose from 10% income to 23-25% income.
- ❑ **Reduced security of tenure:** Reviews of tenancies every 3-5 years have been introduced resulting in public housing tenants no longer having security of tenure. Previously public housing tenants could stay in public housing for as long as they chose regardless of any changes in their financial situation.

The Bracks Labor Government was elected in October 1999 with a platform to review these public housing policies. Some changes have already been made to the policy of reviewing tenancies every 3-5 years. Currently the Victorian Office of Housing is undertaking the following reviews, in consultation with tenants and community organisations:

- segmented waiting list
- eligibility criteria for public housing, and
- broadbanding.

The outcomes of these reviews will have a major impact on the capacity of housing managers to develop and implement strategies which address some of the critical issues for high-rise public housing.



# CHAPTER 3

## UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

High-rise public housing provides housing for over 6,000 Victorian households. It represents a substantial proportion of public housing stock generally – approximately 10% - and a very substantial proportion of public housing stock in inner Melbourne – approximately one third of inner Melbourne public housing and over half in some municipalities.

High-rise public housing has some unique characteristics including:

- a unique living experience
- affordable housing in inner Melbourne
- their prime location close to services and public transport
- particular characteristics of the flats
- ethnic and cultural diversity
- socio-economic diversity
- their role supporting basic community services, and
- their scale and complexity.

It is these characteristics which are highly valued by many tenants and by others living in close proximity to high-rise towers. It is these characteristics that are the strengths of the high-rise estates. If not recognised and promoted, they are also the weaknesses that can have disastrous results. It is important that in future planning for high-rise public housing these unique characteristics are recognised.

### *(1) A unique living experience*

While high-rise living is a way of life for many households in overseas countries, it is an unusual experience in Australia. High-rise living is not the preferred housing choice of most Victorians. However, it is a housing type which many enjoy and it contrasts markedly with low-density living in the suburbs of Melbourne.

The common access point to a tower and its higher density result in higher levels of interaction between residents. To live in an environment with a diversity of personalities, interests, expectations, cultural and religious practices requires high levels of tolerance and respect. Higher density living can shift the boundaries of privacy. Those living in higher density environments cannot avoid learning about some aspects of the lives of other people. Some enjoy the robustness of interaction whereas others withdraw. For many it brings opportunities to interact and enjoy the company of other people and other cultures. For others who prefer their privacy there is an ongoing tension. Higher density living forces the issues of community interaction and tolerance. It is a challenge to deal more closely with a large number of proximate neighbours.

High-rise living is a stark contrast to suburban living where the structure of the streetscape ensures a high level of privacy and that privacy is only breached by invitation. Community interaction is more fluid, more selective and spread over a larger geographical area. It is easier to move beyond proximate neighbours and maintain low level relationships with these neighbours.

Overall anecdotal evidence from our consultations indicates that many tenants enjoy high-rise living.

### **(2) Affordable housing in inner Melbourne**

Over the past decade the price of housing in inner Melbourne has increased dramatically, particularly during the boom period in the late 1980s. In addition, inner Melbourne, once the preserve of low cost private rental housing, now provides relatively little affordable rental housing. Private rental housing supply has progressively moved up-market.

Strong demand for inner Melbourne housing both for purchase and for rent will continue and the opportunities for new supply are limited. Subsequently pressure on house prices and rentals is progressively excluding low and middle income earners from inner Melbourne.

Public housing now represents one of the few remaining affordable housing options in inner Melbourne for low income households. High-rise public housing is a significant proportion of public housing in inner Melbourne. Given current house prices and limited opportunities for new construction it is unlikely that the Office of Housing will be able to reconfigure its housing stock without a substantial loss of dwellings in inner Melbourne.

### **(3) Location**

A unique feature of high-rise public housing is its location with proximity to the city, good access to public transport and easy access to a broad range of services – health and medical services, schools and pre-school education, retail and commercial services, support services and diverse forms of entertainment. Many tenants particularly enjoy the location of the flats and their proximity to this wide range of services.

### **(4) Characteristics of high-rise flats**

By contemporary standards, high-rise flats are spacious with large bedrooms and living areas, compared with many other inner-urban flats and with more recently constructed Office of Housing dwellings.

Many tenants regard their flat as a very safe place to live. Security doors provide an additional level of security.

For many long-term tenants, their high-rise flat is their home. It is the place they have lived for a long time. It is a place full of memories and where they have raised families and have made friends. They are comfortable with the area. The affinity and attachment to the place is very strong.

### **(5) Ethnic and cultural diversity**

High-rise towers have traditionally been used by recently arrived migrants and refugee groups. By locating themselves in particular areas, recently arrived migrants and refugees can establish something of their own cultural identity and call upon one another for both formal and informal support. For example, both the Vietnamese community and the East Timorese community have strongly established themselves on the North Richmond estate, the Russian communities on the Prahran and South Melbourne estates and the African communities on the North Melbourne estate.

High-rise towers continue to play an important role in providing cultural diversity within local communities. Not only have they contributed to the Australian community through their diverse cuisine but have enriched the community with their traditions, values and cultural practices.



### ***(6) Socio-economic diversity within inner Melbourne***

With gentrification over the past four decades, the socio-economic profile of inner Melbourne has progressively shifted from low income working families to high and very high income singles, couples and small families.

If inner Melbourne is to retain its socio-economic diversity, its diversity in housing forms and its diversity in household types, then the retention of public housing (including high-rise public housing) appears an essential strategy.

### ***(7) Their role supporting local social infrastructure***

High-rise towers also play an important role in supporting basic community services in the local area. Residents from the high-rise often provide a mass of population sufficient to maintain key services in an area. These key services are important to the whole community but rely upon a certain level of usage for their viability. Examples are pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, health centres, ethnic services and aged care services. Without a base level of population using these services, they would not be available for use by a range of other people in the local community.

### ***(8) Scale and complexity***

High-rise towers are complex buildings containing a large number of dwellings. They require specialised services such as lifts, laundries and garbage disposal. Any decision about a high-rise tower will have an impact on a large number of tenants. The scale and complexity of high-rise towers presents some difficult issues for asset management strategies. For example, a decision to upgrade a dwelling may involve disruption (noise, dirt, dust, relocation) to tenants over long period of time. A decision to demolish or sell a building will involve the relocation of a large number of residents and disruption to their lives as they resettle elsewhere. It also has a major impact on applicants for public housing as priority is given to transferring tenants. It may also involve loss a major loss of revenue over long periods.

The scale of high-rise towers also makes allocations and tenancy management more complex. Policies on who is allocated housing can have an influence on other tenants. Changes in allocation policies can change the characteristics of people living in a high-rise tower. These changes may undermine a reasonable living environment, compatibility between existing tenants and their sense of safety. For example, policies which result in concentrations of people with multiple difficulties and high support needs (sometimes without adequate levels of support) can have a major impact on the lives of residents.



# CHAPTER 4

## STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR PERSPECTIVES

### 4.1 Key stakeholders

Many different groups (which we will call stakeholders in this and subsequent chapters) have an interest in the future of high-rise public housing. For the purposes of this study these stakeholder groups have been identified as:

- Tenants and applicants for public housing
- Victorian Government
- Office of Housing
- Other Government Departments
- Local Government
- Social infrastructure agencies and support services
- Local community, and
- Wider community.

Each stakeholder will have a particular perspective on inner city high-rise housing which shapes their views about the best future for public high-rise housing, as do the formal responsibilities of some stakeholders. Stakeholders may have some objectives in common, but more often their objectives in relation to high-rise public housing will differ in emphasis, or will differ but complement one another, or will differ and conflict. They may perceive the key issues differently and seek to implement differing strategies. We need to recognise and understand these different perspectives in order to unravel the complex issues confronting high-rise public housing and reach some consensus about its future.

It is important to recognise that each stakeholder has distinctive yet important perspectives on high-rise public housing. Stakeholders need to acknowledge the legitimacy of other perspectives and the limitations of their own. Only in this way can the stakeholders develop a collective view of the key issues and develop sustainable strategies for high-rise public housing.

This chapter discusses the interests, perceptions and objectives for high-rise housing of the different stakeholders. It is important to note that the consultations undertaken for this project have identified that within a stakeholder group there is often a diversity of interests. The following discussion does not seek to articulate the full extent and range of the interest of each of the stakeholders but rather articulates their central interest in high-rise public housing.

#### *(1) Tenants and applicants*

The core interest of tenants and applicants is access to safe and secure housing that is appropriate to their needs and is affordable. They want to feel safe in a liveable environment. They want lifts that work. They want clean foyers, lifts, balconies etc. They want their flats maintained.

Beyond this common interest this stakeholder group has a diversity of other interests. For some residents, high-rise public housing has become their home. They are long-term residents and have a strong affinity and attachment to where they live, to the people around them and to

the local community. Others are interested in establishing and maintaining a home but have yet to do so. For the group in transition, high-rise public housing is a stepping stone to other housing options. For applicants, their housing options are not yet determined.

These different resident and applicant groups have diverse views about what is safe and secure housing and what housing is appropriate to their needs.

### **(2) Victorian Government**

The Victorian Government as the representative of the people of Victoria has an interest in high-rise public housing. High-rise public housing will have a role in achieving their broader objectives in relation to:

- housing and urban development
- housing assistance
- social justice and welfare, and
- environmental and conservation.

The Victorian Government has adopted a triple bottom line approach to policy-making across Government balancing integrated sustainable economic growth objectives with social development and environmental stewardship. Thus they have a particular interest in linking and co-ordinating high-rise public housing with a range of other services.

Their perspective on high-rise public housing will be viewed through the lens of these broader social and economic objectives and the contribution which high-rise public housing can make. They will be seeking cost-effective means of achieving these social and economic objectives and will be assessing outcomes from high-rise public housing against this criteria.

The current Victorian Government has already made a commitment to maintaining the current level of public housing in inner Melbourne. This key commitment is one among a number of other commitments which achieve broader objectives.

### **(3) Office of Housing**

Just as there are various perspectives of the high-rise among residents and applicants, there are various perspectives within the Office of Housing. We can distinguish four different perspectives in particular:

- Office of Housing as an asset manager
- Office of Housing as a property manager
- Office of Housing as a tenancy manager, and
- Office of Housing as a planner and policy maker.

#### **Asset management**

As an asset manager, the Office of Housing is seeking to maximise the value of its assets. Thus it seeks to utilise its assets in a way which provides the highest return. As asset manager, the Office of Housing is seeking to make the best use of public housing assets. “Best use” may refer to the social return on these assets (i.e. whether they are being used to provide the greatest good for the largest number of people) or it may refer to the financial return on these assets (i.e. whether they are being used to provide the greatest financial return). Social return and financial return represent two different approaches to the use of assets. To some extent, depending upon the circumstances, financial return may correlate with and indicate the social return on these assets.

Thus, as an asset manager, the Office of Housing is interested in key questions about when and whether to upgrade high-rise dwellings, whether to demolish and redevelop high-rise

public housing and whether to dispose of dwellings or a tower and how to use the funds from this disposal.

### **Property management**

As a property manager, the Office of Housing is seeking to maintain the buildings in good condition suitable for renting to public tenants. Thus they are concerned with the dwellings themselves rather than with tenants. They are concerned with the maintenance of the buildings and areas surrounding high-rise towers and, about the maintenance of services to these buildings. They are concerned about the continued viability of the building fabric and the impact of tenants upon this building fabric.

### **Tenancy management**

As a tenancy manager, the Office of Housing is seeking to maximise the use of public housing stock, target limited stock to those most in need and efficiently manage tenancies within the terms of the Residential Tenancies Act. At the regional level, tenancy managers have a particular interest in who is on public housing waiting lists and the type, size and location of housing stock to meet this demand.

In each tower, tenancy managers are concerned about their relationships with tenants, managing vacancies and hard-to-let dwellings, managing the turnover of tenants, rental arrears and the impact of anti-social behaviour on maintaining tenancies.

### **Planner and policy maker**

It is as planner and policy maker that the Office of Housing brings these various perspectives together into a common view. It is in this role that the Office of Housing integrates the social and economic objectives of the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments with high-rise public housing and makes links with policies and directions established by other government agencies such as immigration and support services.

## ***(4) Other Government Departments***

The future of high-rise public housing is also of particular interest to other Government Departments both Commonwealth and State Departments. Their interest will vary according to their particular objectives and services they provide or fund other organisations to provide.

Other Government Departments and Divisions which may have a particular interest in high-rise public housing include:

- Victorian Department of Infrastructure – Metropolitan Strategy Plan
- Victorian Department of Human Services – Aged Community and Mental Health
- Victorian Department of Human Services – Public Health
- Victorian Department of Human Services – Drug and Alcohol Services
- Victorian Department of Justice – Crime Prevention Victoria
- Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

The extent to which high-rise towers will work often depends upon the timely and adequate provision of other services. Such services can mitigate some of the issues which arise in high-rise towers as a result of targeting policies of the Office of Housing.

The perspective of each of these stakeholders will have on the high-rise will vary. Each of these stakeholders is particularly concerned with planning particular responses to local needs and/or, providing or funding these local services. A common theme is to ensure the success of their programs and the achievement of particular objectives for their own target groups. This

will often require a coordinated approach particularly where there is a concentration of their target group such as in high-rise housing in inner Melbourne.

### **(5) Local Governments**

Local Governments like other stakeholders have a diversity of perspectives on high-rise public housing. Two particular themes relate to the orderly development of the local area and to the provision of adequate services (including housing) for local residents.

Local Governments are particularly interested in land use, ensuring an orderly development of the local area and a balance between residential, commercial, industrial and retail developments. They seek to enhance the attractiveness and amenity of the local area and to maintain sound building structures.

Local Governments plan and advocate for a broad range of local services which are needed by local residents. These include retail and commercial services, recreational services, medical services, education and various support services. Where appropriate they also play a role in facilitating the development of particular services as well as directly providing some services. They are also interested in ensuring that housing meets a range of local needs including the needs of low income residents.

### **(6) Social infrastructure agencies and support services**

This stakeholder group includes a range of local agencies concerned with the well-being of the local community. They include social infrastructure agencies such as police, health centres, schools, kindergartens, child-care, TAFE etc. and support services such as providers of Home and Community Care Services, Psychiatric Disability Support Services, Homeless Persons Services, Crisis and Transitional Housing Services, Tenancy Advice Services, legal services and Rental Housing Support Services.

These agencies seek to provide a particular service or range of services. Their primary focus is on the provision of a service and they are concerned to ensure their services are effective. Their interest in high-rise public housing is the impact it has on their clients and on their ability to respond effectively to their clients. The quality and appropriateness of a resident's housing may complicate and reduce the effectiveness of their services. They are interested in providing services and in their ability to access tenants who require their support.

In planning and developing their services, support agencies are also concerned about changes in housing policy which will impact on their service and its future viability. For instance a shift in allocation policy towards housing single adults and couples will possibly impact on the future viability of local primary and secondary schools, on child-care and pre-schools.

### **(7) Local community**

The local community is interested in the impact that high-rise public housing has on their local area. They are not interested in the high-rise *per se* but rather on their impact on the local community. The local community often has diverse views about high-rise public housing. Some appreciate the cultural and socio-economic diversity it brings to the local community. Others want to ensure the orderliness and liveability of the local area. Thus their interest is in such things as house values, overlooking, car parking, anti-social behaviour and threats to their sense of safety and security. Others regard high-rise public housing towers as a blot on the landscape and want them demolished.

**(8) Wider community**

A range of other disparate stakeholders have an interest in high-rise public housing. These include:

- developers interested in the redevelopment potential of high-rise towers
- architects interested in the high-rise as a housing form, and
- urban and social planners interested in the role of high-rise towers in the urban environment.

**4.2 Summary of core objectives**

Each of these stakeholders has an interest in high-rise public housing and hopes to achieve particular objectives. Some stakeholders will be seeking to provide better outcomes for high-rise residents, but others may have more self interested objectives. Each will define the outcomes they desire through the lens of their particular perspective.

Table 4-1 below seeks to summarise the **core** objectives of the different broad stakeholder groups. Any decisions made about high-rise public housing must be cognisant of this diversity of perspectives. Their different objectives will result in stakeholders judging in different ways the effectiveness of any measures taken to address problems associated with high-rise public housing.

The diverse perspectives and core objectives of stakeholders will underlie:

- how they assess the current performance of a particular high-rise tower
- their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a tower
- their identification and understanding of the key issues for high-rise public housing and the factors that contribute to these key issues, and
- the strategies they propose to address these key issues.

If we are to develop common agreements about the future of high-rise public housing, it is important that each of the stakeholders understand what is important to the other stakeholders.

**Table 4-1: Core objectives of stakeholders in high-rise public housing**

Stakeholder	Core objective
Tenants of and applicants for public housing	The core objective of tenants and applicants is to find housing which is safe and secure, is appropriate to their needs, is affordable and is in a liveable environment.
Victorian Government	The core objective of the Victorian Government is to ensure that high-rise public housing contributes to the achievement of their broader economic and social objectives.
Asset manager Office of Housing	As an asset manager, the core objective of the Office of Housing is to ensure that its assets are well utilised, provide highest and best value and provide a reasonable social or financial return.

**Table 4-1: Core objectives of stakeholders in high-rise public housing (continued)**

Stakeholder	Core objective
Property manager Office of Housing	As a property manager, the core objective of the Office of Housing is to provide and maintain safe and sound housing.
Tenancy manager Office of Housing	As a tenancy manager, the core objective of the Office of Housing is to maximise the use of public housing and manage public housing efficiently.
Planner and policy maker Office of Housing	As a planner and policy maker, the core objective of the Office of Housing is to reach a consolidated view of the role of high-rise public housing, taking into account the social and economic objectives of the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments.
Other Government Departments	The core objective of other Government Departments is to ensure integrated and coordinated planning of services provided by them or funded agencies in ways that improve outcomes for users of these services.
Local Government	The core objectives of Local Governments are to ensure that high-rise public housing meets their planning and building requirements, that it is integrated into the local community and that it achieves housing and social outcomes for local residents.
Social infrastructure agencies and support services	The core objective of social infrastructure agencies and support agencies is to ensure that high-rise public housing contributes to improved outcomes for users of their services.
Local community	The core objective of the local community is to ensure that high-rise public housing contributes positively to the diversity and value of the local area.
Wider community	The core objective of the wider community will differ according to their particular interests.



# CHAPTER 5

## CRITICAL ISSUES

The following discussion outlines the key issues about high-rise housing from the perspective of the major stakeholders. The discussion of these issues in relation to a particular stakeholder indicates this issue is of primary interest to them. However, many issues will be common for a number of stakeholders.

### 5.1 Tenants and applicants

Through our consultations with tenants and others, six clear issues were identified for residents on high-rise public housing estates that relate specifically to their housing:

- negative community attitudes
- tenants feeling like second class citizens
- lack of choice in where they live
- constantly being confronted by anti-social behaviour
- the poor condition of particular aspects of their housing
- easy access by outsiders to common areas, and
- breakdown of social interaction among residents.

As we will see in the following discussion of these issues, many are inter-related in quite complex ways.

#### **Negative community attitudes**

High-rise housing is a very visible form of public housing. Until recently, the high-rise public housing has been the only form of high-rise dwellings. They are largely separated from surrounding areas such that the movement of local residents into and through estates is almost non-existent. Their design and layout works against easy interaction between local residents across the road from an estate and residents on an estate.

The towers clearly identify the residents as public tenants and as low income and reliant on government pensions and benefits. Any incident within or around a high-rise estate can rebound upon all high-rise estates creating a general sense of fear in the community. For many, the lives of high-rise residents are closed books and this engenders fear and prejudice.

The negative stigma of the high-rise estates continues despite strong evidence that the overall crime rate on high-rise estates is no higher than in the community at large and that many people regard their high-rise flat as their own, rather than an impersonal rented property.

The strangeness of the type of dwelling and its isolation becomes the focus of public and media attention. As long as these high-rise towers continue to be a unique form of housing in Melbourne they will continue to attract attention. However, as private sector high-rise housing continue to increase, more people will experience this style of life and better understand it.

#### **Tenants feeling like second class citizens**

Like most public tenants, those living in the high-rise towers have only become public tenants as an option of last resort. The dominant paradigm of owner-occupied housing results in the marginalisation of people renting their dwellings, particularly those who are renting publicly. As renters and public renters there is a sense of being second class citizens and maybe even a sense of failure.

This is further heightened by the current application process for public tenants. The process of applying for public housing can heighten their sense of failure and need. It involves the indignity of having to tell their life story and all its failures and justify why they should be given priority. It demands going through many hoops and over many brick walls. It demands waiting long periods even in crisis and in poor and uncertain circumstances. Furthermore applicants have limited choices in terms of preferred location and type of housing as a result of the high demand for public housing and broadbanded waiting lists.

Many high-rise public housing tenants have to contend with a second grade standard of housing, second rate maintenance and a degraded living environment. They often live for long periods with lack of action about anti-social behaviour. They lack control over their environment and have no control over the compatibility of new residents. They are not consulted or appraised of the changing nature of a tower. They report that some of their dealings with staff and contractors is tinged with “take what you are given and be grateful” and the quality of services is often less than satisfactory.

It is difficult to separate the experience of being poor and the experience of being a public tenant. Yet the signals in their various forms heighten and continue the sense of being second class citizens.

In response, many residents retreat from their uncontrolled environment. They sense their environment as insecure and unsafe and isolate themselves, minimise their dealings with neighbours, with the Office of Housing and with services.

All this points to the need to mitigate as far as possible the factors that reinforce and continue the sense of being second class citizens. This includes changes in the application process, changes in the environment, improved standards of housing and in particular development of initiatives which recognise the value of residents and draw them into active participation in the life of their community.

### **Lack of choice in where they live**

One of the attractions of high-rise housing, particularly for recent migrant and refugee groups, is the support provided by local communities. However, the current policy of broadbanded waiting lists does not allow an applicant to choose either the location or the tower in which to live. Thus tenants often find themselves offered housing that isolates them from possible sources of support and community.

### **Anti-social behaviour**

One of the striking aspects of many high-rise buildings is the degradation of the environment both visually and aurally. Entrances, foyers and stairwells generally appear vandalised with smashed windows and doors, damaged walls and lifts, broken bottles, graffiti etc. Tenants relate instances of urine, faeces and vomit in foyers, lifts, stairwells and laundries. Loud music and angry and threatening voices are regular occurrences as are threats of violence. In some towers the use of illegal drugs in public places is common, however, in only a few towers drug dealing is open with its associated threats of violence.

However, what we do not know is whether the rate of anti-social and criminal activity is better or worse than in other communities. The rate may appear higher in high-rise housing but this could be related to the higher number of people in one area or to the fact that graffiti and vandalised windows, doors etc. remain in that condition for long periods. It seems that current police data could be skewed by a number of factors including the propensity to report criminal activities and the degree to which criminal activities are visible to the broader population.

The causal factors in anti-social behaviour such as this are many and complex. The immediate causes may be related to the anger, frustration, boredom, despair and hopelessness of the perpetrators, many of whom do not live on the estate. Much work needs to be done to address these issues particularly among young adults through, for example, improved access to pre-training and pre-employment programs, employment and training programs, mentors and recreation programs. Other factors include the continuing rundown and vandalised appearance of a tower, the lack of follow-up action and the lack of control that tenants can exercise over their environment - whether by more controlled access of people to a tower, control over who is housed in a tower and/or control over the public and common areas.

From a housing perspective, that is from the perspective of residents as tenants, the key issues in relation to anti-social behaviour, criminal activity, drug use and drug dealing are the extent to which the design and management of a tower and surrounding area contribute to problems in a tower and the degree to which these factors can be addressed.

### **Poor condition of particular aspects of the housing**

While there are many aspects of their housing valued by tenants including its location, its affordability and its spaciousness, there are many aspects which detract substantially from its liveability. The common areas – entrances, foyers, lifts, stairwells, balconies, laundries etc., – generally appear rundown by contemporary housing standards. Even good cleaning is not sufficient to improve their appearance. Finishes to repairs in common areas are often of a poor standard.

Lifts are a critical access point for high-rise towers, even more so as each floor is serviced by one lift only. Yet there are numerous reports of lifts out of action for long periods of the day. This can be devastating for those who are unable to use stairs and rely on lifts for entry and exit from a building.

On each floor, the garbage chutes continue to be a major problem. They are continually dirty and many regard them as too small.

Since their construction in the 1960s and 1970s, the flats within the high-rise towers have not had a major upgrade. The facilities within the flats are now between 25 years and 40 years old and in urgent need of a refit to contemporary housing standards.

### **Easy access by outsiders to common areas**

Many tenants value their individual flats for their safety and security. However, the common areas remain problematic. Foyers, lifts, floor landings and balconies, stairwells and laundries are generally open to anyone with no limitations on access. As a result, many different people, many of whom do not live in the tower, use these common areas. Where these areas are uncontrolled, tenants feel unsafe and can be subject to violence.

In addition many approaches to the tower entrances are regarded as unsafe. Often the towers are surrounded by open space which does not feel safe, particularly at night.

### **Breakdown of social interaction among residents**

As previously noted, a unique characteristic of high-rise living is the potential for high levels of social interaction among residents. Over many years in 1970s and 1980s, high-rise residents had built up a network of support. Many high-rise communities have had a capacity to support households in crisis. For example, where a family was in crisis, other residents looked after children providing them with some security and stability through the difficult time.

However, consultations with residents and service providers indicate that over the past decade the level of social interaction among high-rise residents had reduced markedly. In part this

was attributed to the increasing numbers of households with high needs being allocated to high-rise towers. Traditionally, high-rise towers have been used for households in crisis. However, in the past decade the proportion of households with high needs and in crisis had increased to such an extent that the core community of long-term residents began to fall apart.

A second factor has been the demise of local tenant groups in the 1990s. Often these groups provided a core community of residents who were interested in what was happening in a tower and surrounding area and, worked to facilitate interaction among a broader group of residents.

## 5.2 Victorian Government

The Victorian Government primarily is responsible for setting the broad policy and strategic framework within which public housing operates. This framework establishes the role of public housing in relation to its broader social and economic objectives. It is this framework which is crucial to the future of high-rise public housing. Three elements of this framework are of particular importance to high-rise public housing:

- the value the Victorian Government places on the provision of affordable rental housing in inner Melbourne
- the role envisaged for public housing, in particular who is eligible for public housing, and
- the level of financial resources provided for the acquisition, redevelopment and upgrading of public housing.

### **Affordable rental housing in inner Melbourne**

The Bracks Labor Government has made a commitment to retain the current level of public housing in inner Melbourne and high-rise towers are a substantial proportion of public housing stock in inner Melbourne.

When high-rise flats were first built in the 1960s inner Melbourne was predominantly working class. The high-rise flats were a central feature of a slum reclamation program. The process of gentrification whereby those on higher incomes began to rediscover and move back into inner Melbourne began in earnest in the 1970s. In part it was this movement which halted the slum reclamation program of Housing Commission Victoria. This process of gentrification has continued through each of the inner Melbourne suburbs driving low-income households out of the inner suburbs towards the fringes of Melbourne.

As a result of the gentrification process the value of inner Melbourne public housing acquired in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s has increased enormously. In a time of high demand and very limited resources, the Victorian Government could realise the value of their inner Melbourne assets and use these funds to acquire stock in other locations. On the other hand, it highlights the value of inner Melbourne public housing and creating an avenue for low-income households to live in inner Melbourne. The key issue for the Victorian Government is whether high-rise public housing has strategic value in:

- adding to the socio-economic diversity of inner Melbourne in terms of both income and household types
- adding to the cultural diversity of inner Melbourne
- providing access to a range of inner urban resources
- providing improved social justice outcomes for low income groups
- maintaining valuable investment in social infrastructure and support services

- concentrating valuable resources and creating economies of scale in the delivery of support services, and
- providing a capacity to respond to the needs of people who are homeless and are attracted to inner Melbourne.

### **The role of public housing**

While the Office of Housing develops a range of public housing policies which specify who and how households will gain access to public housing (eligibility criteria for public housing), it only does so within a general framework determined by the Victorian Government.

The role envisaged for public housing will largely determine the future directions of public housing policies. How broadly or narrowly the Victorian Government defines the target group for public housing will impact on the social and housing outcomes for tenants. The current concentration of public housing dwellings means that the more public housing is targeted at those most in need, the more consideration will have to be given to the impact of the concentration of disadvantaged groups on social and housing outcomes. This will raise issues about the appropriateness of the current stock profile - the concentration and size of dwellings and the location of dwelling as well as issues about linkage and co-ordination with support services.

Eligibility criteria for public housing is currently under review and the outcomes of this review are potentially critical to deliberations about the future direction of high-rise public housing.

### **Financial resources for public housing**

The level of resources allocated by the Victorian Government for the acquisition, redevelopment and upgrading of public housing will impact profoundly on the capacity of the Office of Housing to provide housing which meets the needs of applicants and tenants. It will enhance or restrict its capacity to respond to the changing role of public housing, the changing demand for public housing and the needs of households housed or seeking public housing. It will diminish or exacerbate the trade-offs which have to be made between the acquisition of new stock and the quality of current stock, the types of stock to be acquired and disposed of and the locations for stock.

## **5.3 Office of Housing**

Many of the issues outlined above for applicants and tenants are also issues for the Office of Housing. However, the Office of Housing will view them from a different perspective. This section discusses five key issues for the Office of Housing:

- lack of strategic and policy framework
- role and responsibility of the Office of Housing
- layout of areas surrounding high-rise towers
- management of high-rise towers, and
- maintenance, cleaning and lifts.

### **Lack of strategic and policy framework**

The commitment by the Victorian Government to retain the current levels of public housing stock in inner Melbourne raises more questions and dilemmas than it answers. It does not define, in any way, the role of high-rise public housing. Nor does it address important questions about the future of high-rise public housing and how current issues and problems are to be addressed. It is still unclear what future is envisaged for the high-rise estates. While



there has been a shift from the negative view of the high-rise towers – that they should be demolished – a clear vision for the future has not yet emerged.

Different sections of the Office of Housing are addressing different issues about the high-rise towers. Commitments have been made for their upgrading and plans drawn up. Housing managers and others are concerned about the impact of the segmented waiting list on the management of the high-rise. The conversion of older-person bedsitters to 1-bedroom units has once again recommenced. The conversion of 3-bedroom units in mixed-household towers is being trialled. The hours of security guards are expanded to make tenants feel safer. Community development projects are being tried in some areas. There is much activity which indicates that the Office of Housing has decided to retain high-rise public housing. However, now a clear future has been articulated and initiatives remain uncoordinated.

The development of a strategic vision for the long-term future of high-rise public housing would pull together these various threads. The experience both in Australia and overseas indicates that a range of strategies are necessary to address the complex issues in high-rise housing<sup>8</sup>. A strategy which is primarily driven by capital upgrading is not sufficient to achieve the long-term sustainability of high-rise public housing. In Part 2 a range of strategies that can be adopted are outlined. Which strategies are appropriate will depend upon the identification of the key issues on a tower/neighbourhood area and an understanding of the factors that contribute to these issues. This demands planning on a tower by tower basis or neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis.

For this planning to occur for each tower/neighbourhood area, the Office of Housing must address some broad strategic questions and develop a strategic and policy framework which will inform and direct this planning. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

### **The role and responsibility of the Office of Housing**

The nature of the role and responsibilities of the Office of Housing in neighbourhood areas where public housing is predominate and in relation to high-rise is a key issue. The Office of Housing is not responsible for everything that happens in these areas. For example, they are not responsible for the delivery of many support services.

Up until the late 1970s the then Housing Commission Victoria ( HCV) provided public housing on estates, large and small. Many of these estates were built at a time when HCV had considerable powers with a broader role than just the provision of housing (such as slum reclamation) and was a major player in the development of Melbourne. Often, however, estates were built without the agreement and support of key Government Departments and agencies. Thus, despite the best of intentions, these estates were built without key infrastructure in place. Some of this infrastructure (such as electrical, water and sewerage services as well as provision for kindergartens) was put in place by HCV. However, many aspects of social infrastructure in particular were neglected.

While there has been a shift to public housing scattered through general housing stock, a significant proportion of public housing stock still remains on large estates. The inner Melbourne high-rise estates are a prime example of this stock. In the 1980s and 1990s as resources reduced, the role and responsibility of the Office of Housing changed considerably. It increasingly envisaged its role as the provision of housing assistance only.

At a minimum the Office of Housing has the responsibilities as outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act – letting of flats, signing of tenancy agreements, informing tenants of their rights and duties, setting rents, collecting rents, maintaining premises in good order etc. This

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<sup>8</sup> See *Shelter is not enough: transforming multi-storey housing* by Graham Towers, Policy Press, Bristol 2000, Chapter 6 particularly pages 135-136 and *Public Housing Estate Renewal in Australia* by Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd. (Australian Housing Research Fund Project Number 212), forthcoming p.16.

is tenancy management and is concerned about the relationship between the Office of Housing as landlord and tenants.

While this may be appropriate for newly acquired housing scattered through the general housing stock, it has raised difficulties with high-rise towers. Their responsibility goes beyond this “transaction-based” role.

Office of Housing decisions about the design, the construction, the location, the type, the size, the standard and the management of public housing impact have a major impact on applicants, tenants, support services, other Government departments, Local Governments and local communities. They play an important role in the proper working of a tower/neighbourhood area. Their decisions can facilitate better communities. They can assist or impede the delivery of services. They can enhance or undermine the outcomes for residents. They can enhance or undermine the work of support services.

Tower management cannot be reduced to tenancy management. Tower management is about ensuring that any action takes account of all the tenants in a tower. Tower management recognises the tension between balancing the rights of individuals and the degree of tolerance of anti-social behaviour by individuals against the wellbeing, safety, security and quality of life of other people living in a tower. It recognises that its decisions have a cumulative impact on residents.

### **Layout of areas surrounding high-rise towers**

All the high-rise towers are surrounded by considerable open space. This open space is used for a variety of purposes, most of them valuable and legitimate - extensive gardens, community gardens, playgrounds, sitting areas, recreation facilities, car parking etc. However, despite fencing around these areas, they are not secure and are generally uncontrolled.

A key issue for the Office of Housing is whether and to what extent the layout of the areas around a high-rise tower contributes to the community attitudes to high-rise public housing, anti-social behaviour, the insecurity - real or perceived by tenants - and the use of these areas by outsiders.

Fences consolidate a neighbourhood area consisting of one or more towers and walk-up complexes. But do they address or complicate some of the problems? An alternative view is that these neighbourhood areas should be broken up further and integrated into the local area. For example, it is noticeable that the private sector high-rise have little surrounding open space, that entry is effected directly off the street and that they are far more integrated visually into the local streetscape.

### **Management of high-rise towers**

The Office of Housing has a long history and experience in managing high-rise towers. High-rise public housing may be difficult to manage because of the concentration of people in crisis, people who are unable to speak English, people with mental health problems and people who have behavioural difficulties.

Tenancy managers are at the sharp end of delivering services to tenants. Their jobs are made more or less difficult according to whether other parts of the Office of Housing have adequately done their job. The work of a tenancy manager will be easier and the costs of managing high-rise public housing minimised where:

- the design of the towers, the common areas and the surrounding areas is good
- cyclical maintenance is undertaken as programmed
- the role of the high-rise within public housing is clear
- the policy framework recognises the unique characteristics of high-rise living
- appropriate allocation and transfer policies are in place

- processes enhance the sense of ownership by tenants, and
- effective partnerships and protocols are developed with support services such as the police and mental health services.

High-rise public housing present major challenges to housing managers. Good management has the potential to enhance the living environment for tenants and address many key concerns by:

- improving cleanliness and maintenance of foyers, lifts and other common areas
- improving maintenance of flats
- improving tenant's sense of safety on the estate
- reducing their vulnerability to anti-social and criminal activities, and
- reduce the necessity for other more expensive strategies such as higher police presence, higher levels of intervention from support services, higher levels of security guards, redesign of surrounding areas and upgrading dwellings.

### **Maintenance, cleaning and lifts**

The external condition of areas surrounding high-rise towers, particularly gardens, is very high. However, for the most part, the most common complaints of tenants relate to maintenance, cleaning and lifts. These are long standing complaints yet remain an ongoing problem. Finding an adequate solution to these problems, particularly in common areas, is essential if tenants are to feel that a high-rise tower is their home. The lifts are the major access point to a tower and for some residents with limited mobility and fitness the only means of access. However, consultations during this Project have highlighted that some lifts are still out of action for many hours a day.

In some towers, the Office of Housing continues to insist that tenants are responsible for cleaning some common areas such as laundries and balconies. This has only worked where a particular tenant has taken on the task himself or herself and resolutely continued with the task.

## **5.4 Other Government Departments**

Currently the Department of Infrastructure is developing a Metropolitan Strategy. The role of high-rise housing, in particular high-rise housing for low income households, is an important strategic issue for this Strategy. High-rise housing increases the density of inner Melbourne utilising current physical infrastructure.

Many aspects of high-rise housing are suitable for people with complex needs and challenging behaviours. This group is always going to be part of the social mix within high-rise. Good support services can mitigate against the difficulties associated with living near someone with high needs. Thus, for other areas of government such as DisAbility Services, Mental Health, Aged Care, Community Care, Migrant and Refugee Settlement that are planning the delivery of various support services, high-rise housing can play an important role in providing access for low-income households with support needs to the resources of inner Melbourne. The Office of Housing has a specific role providing housing to these households with high needs and it is important that the Office of Housing develop links with and coordinates its activities with these other areas of government.

## **5.5 Local Governments**

For Local Government high-rise public housing presents three key issues:

- a high proportion of public housing in the local area is high-rise



- better linkages with and adequate resources for social infrastructure agencies and support services, and
- better integration of high-rise public housing into the local area.

First, as illustrated in Section 2.1, high-rise public housing is a significant proportion of public housing stock in each of the Local Government areas. Disposal or demolition of this stock is likely to lead to a major reduction in the level of public housing and therefore reduced access by low-income residents to affordable housing. This will impact on the character, the socio-economic and cultural diversity of an area, and on the sustainability of many social infrastructure agencies and support services.

Second, the concentration of public housing dwellings and the changing target group for public housing accentuates the importance of better linkages and adequate resources for social infrastructure agencies and support services in the local area.

The third key issue for Local Government is the better integration of high-rise public housing into the local area. The current layout of high-rise estates distinguishes and isolates them from the surrounding streetscape and area. Moreover, as the gentrification of the inner suburbs proceeds the current layout will accentuate the concentration of low-income and disadvantaged people on high-rise estates and the contrast with local residents.

## **5.6 Social infrastructure agencies and support services**

Social infrastructure agencies such as schools, child-care, kindergartens and police, and support services have a range of diverse interests. However, two key issues are common to many of them:

- whether they can achieve sustainable outcomes for users of their agencies and services from high-rise public housing, and
- whether and how high-rise public housing residents can access their services.

Agencies and support services provide a diverse range of services. The concentration of high-rise public housing dwellings and the targeting of public housing over the last two decades has concentrated many of their clients in these areas. On the one hand, this has provided a focus and a scale for their service. On the other hand, these services and agencies recognise that appropriate housing that is affordable is a basic starting point for their service.

Inappropriate housing is detrimental to their service users and can undermine the outcome of the service they provide. This raises two issues for social infrastructure agencies and support services.

The first issue is whether the concentration of low-income and disadvantaged people (many with high support needs) undermines outcomes of their service for their users or even further complicates the lives of users of their service. For particular service users, high-rise public housing may be inappropriate and these services may seek some flexibility from the Office of Housing to transfer their clients to more appropriate housing. It is in recognition of these issues that some agencies advocate for community development in areas where public housing is concentrated – activities which will develop interaction and trust among residents, develop a more cohesive community and empower residents to take action on issues.

The second issue for social infrastructure agencies and support services is whether residents in high-rise public housing can access their services and how they access their services. Some services are located on an estate and many focus their services around the needs of residents of the estate, e.g. kindergartens, health service, meals-on-wheels, recreation programs. The high-rise estate also becomes the focus of community development activities.

Other services are located off the estate and provide services to the local area. Residents of an estate are provided services through outreach or by coming to a location off the estate. Many agencies wrestle with the best means of providing services to residents of high-rise public housing.

Implicit in this discussion is the separation of high-rise public housing from the local area. Whether located on an estate or off the estate, services are conscious of the location of the resident on an estate. This raises an issue for agencies about the focus of their community development activities – whether the focus is on an estate or on the local area which will encompass a particular estate.

### 5.7 Local community

High-rise public housing presents two key issues for local communities. First, the layout and concentration of public housing dwellings and, the concentration of many people with high support needs and of ethnic diversity raises an issue about the physical and social integration of high-rise public housing into the local neighbourhood. In the context of gentrification, these factors highlight the separation of public housing dwellings and public housing residents from the local community.

Second, any change in the role and use of high-rise public housing has the potential to have a major impact on property values and local businesses. The local community will be most concerned that this impact is not detrimental.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.8 Other issues

In examining the key issues in relation to high-rise public housing we have focused on those specifically related to the housing, rather than the more general issues found more commonly across the community. However, it is important to acknowledge that significant numbers of tenants have important needs for support beyond their need for assistance with housing. Two recent projects conducted under the auspices of Jesuit Social Services give us an insight into many of these issues.<sup>10</sup> Areas where support is required are diverse and include: gaining employment and dealing with unemployment, poverty, gambling, mental and physical health problems, need for English language skills and need for access to a range of support services.

Many of these issues are independent of people's particular housing location. However, the clustering together of a high number of people with complex needs intensifies the awareness of the support needs and the negative consequences when these needs are not met. Not addressing support needs for some will threaten their ability to maintain their tenancy and some will behave in ways that compromise the quality of life of other residents. This highlights the need for very effective linkages between planning for provision of housing and support and the need to ensure that as part of any strategic planning for the future of high-rise public housing issues of access to appropriate support services are addressed.

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<sup>9</sup> See *High-rise Scoping Study* (Draft only) prepared by Andersen Consulting, Office of Housing 1997 p.51f

<sup>10</sup> For a recent assessment of a broad range of needs of households on high-rise estates see *Assessment of service needs for young people and families living on the North Richmond housing estate* by Kate Digney, Jesuit Social Services, Richmond October 1999 or *Assessment of the service needs of low income families: Collingwood and Fitzroy housing estates* by Catherine Guinness, Jesuit Social Services, Richmond, May 2000. Both of these studies are available on website [www.jss.org.au/publications.html](http://www.jss.org.au/publications.html) .

## **5.9 Summary and conclusions**

Chapter 5 has raised a range of complex issues for each of the stakeholders. Overall, the primary issue is how well high-rise public housing is working for residents and the factors that can improve their working.

For many the high-rise flats are their home. In the face of persistent and ongoing issues, many residents still enjoy high-rise living and want to remain in their homes.

Some high-rise towers are working better than others. The least problematic appear to be the older-person high-rise towers. The common areas are in reasonable condition – usually clean and without obvious signs of graffiti and vandalism. While alcoholic drinking by some residents presents some problems, the incidents of illicit drug use and drug dealing are rare. However, as the report on older people living in high-rise towers indicates, there are a variety of social issues<sup>11</sup>.

The more problematic high-rise towers are the mixed household estates. Again, some of these work better than others. Some, however, are not working very well and are in danger of moving into a spiral of distress. For tenants the key issues are related more to the use and abuse of common areas and to the social issues of the estates rather than the type of housing and the physical condition of buildings. It is these issues, in particular, which need to be addressed most urgently.

The types of issues raised in Chapter 5 are diverse. Some are strategic issues which involve a consideration of the role of high-rise public housing, some are policy issues, some are physical issues to do with the standard and condition of the high-rise towers, some are social issues which need to be set within a broader social context, some are management issues and some are design issues. The next Chapter focuses on the future directions for high-rise public housing at a strategic and policy level. Part B of this report provides a set of tools and resources to support effective planning approaches for addressing the critical issues for each high-rise tower.

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<sup>11</sup> Victoria. Department of Human Services *The Support Needs of Older People Living in High-Rise Public Housing* Department of Human Services (Aged, Community and Mental Health) Melbourne 1998



# CHAPTER 6

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The high-rise towers are an important and unique component of public housing stock in the inner city. However, they are beset with a number of problems which currently reduce their appropriateness and effectiveness in maintaining access to affordable housing in the inner city for low income households.

Currently the structural problems with the walk-up flats are seen as the highest priority for attention by the Office of Housing but there is nevertheless an urgent need to tackle the more complex strategic issues associated with high-rise public housing. A way forward is required that will systematically explore what is a desirable and possible future for high-rise public housing.

We know that policies that have increasingly targeted access to public housing to those with the highest needs and greatest disadvantage have had a major impact on the fabric of life in the towers and on their immediate surrounding areas. The lack of long term support services and their coordination with access to housing may have contributed to the issues within high-rise public housing.

We also know that each tower has a unique set of characteristics as well as strengths and weaknesses. Each tower also plays a particular role in addressing local housing needs with this role having evolved and changed, particularly over the past decade. These are all issues which need to be taken into account in setting directions for the future.

The lack of a comprehensive and integrated vision for the future of the high-rise is a major factor undermining attempts to address the critical issues for the high-rise towers. Certainly the Bracks Government has made a commitment to retain the current level of social housing in inner Melbourne. Moreover, the Bracks Government has taken a number of initiatives such as developing plans for capital upgrading for some high-rise towers and has made provision for this in the budget. It has also supported some community development activities on the most distressed estates and developed new approaches to providing support to tenants in some older-person towers.

However, these initiatives are not being undertaken within a co-ordinated and strategic framework for the future of high-rise public housing. They often represent partial and uncoordinated responses to issues with particular towers. This is because as yet there is no consolidated and agreed view for the future of high-rise public housing among the different stakeholders.

In determining the possible directions for high-rise public housing we cannot afford to be either sentimental or ideological. Resources for housing assistance in Victoria are scarce and precious and thus responsibility needs to be exercised to ensure they are used effectively. The problems are complex and solutions must be practical. Future directions for high-rise towers must take account of the current and future environment for housing assistance in Victoria and be implementable within timeframes that are realistic and manageable.

This Chapter considers a number of the broad approaches to high-rise housing that might be contemplated by government and different sections of the community. It explores four critical issues that are important for informing consideration of future directions for high-rise housing. It concludes by arguing that the most logical and responsible response is to positively address current issues and retain as much access as possible by low income groups to inner city high-rise public housing stock.

## 6.1 Broad approaches to the future of high-rise towers

High-rise public housing is highly visible. Many people have strong and often entrenched views about what should happen to them. These views form the backdrop and starting point for any discussion about the future of the high-rise towers. Table 6-1 attempts to characterise these starting points as three broad approaches or mindsets. Each of these approaches has its corresponding strategy or strategies for addressing the future of high-rise public housing. Table 6-1 outlines the pre-requisites, advantages and disadvantages of each. The following summarises the three broad approaches:

- ❑ **Approach 1: A negative approach** which assumes that it is all too hard, that doing anything systematic about the future of the high-rise towers is too hard and that little can be done except respond to crises as they arise.

This first approach reflects the starting point of many who have struggled with the issues of high-rise public housing over many years. It is a starting point which recognises both the value of the high-rise and the complexity of these issues but is overwhelmed by the enormous effort required by many parties to make high-rise public housing work. From within this approach it is not possible to envisage a future for the high-rise. A sense of defeat permeates the strategies and actions of this approach. However, it is an approach which, in the long term, is unsustainable. At some point it will be overtaken by the second approach – shed responsibility or opt out - unless there is a conscious shift to the third approach – a positive future.

- ❑ **Approach 2: An approach which wants to shed responsibility or opt out** and which believes the best thing to do is either to sell or demolish most or all high-rise public housing. Within this approach two different strategies are possible: sell to tenants or the private sector, or; demolish all or most of the towers and rebuild new housing on the site.

The assumption of this second approach is that high-rise towers are inappropriate or unworkable as public housing or indeed as affordable social housing. The strategies diverge in that they have different visions for inner-Melbourne and have reached different conclusions about the demand for affordable housing in inner Melbourne.

- ❑ **Approach 3: An approach which envisages a positive future** based on the belief that high-rise public housing is an important component of social housing and solutions to the current problems are possible. Within this approach two different strategies are possible: retain all or most high-rise towers as public housing, or; transfer ownership or lease the high-rise towers to another social housing provider. The two different strategies within this approach are based on different conclusions about the capacity of the Office of Housing to make them work.

These broad approaches to the future of the high-rise recognise the different starting points possible when considering the future options for high-rise public housing. To find a way forward which addresses urgent needs and issues and, is both realistic and implementable, it is important to recognise these starting points and work through the underlying assumptions of each.

Four questions are critical to a re-assessment of each of these approaches: trends within the inner Melbourne market; the demand for high-rise housing; how well high-rise housing can work, and the cost-effectiveness of various strategies. Each approach develops strategies which reflect different conclusions about these questions. The following section explores these critical questions in more detail.

Table 6-1: Approaches to the future of high-rise public housing

<p><b>Approach 1: Negative – too hard – little can be done</b></p>	<p><b>Approach 2: Shed responsibility or opt out</b></p>		<p><b>Approach 3 Positive future</b></p>	
<p><b>Strategy</b> Respond to crises but otherwise do little to current high-rise public housing</p>	<p><b>Strategy (2a)</b> Plan to <u>sell</u> to tenants or the private sector all or most high-rise public housing</p>	<p><b>Strategy (2b)</b> Plan to <u>demolish</u> all or most high-rise public housing</p>	<p><b>Strategy (3a)</b> Actively create a positive future by retaining all or most high-rise towers as public housing</p>	<p><b>Strategy (3b)</b> Actively create a positive future by transferring ownership or leasing high-rise towers to another social housing provider</p>
<p><b>Pre-requisites</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>poor housing conditions are acceptable</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pre-requisites</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>low demand for affordable inner-urban housing from low-income households</li> <li>strata-titling required for sale of individual units</li> <li>capital upgrade required prior to strata-titling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pre-requisites</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high demand for affordable inner-urban housing from low-income households but not high-rise towers</li> <li>allocation of resources for redevelopment</li> <li>unable to make high-rise towers work</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pre-requisites</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Office of Housing is committed to making high-rise towers work</li> <li>the Office of Housing can change its management style and practices and, its policies to make high-rise towers work</li> <li>a major allocation of resources</li> <li>commitment to a strategic framework</li> <li>commitment to a strategic planning process involving all stakeholders</li> <li>a recognition of the diversity of towers and the particular characteristics of each tower</li> <li>requires whole-of-Government support</li> <li>cross-party support for broad strategic framework desirable</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pre-requisites</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the management culture and style of an alternative social housing provider is conducive to better outcomes for high-rise residents</li> <li>a major allocation of resources</li> <li>commitment to a strategic framework</li> <li>commitment to a strategic planning process involving all stakeholders</li> <li>a recognition of the diversity of towers and the particular characteristics of each tower</li> <li>requires whole-of-Government support</li> <li>cross-party support for broad strategic framework desirable</li> </ul>



## Chapter 6: Future directions

<b>Approach 1: Negative – too hard – little can be done</b>	<b>Approach 2: Shed responsibility or opt out</b>		<b>Approach 3 Positive future</b>	
<b>Advantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintains inner urban public housing stock</li> <li>• limits the hard decisions to be made</li> <li>• issues can be ignored for a time</li> </ul>	<b>Advantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sale before housing conditions deteriorate</li> <li>• Office of Housing no longer responsible for managing high-rise towers</li> </ul>	<b>Advantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demolition allows redevelopment of new housing forms appropriate to current needs and demand</li> </ul>	<b>Advantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintains inner-urban affordable rental housing stock</li> <li>• creates good living conditions for public tenants</li> <li>• better utilisation of high-rise public housing assets</li> <li>• maintains the socio-economic and ethnic diversity of inner Melbourne</li> <li>• maintains long-term government control over usage of high-rise towers</li> </ul>	<b>Advantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintains inner-urban affordable rental housing stock</li> <li>• creates good living conditions for public tenants</li> <li>• better utilisation of high-rise public housing assets</li> <li>• maintains the socio-economic and ethnic diversity of inner Melbourne</li> <li>• maintains long-term government control over usage of high-rise towers</li> </ul>
<b>Disadvantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unsustainable in the long term</li> <li>• delayed action will result in larger financial losses and/or required larger levels of resources to address issues</li> <li>• increasing social problems and deterioration of housing conditions</li> <li>• further stigmatisation of residents in towers</li> <li>• builds antipathy from local community</li> <li>• a lot of social and political pain over a longer period</li> </ul>	<b>Disadvantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• major loss of inner urban affordable rental housing stock</li> <li>• difficulties finding buyers will result in major financial losses</li> <li>• current tenants will need to be rehoused and this will have a major impact on current waiting lists</li> <li>• further gentrification of inner Melbourne and reduced socio-economic and ethnic diversity</li> <li>• short term social and political pain</li> </ul>	<b>Disadvantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• value of towers reduced to land value only resulting in major financial losses</li> <li>• current tenants will need to be rehoused and this will have a major impact on current waiting lists</li> </ul>	<b>Disadvantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requires a major allocation of resources</li> </ul>	<b>Disadvantages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requires a major allocation of resources</li> </ul>



## 6.2 Four critical questions

Four key questions need discussion when considering the broad approach to adopt for addressing the current issues associated with high-rise public housing. These questions are as follows:

- What do the trends in the inner Melbourne housing market tell us about the need for this housing and its possible role in the housing market?
- To what degree does the demand match the stock available and is it possible to address any mismatch?
- How well is high-rise public housing working now and is it possible to address the evident problems?
- How cost effective are the different possible approaches to the future of high-rise public housing?

### (1) *Inner Melbourne housing market*

Public housing operates within a changing housing market. Two trends within the inner urban housing market need to be taken into account when making a decision about future directions for high-rise public housing and these are:

- the role of high-rise housing generally within the inner Melbourne housing market, and
- the ongoing process of gentrification and the resulting socio-economic changes.

#### **The role of high-rise housing**

Many myths surround the high-rise public housing towers and the people who live in them. These high-rise towers are prominent on the Melbourne skyline. They still symbolise the housing achievements of the Housing Commission. They were born in a dream of providing good housing for people in poverty. They were achieved in controversy as the Housing Commission declared areas of inner Melbourne to be slums and compulsorily acquired land on which to build these high-rise towers. They were born of good intentions but were in some ways only a simple solution to more complex issues.

Their prominence on the skyline of Melbourne serves to perpetuate an old image of the Housing Commission. Their prominence testifies to the grand but flawed plans of previous generations.

At the time of their construction, there were very few high-rise buildings in Melbourne. High-rise housing has only been part of the inner Melbourne landscape for the past four decades. For the first two decades, the 1960s and 1970s, just about all high-rise residential buildings were public housing. As a result, these public housing towers have stood out on the Melbourne horizon. It is only in the past two decades that the private sector has developed high-rise residential buildings, with a particular boom in the 1990s.

This history of high-rise public housing in Melbourne contrasts markedly with Sydney where both public and private high-rise residential buildings have been part of the landscape for many decades.

High-rise residential buildings are a phenomenon of larger cities. This higher density urban form provides more people with access to valuable urban resources at relatively lower costs. It provides access to the Central Business District, to the arts and entertainment precincts of

Melbourne, to business and medical facilities etc. Higher density housing promotes a cosmopolitan lifestyle with a diversity of cultures.

**Table 6-1: Comparing the common characteristics of public and private sector high-rise towers**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Public sector</b>	<b>Private sector</b>
Building construction	Pre-cast concrete slabs	Concrete form-work (or large bricks)
Height of buildings	Range from 12-30 storeys with most either 12 storey or 20 storey	Can range from 8 storey to over 20 storey
Access to building	Many entrances to building with no restrictions on access. Access can be through a central foyer (with many entrances) or by stairs	One major entrance sometimes with caretaker/concierge. Access is restricted with entry by key, card or pin
Access to floors	No restriction on access to floors via lift or stairs	Access to floors restricted to lift only and often entry to a floor is by key, card or pin.
Grounds	Buildings set back from streets with large areas of open space separating high-rise buildings from surrounding built-up environment	Buildings set back from streets but with little open space and at ground level are far more integrated into the surrounding areas
Household types	Two major groups: older single people and families, particularly sole parent households	Younger singles and couples without children
Lifestyle of residents	At home most of the day	Away from home for most of the day
Lifts	Two lifts, with each lift stopping on alternative floors	Two or three lifts stopping on every floor
Management	Combination of housing officers located on the estate, maintenance and cleaning contractors, and mobile security guards	Housing management off-site. On site caretaker/concierge/ security guard. Maintenance and cleaning contractors
Common facilities	Laundry, community facilities	Swimming pool, gymnasium
Garbage disposal	Common garbage disposal chute on each floor	Common garbage disposal chute on each floor
External lighting	Spot-lights from top of building and other ground level lighting	Low key lighting
Carparking	Ground level carparking within grounds of estate with few restrictions on access	Underground carpark with restricted access

Table 6-1 above compares high-rise public housing with recently developed private sector high-rise and highlights their differences. It also indicates the current trends within private sector high-rise. These trends are important to the future acceptability of high-rise living. At present the public and private sectors cater for the two extremes of the housing market:

- the private sector caters for singles and couples who are on relatively high incomes and who spend a large part of their lives away from home either at work or nearby entertainment, while
- the public sector caters for vulnerable households (particularly older people, single adults with support needs and families with children) who are on low and very low incomes (mainly Centrelink pensions and allowances) and who often spend much of the day at home.

Is it likely that the gap between these two extremes will close as the acceptability of high-rise housing continues to increase? If so, then a broader range of households will seek high-rise housing and high-rise public housing will become more acceptable. However, what will also be important will be the better integration of high-rise public housing into the local area. Private sector high-rise housing has succeeded in doing this relatively well and there are potential lessons here for the public sector.

### Gentrification and socio-economic changes

Since the construction of high-rise public housing in the 1960s and 1970s, the inner urban housing market has been through some major changes. In particular, the process of gentrification has transformed inner urban areas from low income and blue collar working households to relatively high income, professional and white collar households. Thus, not only has the target group for public housing changed (from low income working families and older pensioners to mixed households on Centrelink pensions and allowances), but also the areas surrounding the towers has changed dramatically.

This process of gentrification continues to move through each of the inner suburbs as older generations with strong local ties have died or moved out. In *Melbourne's Housing Past Housing Futures*, Terry Burke and David Hayward illustrate this gentrification of inner Melbourne with reference to housing prices, the private rental market and affordability. Their data indicate a widening spatial polarisation between an affluent inner Melbourne and a less affluent outer Melbourne over the 10 years from 1986 to 1996 with reference to:

- rapid real rent increases in inner Melbourne compared with slight long-term increases for the whole of metropolitan Melbourne<sup>12</sup>
- strong falls in low cost private rental in inner Melbourne and Boroondara compared with marginal falls or small increases in other areas<sup>13</sup>, and
- the decreasing affordability of inner Melbourne<sup>14</sup>.

They conclude as follows:

*The level of non-affordability of inner areas has... reached new peaks and implies a market increasingly for households with incomes in excess of \$90,000, a situation that might well deteriorate in the years ahead.*

Gentrification continues unabated and public housing stock is one of the few mechanisms available to the State Government to ensure that low income households continue to have access to the scarce and valuable urban resources of inner Melbourne. It is one of the few mechanisms available to ensure that inner Melbourne retains some level of cultural and socio-economic diversity. If the State Government were to sell the current valuable pool of public housing stock in inner Melbourne to the private sector, it is highly unlikely that any future

<sup>12</sup> *Melbourne's Housing Past Housing Futures* by Terry Burke and David Hayward, Swinburne Institute of Social Research, Hawthorn 2000 p.48f

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.50f

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.55ff

Government will have the resources to re-acquire housing for low income households in this area.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the current targeting of public housing, the layout of areas around towers, their lack of integration into the local area and the gentrification of inner urban areas accentuates the differences between high-rise public housing and the surrounding areas. The current layout of areas around towers segregates public housing residents from other local residents. While these differences may vary from tower to tower, it does raise a question about their future. Unless these issues are addressed the tensions between areas of high levels of public housing and surrounding areas are likely to increase with resultant pressure on the Office of Housing and State Governments to sell the sites.

### ***(2) Supply and demand for inner-urban public housing***

One of the major reasons cited by the previous Government for the disposal of high-rise public housing is the current mismatch between the size of households seeking public housing in inner Melbourne and the size of current stock.

#### **Current supply and demand**

As outlined in Table 2-2, of a total 7,135 high-rise flats, just under 2,000 high-rise flats are 3-bedroom dwellings. Just over one-third of the family or mixed household flats (37%) are 3-bedroom dwellings. Fifty seven per cent of these flats are 2-bedroom. Very few (only 280 out of 5,332 or 5%) are 1-bedroom.

Throughout the 1990s the number of non-aged single and couple households seeking public housing has increased dramatically. Despite acquisition programs giving precedence to smaller dwelling types, the relative demand for smaller dwellings has resulted in indefinite waiting times for public housing in many areas. In inner Melbourne where the demand is high, few new units have been acquired to supplement the very limited supply of non-aged 1-bedroom dwellings.

In addition, the mismatch between public housing demand and public housing supply in inner Melbourne has been further exacerbated by the reduction in demand from families, particularly those with two or more children. The reasons for this reduction in demand from families is very unclear. One interpretation could be that families prefer houses or prefer living in middle and outer suburban areas. However, a number of policy and practice issues may also contribute to this apparent low demand:

- families prefer better housing standards than those currently offered by high-rise and walk-up flats which have not been upgraded since their construction
- families are fearful of the social conditions within some of the high-rise towers, and
- families, conscious of their lack of choice due to the broadband allocation policy, are unprepared to risk being offered public housing in an area or of a type they do not want.

In terms of the current stock profile, the key issue that requires further investigation is whether there is a demand from family households for inner urban public housing or whether they prefer housing in the middle and outer suburban areas. Current waiting list data does not provide an accurate indicator of potential demand by families if conditions in high-rise towers were improved. The degree to which demand by families might increase with upgraded flats, a reduction in problems in some towers and greater capacity to choose to live in a particular block of flats needs exploration.

### Possibilities for reconfiguring supply and demand

A further consideration is whether the current profile of high-rise public housing can be reconfigured. This becomes necessary with the changing profile of households seeking public housing in inner Melbourne and the acceptability of particular dwellings such as bedsits.

Already in response to a perceived increase in demand from single person households for 1-bedroom dwellings in inner Melbourne, the Office of Housing has undertaken some prototype conversions of 3-bedroom dwellings in the family towers to two 1-bedroom dwellings. As a result, conversions increase housing stock and provide housing which better meets the needs of households seeking social housing in inner Melbourne.

In addition many older tenants find bedsitter dwellings too small and prefer a larger dwelling or, they prefer a separation between their living area and their bedroom. Thus, the Office of Housing had undertaken an extensive program of converting bedsitters in the older-person towers to 1-bedroom units. This provides tenants with better quality housing but results in a loss of stock.

Both of these conversions have their engineering limits – conversions can only occur where they do not jeopardize the structural integrity of a building. Conversion then may be only part of the solution by providing housing which better meets the needs of those households seeking social housing in inner Melbourne.

### (3) *How well is high-rise public housing working?*

The current interest in high-rise public housing arises because of a sense that they are not working well (mixed household towers) or not working as well as they could (older-person towers). The critical issues identified in the previous Chapter highlight the inadequacies of high-rise public housing. On the other hand, Chapter 3 and the earlier sections of this Chapter highlight the significance and potential for high-rise public housing.

Poor media and public opinion tend to sway towards the simple solution of pulling them down. These simple views have served to undermine confidence in high-rise housing and undermine any belief that there are solutions to the current problems of the high-rise and that they are manageable.

This report highlights the complexity of the issues and highlights the need for balance in assessing benefits and problems with high-rise public housing. Any decision requires a much more sophisticated understanding of high-rise public housing and public housing generally.

Part 2 of this report outlines an assessment tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of the high-rise towers (see Resource 2). Such a tool can be used to assess:

- whether they are working
- what is working and what is not working
- their current strengths and weaknesses
- the critical issues
- which stakeholders they are working for
- what is required to make them work.

In the UK and USA, some high-rise towers have been working so badly that they have developed a very poor reputation and poor social environment for tenants such that the towers are beyond rectification. In such instances, housing authorities have concluded that the only solution is demolition. In Victoria, the problematic issues with high-rise towers are nowhere near comparable and are variable between towers. A range of strategies is available to address the issues confronting Victorian high-rise towers and these are outlined in Part 2 – Resource 3 - *Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise public housing*.

Unless the key issues confronting high-rise towers and the factors which contribute to them are substantially addressed, then high-rise public housing will not provide housing which is safe, secure and appropriate. The critical issue, however, is not so much the problems currently being experienced in high-rise towers but the existence of the confidence, the willingness and the resources to address them. Without this, the retention of the high-rise will not do justice to residents and managers of high-rise public housing.

### (4) Cost effectiveness

It is clearly beyond the scope of this Project to undertake any cost benefit analysis of the strategies outlined in each of the broad approaches to the future of high-rise public housing. Such an exercise is a complex task and considerable preparatory work would be required to reach agreement on acceptable social and financial indicators for such an analysis. Also, it would require assessment of cost effectiveness on a tower by tower basis, as the issues would vary between towers.

Any cost benefit analysis would need to be considered within a broader inner urban housing policy framework, including a clear view about the social importance of retaining access to affordable rental housing in the inner city for low income households. It would also need to take into account that the towers are structurally sound and have a structural life of at least another 25-30 years. Account would also need to be taken of the fact that there are a number of strategies possible to address both the mismatch between stock size and demand as well as the problems being confronted with the management and operation of specific towers.

The Victorian Government has adopted a triple bottom line approach to policy-making across Government “to balance integrated sustainable economic growth objectives with social development and environmental stewardship.”<sup>15</sup> To meet this broad criteria of the Victorian Government, any cost-benefit analysis would have to take account of a range of factors.

We would argue that the most appropriate level at which any cost benefit analysis should occur is at the level of an individual tower. This is because the circumstances for each tower are often different. A variety of techniques that can be used to evaluate the relative cost effectiveness of different courses of action for a specific high-rise tower is discussed as part of Stage 6, Evaluation of the potential options, in *A planning process to identify the best future outcome for each tower* (see Part 2 – Resource 1). Each of these evaluation techniques incorporates a range of factors and seeks to put a comparative monetary value on different options identified.

However, some broad comments can be made about each of the strategies outlined in Table 6-1 above. From a financial perspective it is clear that there is no easy financial solution to issues confronted by high-rise public housing. Other than the first approach which entails doing little or nothing, it is likely that each of the broad approaches will require a significant financial outlay. Each strategy entails major expenditure which will be largely recouped as a social dividend over a long period of time rather than as a financial dividend.

A financial analysis is likely to indicate that the least cost approach is to do little or nothing and make the most of the towers as they are for as long as possible. This approach does not require major expenditure but over time revenue could be expected to decrease as dwellings become increasingly hard-to-let. This approach is however, unacceptable from a social perspective. It clearly does not meet the criteria of the triple bottom line espoused by the Bracks Labor Government.

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<sup>15</sup> Government response to Recommendation 8 of the “Growing Victoria Together Summit” held on 30-31 March 2000



It is likely that the sale strategy will require financial outlays over and above the realised value of a tower in order to replace lost public housing stock in local areas and relocate tenants. The demolition strategy will entail a major allocation of resources for the development of the site.

The positive future strategies will also entail a major allocation of resources to high-rise towers. Some options, particularly asset management strategies, have very high upfront costs e.g. upgrading the building and its services, upgrading flats, redesign of the layout and the construction costs of additional residential, retail and commercial opportunities.

In short, there are no easy solutions from a financial perspective.

### **6.3 Moving forward on the basis of a positive future**

Ecumenical Housing believes that the most responsible and appropriate approach is to work from a basis that sees a positive future for high-rise towers in providing housing for low income households. There are strong arguments in favour of this approach and these are as follows:

- ❑ This stock plays a key role in maintaining access for low income households to housing in inner Melbourne where private rental prices are now beyond the reach of people on low incomes and increasingly beyond the reach of those on moderate incomes.
- ❑ The structure of the buildings is sound, they have a structural life of at least another 25-30 years and it is possible to reconfigure many of the floors to accommodate the increasing need for housing by smaller households.
- ❑ The estimated costs of finding replacement stock in the inner city if the towers are no longer used as public housing are overall likely to be higher than the cost of major refurbishment and improved management.
- ❑ High-rise living is increasingly becoming a more accepted form of living in the inner city with the development of many high-rise towers by the private sector. This means that to some degree, this form of housing has the capacity to become less stigmatised in the future, compared to the past.
- ❑ There are many possible tenancy and tower management practices and community development initiatives to respond to difficulties experienced with high-rise towers which have not yet been tried.
- ❑ It is possible to introduce changes to current public housing policy which have the capacity to assist in addressing a number of the factors contributing to difficulties with high-rise towers.

It is recognised that there will be a number of major challenges in improving the towers so that they provide appropriate, safe and a quality living experience for tenants. At present there are many possible approaches that still need to be tried to redress difficulties being experienced in individual towers.<sup>16</sup>

However, if after a concerted effort to seek and implement creative and sound strategies for improvement major issues remain unaddressed within particular towers they should not be retained as housing for low income households.

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<sup>16</sup> For an outline of possible approaches see Resource 3 – Potential options for addressing issues affecting towers.





# CHAPTER 7

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Victoria needs a strategic vision for its high-rise public housing and a clear process for the State Government to work collaboratively with others to assess and address the issues facing individual towers. Without a clear strategic vision and a framework for planning for their regeneration, current efforts to address the issues facing high-rise public housing will remain partial, frustrating and in some instances a waste of funds.

### 7.1 Central role of the State Government

- The ability to develop a more positive future for high-rise living for low income households will be strongly influenced by the State Government building a vision for inner Melbourne that is based on a desire to:
  - maintain a population that is socially, economically and culturally diverse
  - maintain access to a diversity of housing types and tenures for low income households
  - support maintenance and rebuilding where necessary, of cohesive and resilient local communities that positively embrace social, economic and cultural diversity.
- The potential for a positive future for high-rise living for low income households will also be dependent on the State Government's willingness to undertake the following:
  - ❑ **Exercise leadership in bringing together all the key stakeholders to work in a spirit of partnership** to develop a positive future for inner city high-rise living for low income households.
  - ❑ **Commit to implementing co-ordinated, cross departmental and divisional responses** to:
    - develop effective responses to address the support needs of tenants with more complex needs so that they receive the support they need to live effectively in the community and can participate positively in the life of their community
    - support the rebuilding of a positive sense of community amongst tower tenants where this has broken down
    - enhance the participation of low income households from public housing in the life of the broader local community and address the increasing divide occurring as a result of gentrification of surrounding neighbourhoods, and
    - advocate for Commonwealth Government commitment to support initiatives that enhance the quality of life and economic and social participation of low income tenants of high-rise housing.
  - ❑ **Develop a program of urban regeneration and community building** in areas where there are high concentrations of low-income households
  - ❑ **Address issues related to the housing stock and housing management practices** by:
    - trialling new tower and tenancy management approaches and practices particularly suited to addressing and preventing known problems with high-rise towers
    - redesigning of housing policies to:

enable a more diverse group of tenants in terms of income and circumstances to live in high-rise  
enable applicants to make a deliberate choice to live in a particular tower  
ensure that an individual allocation to a unit is appropriate for both the tenant and the wider group of tenants in that housing, and  
ensure better integration and coordination with support services.

- committing sufficient financial resources to develop a rolling program for upgrade
- developing a co-ordinated and well managed approach to addressing the multiplicity of issues that may exist for a particular tower
- examining how to co-ordinate initiatives for towers with those for redevelopment of four storey walk-ups where these co-exist in close proximity.

### 7.2 Key role of Local Government

Each Local Government with high-rise public housing in its area also has an important role to play in building a positive future for high-rise living for low income households through:

- ❑ Exercising strong leadership and advocacy for maintaining social, economic and cultural diversity within the municipality.
- ❑ Developing strategies to encourage community tolerance of diversity.
- ❑ Developing a municipal housing strategy or policy which reinforces the importance of retaining affordable housing within the municipality and ensuring a diversity of housing stock is available to meet the needs of low income households<sup>17</sup>.
- ❑ Taking a leadership role in facilitating neighbourhood planning processes which build knowledge about issues in local neighbourhoods with high-rise public housing and working with others to identify specific local strategies to address key problems and issues.

### 7.3 Proposed strategic framework

The proposed broad strategic framework for consideration by the Government and other interested stakeholders for the future of high-rise public housing stock is outlined in Box 1 below. It is built on an assumption that the objective is to build a positive future for high-rise public housing stock where it can be made to work effectively for low income households and provide appropriate housing that tenants can be proud to live in.

Within this is the possibility that some or all the stock is managed by organisations other than government. In addition such a framework does not preclude the option of disposal of specific towers if, despite considerable effort, tenants do not want to live there and/or they are not able to provide appropriate housing that represents responsible use of scarce resources.

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<sup>17</sup> A number of Local Governments have already developed such strategies or policies, for example City of Melbourne, City of Port Phillip and City of Yarra.

**Box 1****Key elements of the strategic framework for high-rise housing**

- ❑ There is a strong **rationale** for developing a positive future for high-rise towers as housing for low income households including:
  - High-rise towers have a key role in maintaining access for low income households to housing and thus urban resources in inner Melbourne
  - By housing low-income households, high-rise towers provide positive benefits for the whole community
    - socio-economic, ethnic and cultural diversity in inner Melbourne
    - environmental benefits through better utilisation of public infrastructure, e.g public transport, and
    - developing and maintaining dynamic local economies through support of local traders and a range of social infrastructure agencies and support services
  - High-rise flats cannot be replaced with other types of housing stock in inner Melbourne without significant costs or a substantial loss of dwelling stock
  - High-rise living is increasingly becoming a more accepted form of living in inner Melbourne
  - There is a ongoing demand for high-rise flats in inner Melbourne and if necessary the size of dwellings can be reconfigured to meet the changing household profile of applicants.
  - The structure of the buildings are sound
  - There are a number of known but untried strategies to address current issues and better living conditions for tenants can be created through a wide range of options.
  
- ❑ **Overall goals** for regenerating high-rise housing are to:
  - Provide safe, secure and appropriate housing for the full range of household types seeking affordable inner city housing
  - Improve the social conditions so that people want to live there and make it their home
  - Maintain a high level of access to affordable housing in the inner city for a diverse range of low income households
  - Build a more positive image for high-rise living for low income families
  - Create enhanced opportunities for social and economic participation of tenants in the community
  - Better integrate high-rise residents into the local neighbourhood
  - Better meet the social, environmental and economic objectives of the Victorian Government.

### Box 1 (continued)

- ❑ **Specific objectives** for regenerating high-rise housing:
  - Improve their amenity, in particular the social conditions within each of the towers
  - Improve the physical condition of individual flats and the common areas
  - Better integrate high-rise towers into the local streetscape
  - Better manage high-rise towers
  - Improve tenants' sense of safety and personal security
  - Enhance tenant's sense of control and ownership over their living environments
  - Ensure that high-rise towers have a mix of tenants that provides for a sustainable community of tenants
  - Ensure that high-rise towers are child-friendly environments and that they meet a range of cultural needs
  - Ensure effective links between housing and support services for tenants
  - Strengthen ties between tenants and enhance the sense of community
  - Enhance opportunities for employment and other activities
- ❑ **Scope of approach to regeneration:**
  - The complex issues associated with making high-rise living work for low income households will require involvement of all spheres of Government – Commonwealth, State and Local - as well as relevant State Government departments and divisions to ensure co-ordinated, cross program responses.
  - Regeneration will transform neighbourhood areas and may provide opportunities for public and private sector involvement in residential, retail and commercial initiatives on the current sites.
- ❑ **Setting priorities** for managing and staging the regeneration of the towers over a specified time.
  - An initial targeted overview assessment will be undertaken of all towers to scope the diversity of issues found between towers and to set priorities between towers for more detailed consultation, planning and development of strategies for action.
- ❑ **Process:**
  - All relevant stakeholders will be engaged through an approach that respects and builds upon their various perspectives and interests in developing an integrated and comprehensive plan for the regeneration of high-rise public housing. This process will:
    - recognise the diversity of stakeholders and that the best outcomes are achieved by their involvement in the broad strategic planning process and in the more detailed planning for the future of each tower, and
    - recognise the diversity of high-rise towers and that no one strategy is appropriate for all high-rise towers, with different combinations of strategies likely to be required for different towers.
  - Strategies will be developed to ensure that all stakeholders are able to participate on an equal footing and that frank discussion and creative ideas will be welcomed and encouraged.

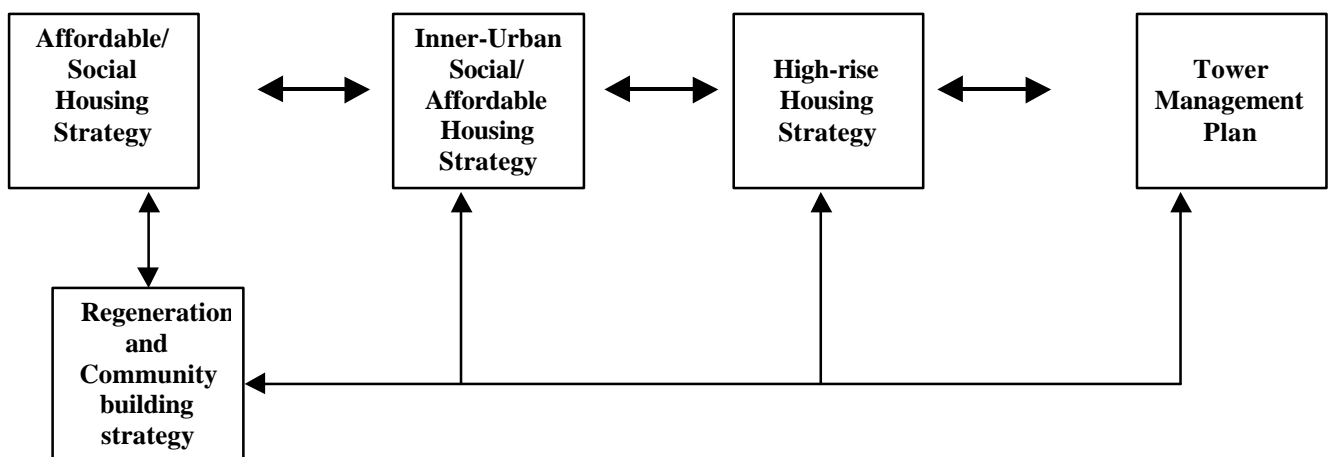
**Box 1 (continued)**

- ❑ A clear **commitment of resources** is made to support the planning process and for the development and implementation of plans for the regeneration of local areas that include high-rise towers or high-rise towers by themselves (whichever is most appropriate).
- ❑ **Housing policy framework:**
  - There is a clear commitment to developing a housing policy framework which takes account of the unique characteristics of high-rise towers, including policies and practices that:
    - actively promote the rights of applicants and tenants to choose the tower in which they live
    - actively excludes households for whom this type of housing is inappropriate, and
    - ensures a mix of tenants able to form a sustainable community.
- ❑ **Encouragement of innovation, piloting of different approaches and evaluation** will form a key component of the approach to the regeneration of high-rise towers.

As illustrated in Diagram 7-1, the strategic framework for the future of high-rise public housing needs to be set within the broader context of an affordable/social housing strategy, within an inner urban affordable/social housing strategy and within a regeneration and community building strategy. The affordable/social housing strategy will also sit within broader government strategies. It is within this context that the rationale, the purpose and the broad objectives for high-rise public housing will be determined. However, it is also likely that a strategic framework for high-rise public housing may well inform thinking and reflection on the more overarching strategies.

The strategic and policy framework for high-rise towers will in turn set the parameters for local area regeneration strategies (of which high-rise towers will be a primary component) and for tower management plans. Thus, the framework will set the general directions for the future of high-rise towers yet will be sufficiently broad to take account of the diversity between these towers.

**Diagram 7-1: Context for a high-rise public housing strategic framework**



## 7.4 Some implementation issues

There are many issues which will need detailed consideration if a successful approach is to be developed to address the issues currently being faced with high-rise public housing. The following outlines some comments about a number of the elements outlined in the framework in Box 1.

### (1) *Scope of the approach to regeneration*

As outlined in Chapter 5, the critical issues for high-rise towers are complex and multi-dimensional. Many of the issues are broader social issues such as high levels of unemployment, poverty, increasing levels of mental illness, need for enhanced family living skills and child protection, crime, the use and dealing in illicit drugs. Others relate to access to appropriate services such as education, health services, family, aged and other services etc. Thus, the scope of regeneration cannot be limited solely to those areas for which the Office of Housing is responsible.

It is unrealistic to assume that all these broader issues can be resolved as part of the process of regenerating high-rise housing. However, they are important issues for the future viability of high-rise housing and should be taken into account. Thus, any vision for high-rise public housing must go beyond the scope of Office of Housing activities and engage a range of stakeholders in developing more comprehensive and integrated responses to the issues. An important role for the Office of Housing in this process is to identify how their current housing policies and practices may exacerbate these issues, for example a stock profile and allocations policy which concentrates low income and disadvantaged households and tenants with complex needs in the one area.

While many of the broader societal issues facing residents of high-rise public housing emanate from Commonwealth Government policies and broader economic conditions, the State Government has some capacity to advocate for Commonwealth support in responding to some of the issues. It certainly has capacity to ensure a more integrated approach within State Government to addressing education and support needs of many residents.

### (2) *Setting priorities for managing the regeneration of towers*

At present the problems being experienced with high-rise public housing as a whole can appear overwhelming and unresolvable. This results in individual *ad hoc* responses to problems with particular towers. This type of approach does not assist in developing an overview of the issues found across the high-rise stock portfolio, the magnitude of the issues or the differences in issues experienced between different towers.

It is not feasible to develop plans for the regeneration of 44 high-rise towers all at once. The key to making the problems and challenges more manageable is to develop a systematic process for undertaking a comparative initial overview assessment of all the towers. This will scope the issues and provide the information necessary to develop a realistic, strategic and well thought-through framework for setting priorities and for tackling the issues.

In determining what issues and which towers should be considered a priority a number of practical factors will need to be taken into account including:

- how well a tower is working, what is not working and the magnitude and impact of problems being experienced
- current opportunities for regeneration

- availability of and commitment to provide appropriate support to residents with high needs
- whether small investments in preventative initiatives will reduce major problems arising or whether small strategic investment of resources have the potential to have significant positive impacts on the lives of tenants, local areas or neighbourhoods
- the features of particular sub-markets of the inner-urban housing market
- issues in the local area in which a tower is situated and the significance of high-rise housing to a local area, and
- the availability of and commitment to provide appropriate individual support services to residents with high needs.

Overall the most critical issue for establishing priorities should be the first factor - how well a tower is working, what is not working and the magnitude and impact of problems being experienced.

In Part 2 of this Report (*Tools and Resources*) a tool for undertaking a preliminary assessment of how well a tower is working, the strengths and weaknesses of each tower and the most significant problems areas is outlined (see Resource 2). This tool examines seven dimensions of a high-rise tower:

- physical condition of the building
- design and condition of common areas
- how well the tower meets the needs of tenants
- social dynamics between tenants, and between tenants and the local community
- effectiveness of the tenancy management
- effectiveness of tower management, and
- economic and financial viability of the tower.

The primary purpose of the tool outlined in Resource 2 is to assist in developing a strategic plan for each tower. It presupposes the engagement of stakeholders in this process. However, elements of the tool can be adapted to undertake a less detailed initial overview assessment of each tower to generate the information needed to develop a priority ranking system across all towers.

Box 2 provides an outline of a suggested approach for undertaking the initial assessment of each tower for issue scoping and priority setting purposes.



**Box 2**

**A suggested approach for undertaking an initial assessment of all towers to scope the issues and set priorities**

1. Establish a committee representing key stakeholder groups.
2. Appoint an “independent” chairperson to direct and oversee the scoping and priority setting process.
3. Identify what data is already available about each tower (for example information about tenant profiles, demand, turnover, refusals, arrears, financial performance and building condition) that can usefully inform the initial assessment process. (The Office of Housing has more detailed information than presented in Tables 2.6 and 2.7 in this report that would be very useful.)
4. Develop the framework for undertaking a systematic and consistent initial assessment of each tower, drawing on Resource 2.
5. Identify other issues that need to be taken into account when assessing relative priority between towers.
6. Develop an efficient and targeted process for consultation with tenants in each tower, local Office of Housing staff and other key local stakeholders. This could be achieved by holding three discussion/workshop sessions across a day with each of the three groups who understand the issues associated with a particular tower. (This would require development of a standard format for the discussion on every tower to ensure consistent information collection.)
7. Assemble the information necessary to assess each tower which will include:
  - collating existing information held by government departments and particularly the Office of Housing
  - the information from the consultations
  - other relevant information available
8. Assess the information and issues emerging, and based on this, develop a framework for setting priorities.
9. On the basis of the framework put each tower into a particular priority category.
10. Review the priority grouping and rankings.
11. Develop a realistic framework for undertaking a more detailed assessment and planning process initially for high priority towers, taking into account available financial and practical resources.

It is important to note that the proposed assessment tool highlights the multi-dimensional nature of information considered necessary to identify issues affecting a tower. Traditionally, the need for capital improvements and the allocation of funds to this purpose have driven regeneration programs. While this is an important consideration, it is not the only consideration. The evidence is that sensitively undertaking capital improvements has a major positive impact on a local area. One of the challenges, however, is to extend the life of this positive impact beyond the first five years. Thus, the need for capital improvements must be weighed against the other dimensions of a high-rise tower and the other factors outlined above. Indeed, it is important that capital improvements do not drive the process of regeneration; the strategies that address the critical issues for a particular high-rise tower process should drive the process.

A comprehensive approach to examining the operation and condition of a tower will highlight other critical issues and strategies. Many of the alternate strategies for addressing issues do not have the initial impact of capital improvements and do not require high levels of resources upfront. However, they do have the potential to bring on-going and lasting results in the long term. Moreover, an examination of multiple aspects of a tower's operations may indicate the need for a particular tower to be assigned a higher priority. For example, there may be a group of towers where a higher priority exists for non-asset strategies such as changes in allocations, changed tenancy management, alternative management structures etc.

The priorities, the available resources, the planning process and the complexity and cost of strategies for each tower will determine the time horizons over which regeneration of high-rise towers can occur from a practical and financial perspective.

### **(3) Process**

#### **Engaging the diverse group of stakeholders**

As seen in Chapter 4 many different stakeholders have a keen interest in both the current operation of towers and future directions. Each of the stakeholders considers the high-rise from a particular perspective and seeks to achieve particular objectives. This perspective influences their views on what is happening, what is important and what is possible to improve the operation of a particular tower. However, this limited perspective is not enough. A vision for the future involves a commitment to engaging a broad range of stakeholders in a process which will take account of these different perspectives.

The difference in perspectives and the need to achieve a commitment to a common view of the future complicates the process of planning the regeneration of each tower. The process has to be sufficiently robust to allow a variety of perspectives to come to the fore. Success will depend on developing an inclusive as well as efficient process with critical questions to be considered including:

- Who are the stakeholders and what is their interest?
- Through what process can they be engaged most productively?
- In what parts of the process will different stakeholders be engaged?
- How do we know the process is a good one? and
- Who will be responsible for facilitating the process and ensuring decisions are reached?

In Part 2 of this Report (*Tools and Resources*) a process for planning for the regeneration of individual high-rise towers is outlined (see Resource 1). The process proposed enables engagement of key stakeholders, sets out a logical sequence for activities and identifies broad tasks to be undertaken.

#### **Planning approach**

Each tower is distinctly different with different issues, different contexts and different opportunities and therefore a detailed planning process is required to identify the best future options for each local area and tower. The focus for the planning exercise may consist of a

single tower, a number of towers or a local area incorporating high-rise towers, walk-up flats and other public housing.<sup>18</sup>

In Resource 1 an approach is outlined for the development of local plans for individual towers or clustering of towers. The local plan will progress through the following stages:

- Stage 1: Establishing a planning committee
- Stage 2: Undertaking an assessment of the local area/towers (The resources to assist this are found in Resource 2 in Part 2 of this report.)
- Stage 3: Developing an understanding of the local area and towers
- Stage 4: Reaching agreement on the objectives for the local area/towers
- Stage 5: Identification of the potential options for the local area and towers (Resources to assist with this are found in Resource 3 in Part 2 of this report.)
- Stage 6: Evaluation of the potential options
- Stage 7: Agreement on a strategy for the future.

### **(4) Innovation and evaluation**

Innovation will be a key component to the regeneration of high-rise towers. Innovation in the planning process, in engaging stakeholders, in assessing what is working and what is not, in the housing policy framework, in tenancy management, in integration of high-rise towers, in complementary and strategic residential, retail and commercial development on the current sites, in design of entrances and common areas, in the design and types of upgrading etc. Much can be learnt from the overseas and interstate experience. However, this experience needs to take account of the local Victorian context. Innovation, along with evaluation, will continue to enhance outcomes for high-rise tenants.

Section 5 of Chapter 2 outlines a range of innovations that the Office of Housing has undertaken in regard to high-rise towers. Unfortunately, very few of these innovations have been evaluated and assessed. It is essential that what works and what doesn't, why it works and why it doesn't is documented for future innovation on high-rise towers. Evaluation, then, is another key component of the regeneration of high-rise towers so that towers which are subject to regeneration latter can gain from the learned experience of different innovations.

### **(5) Key policy and practice questions**

Discussions about regeneration of high-rise housing raises two key policy and practice questions with particular implications for high-rise tenants: who lives in high-rise housing? and; how will high-rise towers be managed? There is a need to consider reviewing both these areas of current Office of Housing policy and practice insofar as they apply to high-rise housing.

#### **Who lives in high-rise housing?**

Who lives in high-rise housing is a key policy question for the future of high-rise housing. Some argue that the high-rise are not suitable places for families with young children. Some argue that high-rise housing is appropriate housing for students, single adults, couples or older people. Some question the appropriateness of concentrating people with social and economic

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<sup>18</sup> The term "local area" is used rather than the term "estate". Our view is that we need to shift the focus of thinking as estates are broken up into smaller units. Thus, rather than focusing on estates we need to focus on local neighbourhoods or on individual towers.

disadvantages and with high support needs. Some wonder about a policy of deinstitutionalisation that moves people out of institutions but congregates them in areas with a high concentration of public housing.

In Chapter 3 on the unique characteristics of high-rise public housing, we noted that the higher density of high-rise housing requires higher levels of interaction between residents. This is both an opportunity and a weakness. It is an opportunity for those who enjoy interacting with other people and other cultures. It is a weakness in that any event or incident in a tower impacts on a large number of people in the tower. This contrasts markedly with a suburban setting where an incident in a house can go largely unnoticed and impacts on few people living near by.

As a household in a high-rise tower has the potential to negatively impact on a large number of people, the Office of Housing needs to consider carefully who is allocated to high-rise public housing:

- How do we define the appropriate target groups for high-rise housing?
- Should any groups be excluded?
- Are different target groups incompatible, for example frail older people and young people?
- What criteria should include or exclude applicants for high-rise housing?
- What mechanisms can be used to target or exclude applicants from high-rise housing?

Who is housed in the high-rise flats is the endpoint of a long process and involves consideration of some fundamental public housing policies:

- the size of dwellings
- extent of public-private mix
- eligibility criteria for public housing
- priority for public housing through the segmented waiting list
- broadbanning and the extent to which applicants can exercise choice about the location of their housing
- practices of allocating applicants to dwellings, and
- transfer policies.

These policies and practices have a major impact on who is housed in high-rise housing and how they feel about it. They impact on the makeup of the tenant population and the concentration of low income and very disadvantaged households and on the sustainability of communities within high-rise towers.

Many of these policies and practices may be appropriate where public housing is scattered throughout a suburb. However, they may not be appropriate for high-rise housing. In the light of evidence about what makes a tower work or not work, the Office of Housing and any alternate housing managers may need to reconsider these policies and practices.

### **How will high-rise towers be managed?**

A second area for consideration is the approach to the management of high-rise towers. Over the past decade the Office of Housing has had a strong focus on the management of transactions between the Office of Housing and tenants. This involves both tenancy transactions, such as signing and terminating tenancy agreements, the collection of rents and follow-up of rent arrears, as well as dwelling transactions such as repairs and maintenance. There has been a strong focus on individual client service.

To some extent the role of the Office of Housing as the manager of a high-rise tower has been neglected. Tower management is concerned about a tower as a whole and the impact that decisions will have not just on one particular tenant but on all tenants in a tower. The previous section has already referred to the possible impact of allocations on a tower. Other aspects of tower management include ensuring or facilitating the adequate provision of support services for tenants and working co-operatively with other organisations to develop services or projects within towers.

Effective management of high-rise housing involves moving beyond tenancy or transaction-based management towards a stronger role in the management of towers as a whole. Thus, current housing management policies and practices that assume public housing is scattered through a suburb may not be appropriate and may need revision.

### 7.5 Recommendations

This report has been prepared to provide a positive and practical contribution to progressing moves to create a more positive future for our current high-rise public housing. In this Chapter a broad strategic framework for the regeneration of high-rise housing has been proposed as have a number of practical suggestions for implementing aspects of this framework. Earlier Chapters of the Report have outlined important background information which should improve understanding of the complex set of issues associated with our current high-rise public housing. Part 2 contains a number of resources to support the process of implementing a concerted strategy for the regeneration of current high-rise housing for low income households and these resources are summarised in Box 3.

It is evident that the State Government needs to show leadership in tackling the complex issues associated with our current high-rise public housing. The issues and challenges will only become more difficult if not addressed soon in a strategic and systematic way. The consultations undertaken as part of this project indicate that many of the different stakeholders are prepared to work together to seek effective solutions for improving the quality of life for high-rise tenants.

We recommend that the State Government draw on the material in this Report and:

1. Adopt a positive vision for the future of inner city high-rise housing for low income households.
2. Approach the implementation of this vision as a collaborative process in partnership with all key stakeholders.
3. Commit relevant government departments and divisions within departments to work together positively and co-operatively to implement a positive future vision for our current high-rise public housing.
4. Commit sufficient financial and human resources to undertake initial planning, initial scoping and assessment of all towers and prioritising of towers to enable development of a plan for consideration by the State Government for undertaking more detailed assessment and planning for high priority towers.
5. Establish a task force that includes representation from all key stakeholder groups to:
  - a) oversee the development of a framework for the initial assessments of all towers
  - b) oversee the process of initial systematic assessment of all towers and development of a priority ranking for all towers, and

- c) develop a realistic framework and plan for undertaking more detailed assessment of priority towers and a proposed timeframe for addressing issues with lower priority towers.
6. Appoint an independent person to chair the task force who has:
    - a) strong leadership capacity
    - b) ability to gain the respect and trust of the wide group of stakeholders with an interest in the future of our current high-rise public housing
    - c) ability to work positively with a wide cross section of stakeholders and ensure all views are heard
    - d) understanding of the complex issues associated with implementing a positive vision for high-rise housing for low income households, and
    - e) ability to ensure a committee is able to undertake and complete its tasks in a professional and timely manner.
  7. Develop effective and practical strategies that positively resource and support tenants to have effective representation and participation in the assessment and planning process.
  8. Advocate for a co-operative approach with relevant sections of the Commonwealth Government for exploring approaches to improve the future of low income high-rise housing tenants.

### Box 3

#### Tools and resources in Part 2

❑ ***Resource 1: A planning process to identify the best future outcome for each tower***

This outlines an approach which incorporates:

- involvement of key stakeholders including the Office of Housing, Local Government, relevant Government Departments, tenants, local support agencies and the local community
- a local planning process that considers the future of high-rise towers in the context of other public housing in the area.
- use of a tool for a preliminary assessment of each tower which ensures that physical, social and financial issues are considered in an integrated way.

❑ ***Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of a tower***

This describes an approach for assessing individual towers/local areas that was developed to take account of the key issues of interest and concern to different stakeholders. It identifies seven different dimensions that contribute to the operation of a tower, outlines a set of standards and proposes 30 different indicators against which each individual tower can be assessed. It provides a comprehensive set of benchmarks and measures that assist in quantifying how well a tower is operating and where its strengths and weakness lie. A proforma for summarising the assessed performance of a tower is provided, as are two examples demonstrating how the proforma can be used.

We expect that different groups will want to adjust and revise different components of this tool – however we believe that it provides an important starting point around which to focus debate.

**Box 3**  
**Tools and resources in Part 2 (continued)**

❑ **Resource 3: *Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise housing***

This section outlines and discusses the range of strategic options available to address issues with high-rise towers. The options outlined are:

- tenancy management and tower management
- alternative management
- short-term intensive management
- allocations policy
- community development
- social infrastructure and support services
- asset management:
  - upgrade buildings both internally and externally
  - upgrade and redesign common areas
  - reconfigure of areas surrounding towers
  - reconfigure dwelling sizes
- demolition and redevelopment of site, and
- sale of tower, dwellings and site.

❑ **Resource 4: *Learning from others – a review of the literature***

Many governments, organisations and individuals have been grappling with the complex issues associated with high concentrations of public housing and addressing the issues and problems they can present. Whatever direction we take in Victoria should benefit from the learning and observations of others who have researched this area.

The literature review provides an account of some of the key reports and academic writing on issues relevant to regeneration of high-rise public housing. Discussion in this Report has drawn on relevant literature and the available literature has also been used when developing the resources contained in Part 2 of this Report.



# **PART 2**

# **TOOLS AND RESOURCES**

Part 2 provides a number of resources to assist in planning for the future of high-rise housing.

- *Resource 1* outlines a process for **local neighbourhood planning** involving all key stakeholders
- *Resource 2* outlines a detailed guide for undertaking a **multidimensional preliminary assessment** of how a high-rise tower is working
- *Resource 3* outlines a broad range of **potential options for addressing issues** affecting high-rise towers
- *Resource 4* reviews useful Australian and overseas **literature**

# ◀ RESOURCE 1 ▶

## A PLANNING PROCESS TO IDENTIFY THE BEST FUTURE OUTCOME FOR EACH TOWER

Examination of high-rise public housing raises some fundamental questions about public housing and its role. The complexity of the issues and the diversity of stakeholders necessary to make a tower work properly mean that we need a systematic and structured approach to considering the future of each tower.

The following outlines a process for planning the future of individual high-rise towers. The approach incorporates:

- involvement of key stakeholders including the Office of Housing, Local Government, relevant Government Departments, tenants, local support agencies and the local community
- a neighbourhood planning process that considers the future of high-rise towers in the context of other social housing in the area
- use of a tool for a preliminary assessment of each tower which ensures that physical, social and financial issues are considered in an integrated way.

### **Effectively engaging stakeholders in the planning process**

The Office of Housing is a key stakeholder in the future of high-rise housing. However, engaging all stakeholders in the planning process is essential to enable development of a plan which goes beyond Office of Housing responsibility and seeks solutions which are determined collaboratively by all stakeholders, and are integrated and multi-dimensional.

Each stakeholder brings a distinctive yet important perspective on the high-rise and each needs to acknowledge the legitimacy of other perspectives and the limitations of their own. Together the stakeholders need to forge a collective view about the critical issues and objectives for a high-rise tower and about the sustainable strategies that must be put in place.

### **A planning framework and process**

Chapter 7 of the report outlines a proposed strategic and policy framework for the future of high-rise housing. This framework should provide a context for more detailed planning for each neighbourhood area with high-rise towers.<sup>19</sup>

Each tower is distinctly different with different issues, different contexts and different opportunities. Thus a more detailed planning process is required for each neighbourhood area and tower. For a particular tower, the strategies or mix of strategies required to address its

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<sup>19</sup> The term “neighbourhood area” is used rather than the term “estate”. Our view is that we need to shift the focus of thinking as estates are broken up into smaller units. Thus, rather than focusing on estates we need to focus on neighbourhood areas or on individual towers.

particular issues would be different from other towers. Planning for individual towers in the context of a broad framework will ensure the development of a systematic, holistic, realistic and accountable overall plan for the future of high-rise housing.

The development of a plan for a neighbourhood or high-rise tower will:

- involve all the relevant stakeholders in the process;
- identify the key issues that need to be addressed in each neighbourhood area and tower;
- identify the range of parties, including tenants, that need to be consulted in the development of the plan, and processes and critical time points for consultation;
- develop a comprehensive communication and consultation process with tenants;
- set the physical, social, economic and financial objectives to be achieved for a particular site and timeframe targets for addressing the issues for the neighbourhood area and towers;
- develop a strategy which would address the range of issues identified for the neighbourhood area and towers.

Each neighbourhood area and each tower has unique features and issues. A practical strategic response must address these issues within a broader policy context. The development of neighbourhood plans for individual towers or clustering of towers will progress through seven stages as follows:

- Stage 8: Establish a neighbourhood planning committee
- Stage 9: Undertake a preliminary assessment of the neighbourhood area/towers
- Stage 10: Develop an understanding of the neighbourhood area and towers
- Stage 11: Reach agreement on the objectives for the neighbourhood area/towers
- Stage 12: Identify potential options for the neighbourhood area and towers
- Stage 13: Evaluate potential options
- Stage 14: Reach agreement on a strategy for the future.

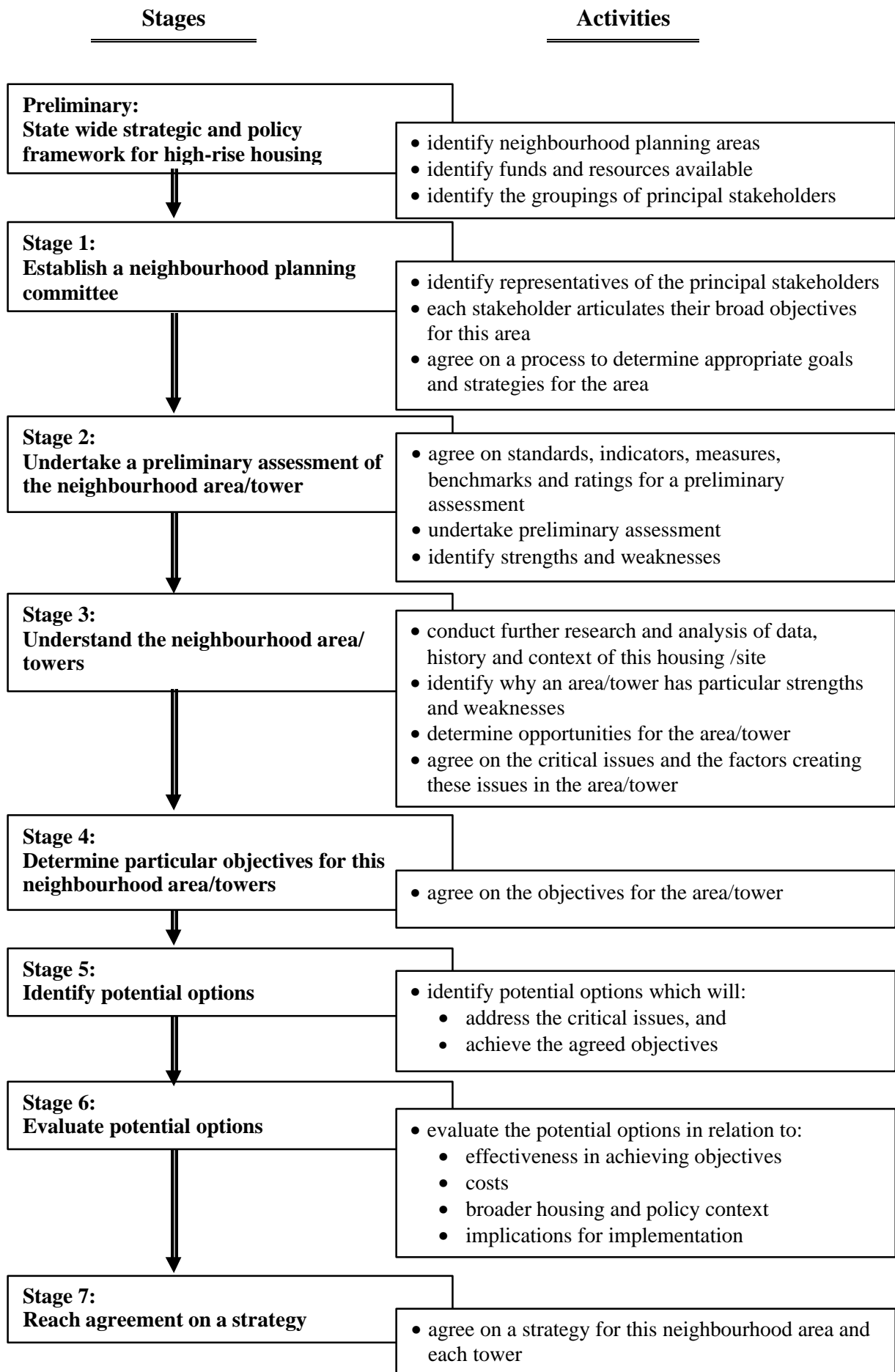
Diagram 1 below summarises the key aspects of the different stages of the neighbourhood planning process, while the following section provides more detail about each of these stages and the information and resources required in each of the different stages.

### **Stage 1 Establish a neighbourhood planning committee**

This stage involves:

- identifying the appropriate representatives for each of the principal stakeholder groups to be members of the planning committee for the neighbourhood area planning process. (It is important that members of the planning committee are accepted as representatives of the key stakeholder groups);
- briefing of the stakeholders about the broad aims and objectives of the planning process, the scope of the planning task, timelines and on some key characteristics of the neighbourhood area;

**Diagram 1: Planning process involving stakeholders**



- providing opportunities for each stakeholder to articulate their objectives for the area/tower. This will highlight the areas of commonality and the initial differences between the stakeholders and issues that this will raise for the planning process.

In this first stage it is important to seek active engagement and commitment of the stakeholders in the planning process and emphasise the importance of reaching common agreement about the critical issues, the objectives and the strategies to be adopted for the neighbourhood area. Stakeholders will have an important role in communicating with their constituency, engaging their constituency in discussions about the neighbourhood area and collectively seeking strategies to address critical issues. Implementing these strategies will not only be the responsibility of the Office of Housing but also, to differing degrees, each of the stakeholders will play their part in achieving best outcomes for the neighbourhood area.

At the outset it is important that the stakeholders agree on a process which will determine appropriate objectives and strategies for the neighbourhood area and each high-rise tower.

It should be noted that a major anticipated difficulty with effectively engaging tenants is the current status of tenant groups, with many tenant groups struggling to maintain themselves. This proposed planning process will place high demands on their skills and resources and they will need support to ensure effective participation.

### **Stage 2 Undertake a preliminary assessment of the neighbourhood area/tower**

This stage involves systematically collecting information about a neighbourhood area/tower.

Resource 2 of this report provides a tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of a tower. This tool seeks to bring together the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders. It outlines seven different dimensions which need to be considered:

- building
- surrounds and common areas
- tenant needs
- social environment
- tenancy management
- tower management
- finance and economy

For each of these dimensions a standard is proposed along with a range of indicators, measures, benchmarks and ratings.

This tool can be adopted as it is, or variations can be made in view of the particular requirements of the neighbourhood area. Each stakeholder will assess the adequacy of the tool from their perspective and may seek changes to the dimensions, standards, indicators, measures, benchmarks and ratings. The challenge will be to reach agreement about the specific details included in the tool.

The use of the tool will result in development of a preliminary, systematic assessment of the neighbourhood area or tower. It will provide a snapshot of the area, identify some of the strengths and weaknesses and provide some preliminary information which may require further follow-up.

Strategies adopted for a neighbourhood area or for a tower must address the critical issues about which the various stakeholders are concerned and the factors that contribute to these. A thorough understanding of what is happening in the neighbourhood area and what is or is not working is central for achieving successful outcomes from this planning process.

### **Stage 3 Understand the neighbourhood area/towers**

Work in this stage is focused on the members of the Planning Committee reaching agreement about what the critical issues are in the neighbourhood area/tower and about what the major factors are that have contributed to these critical issues. The information collected in Stage 2 will provide an important basis for this. However, further research and analysis of data and information about the history and the context for the neighbourhood area will be needed in order to understand what is happening in more depth, why it is happening and the factors that contribute to the critical issues.

Stage 2 provides the basis for this further work. But it is in Stage 3 that the stakeholders must gain some understanding of the neighbourhood area or towers. This includes understanding why an area has particular strengths and weaknesses and what opportunities are available in the neighbourhood area. Understanding these things is an essential pre-requisite for proposing strategies that will work.

### **Stage 4 Determine particular objectives for this neighbourhood area/towers**

The key task of this stage is for the stakeholders to reach agreement on objectives for a future plan for the neighbourhood area and towers. These objectives flow from the previous discussions about the critical issues of concern and will be a guide for proposing possible options.

### **Stage 5 Identify potential options for the neighbourhood area and towers**

This stage will focus on the planning committee working together (possibly with some expert input) to identify a range of options which will address the critical issues and contributing factors as well as achieve the objectives agreed to in Stage 4.

Resource 3 outlines a broad range of potential options available to address issues affecting the operation of high-rise towers. Which option or which combination of options is appropriate will depend upon the critical issues, the contributing factors and the objectives for the neighbourhood area or towers.

Stage 5 is about canvassing options and thinking creatively about courses of action which might work. The key to Stage 5 is focusing on the particular neighbourhood area or tower – considering its strengths and weaknesses, understanding its dynamics, grasping the opportunities that present themselves and addressing the critical issues of the particular area or tower and the contributing factors. It is about refining and tailoring the broad options to address specific local issues. It is not about simply adopting a set of solutions tried elsewhere.



## **Stage 6 Evaluate potential options**

The key focus of this stage is rigorous and systematic evaluation of the potential options identified in Stage 5. Each of these potential options will need to be evaluated against four criteria:

- their relative effectiveness in addressing the critical issues and contributing factors and in achieving the agreed objectives
- their relative costs and benefits
- whether they are realistic in relation to:
  - the overall availability of resources against other priorities
  - their implementation
  - if necessary, the cost and the capacity to transfer tenants
  - the impact of proposed works on current tenants
  - the impact on applicants and other public housing tenants.
- broader contextual issues such as the policy objectives of the Victorian Government and the Victorian housing market.

It is important to note that four different approaches to evaluation are proposed here. Often the focus is on the second, the financial evaluation.

A recent project by Spiller Gibbins Swan (SGS) for the Australian Housing Research Fund, *Public Housing Estate Renewal in Australia* discusses the various approaches to a financial assessment of options for renewal of a public housing estate.<sup>20</sup> The traditional evaluation techniques include:

- financial analysis
- cost effectiveness analysis
- cost benefit analysis
- planning balance sheet, and
- goals achievement matrix.

The traditional cost-benefit analysis evaluates options from an overall society perspective. “Costs and benefits are valued in terms of the claims they make or the gains they provide to societal welfare.”<sup>21</sup> SGS, however, favours what they call a “Sector Cost-Benefit Analysis” over traditional techniques. A Sector Cost-Benefit Analysis takes the perspective of the public rental sector rather than overall societal welfare and includes transfers of assets in and out of the public sector in its financial evaluation.<sup>22</sup> It is favoured because it not only incorporates the requirements of a financial analysis but the benefits and costs of non-financial impacts can be more easily identified and incorporated into the evaluation.<sup>23</sup>

SGS also notes that cost-benefit analyses are best undertaken where options are distinctly different from one another. In regard to physical assets, the broad options might encompass the following broad options:

- Option 1: Retain and upgrade towers – sub-options would involve different uses of areas around high-rise towers
- Option 2: Demolish high-rise tower and redevelop site – sub-options would involve different types of redevelopment

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<sup>20</sup> See *Public Housing Estate Renewal in Australia* by Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd., Australian Housing Research Fund, Project Number 212, July 2000, Chapter 5

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p.30

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p.35

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p.49

Option 3: Sell site and acquire replacement stock in inner Melbourne

Option 4: Sell site and use funds to acquire stock in other areas

## **Stage 7 Reach agreement on a strategy**

The key task of this final stage is for the stakeholders to reach agreement on an integrated and comprehensive strategy for the neighbourhood area and the towers.

An evaluation of the potential options provides a basis for discussion about this strategy and for coming to an agreement about which option or combination of options is likely to achieve the best outcome.

## **Comparison with the current Office of Housing redevelopment process**

The Office of Housing is currently undertaking a number of redevelopment projects throughout Victoria. They have identified four major phases in their redevelopment process as follows:

**Phase 1: Initial project development** which incorporates a scoping/feasibility study and a site options report

**Phase 2: Community Advisory Committee** which incorporates developing terms of reference and project timelines/costs and the preparation of a strategy plan

**Phase 3: Development plan/planning permit phase**

**Phase 4: Project implementation**

This redevelopment process has a broader scope than that proposed in this Report. In this Report the focus is only on Phase 2 of the Office of Housing process.

There are three distinct differences between the planning process proposed in this Report and Phase 2 of the Office of Housing's redevelopment process and they are:

- ❑ The Office of Housing redevelopment process is primarily focused on the redevelopment of physical assets – any consideration of other elements of a broader regeneration agenda are secondary to this purpose.
- ❑ This report outlines in far greater detail the major areas of work and decision making that the planning committee will undertake in developing a comprehensive and integrated plan for the neighbourhood area or towers.
- ❑ In Phase 2 of the Office of Housing redevelopment process, (Community Advisory Committee), they are seeking advice from a range of stakeholders in order that they can reach good decisions about the redevelopment. The focus is on advice and consultation. The planning process in this report envisages that the Office of Housing will be one (all be it a very key one) among a number of stakeholders who will make decisions about what they will do as part of an agreed, comprehensive and integrated response to the critical issues presented by neighbourhood area or towers. This planning process recognises the complexity of the issues and that the best outcomes are achieved when all the stakeholders are engaged. The focus is on engagement of the stakeholders and developing an agreed strategy which potentially requires action by all the stakeholders.



◀ **RESOURCE 2** ▶

**A TOOL TO UNDERTAKE  
A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT  
OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD  
AREA/TOWER**

A key step in the planning process outlined in the previous section is undertaking a preliminary assessment of the neighbourhood area/tower. In this section of the report a tool is provided to assist in undertaking this preliminary assessment. Use of this tool will result in an initial snapshot of what is happening in a tower and how well it is working.

This information provides a starting point for identifying critical questions and issues and the reasons why particular aspects are working well or are problematic. The preliminary assessment, in combination with other information such as demographic characteristics of residents, will contribute to the development of a comprehensive profile of the tower.

### **The assessment framework**

Any assessment of high-rise towers must recognise the various interests and concerns of key stakeholders and these need to be reflected in the assessment tool. The tool must recognise that each of the stakeholders will possibly have different views of what constitutes a tower that works and will give different priorities to different aspects of a high-rise tower. Some will be primarily interested in whether the tower works for tenants while others will be interested in the buildings themselves, whether the tower is well-managed or whether the tower provides an adequate financial return.

A useful assessment framework will thus need to recognise the complexity of issues which need to be considered. However, it will need to do more than that – it will need to be able to assist in understanding how a tower “measures up” from different perspectives. When a stakeholder says a tower is working or not working, What do they mean? What are they looking at? How are they measuring it? What constitutes working or not working?

The framework developed has multiple layers with each playing a different role in assisting to articulate expectations and make accountable and transparent judgements. The areas covered in the assessment are comprehensive in order to address key issues for the various stakeholders.

Broadly, then, the assessment framework consists of six elements as follows:

- dimensions
- standard
- indicators
- measures
- benchmarks
- rating scale

Each of these is discussed in more detail below.

### Dimensions

Dimensions are the various aspects that contribute to the function of a tower. They are the fundamental building blocks of the preliminary assessment and bring together the various perspectives and particular interests of the stakeholders. The preliminary assessment tool for high-rise towers is built around seven dimensions:

- Building
- Surrounds and common areas
- Tenant needs
- Social environment
- Tenancy management
- Tower management
- Finance and economy

### Standards

A standard is proposed for each of the seven dimensions. When a tower meets this standard it is considered to be working in relation to that particular dimension. For example, the standard developed for tenancy management dimensions are that *tenancies are well managed*.

### Indicators

Each dimension has many aspects. Thus, to make assessments manageable, a set of indicators which specify particular aspects of the dimension have been developed.

Development of a set of indicators for each dimension involves a consideration of what specifically constitutes the achievement of the standard for that dimension. A variety of factors will influence the selection of these indicators including the value attached to specific aspects of the neighbourhood area/tower, the limitations in available data, the limitations in accessing information about the neighbourhood area/tower and the limitations on research and surveys of the neighbourhood area/tower. For example, the indicators selected for the building dimension are:

*Condition of building structure*

*External building condition*

*Condition of units*

*Condition of services (water, sewerage, gas, electricity etc.)*

*Energy efficiency.*

These indicators themselves may also consist of a number of aspects that are variously assessed. In these instances, the task is to make an overall assessment. For example, a building indicator such as the *condition of units* could take account of the extent to which the building complies with the Australian Building Code and current safety standards. Buildings may comply in some respects but not others. Some buildings may fully comply while others do not. The different assessments of each aspect would need to be brought together into one overall assessment to provide a “snapshot” of this indicator for the tower/area.

### Measures

An indicator can be measured in a number of ways. Debates can be anticipated about what represents the best measurement. For example, the two measures for the tenant turnover indicator are *proportion of tenancies less than 12 months* and *proportion of tenancies more than five years*.

For some of the measures the data required may not be available or may be difficult to obtain. Some measures will be more symbolic of what is happening compared to others. For example,

in the dimension of social environment we want some idea of the relationship between public housing tenants and the local community. One indicator of this is the *extent to which tenants use local services – shops, schools, child-care, health services etc.* One measure of this indicator is the number of services used by tenants each week.

### **Benchmarks**

A benchmark for each indicator provides a basis for evaluating each tower and for deciding whether it is working or not working for that particular indicator.

The benchmarks incorporated into the measures are determined by adopting a current standard (for example, buildings comply with the Australian Building Code) or by adopting a standard which incorporates a comparison with:

- other housing stock, or
- private rental housing (for example, the rate of return is equivalent), or
- public housing generally (for example, average rent arrears is equivalent), or
- high-rise towers generally (for example, average rent arrears is equivalent).

### **Rating Scale**

The benchmark allows us to assess whether a tower is working or not working for a particular indicator. But this does not give us a sense of how well or how badly a tower is working. In order to do this, we have devised a simple 1 to 5 scale by which a tower can be rated for each indicator. In this way we get a better sense of where a tower is at.

When we assess a tower we can rate it on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being the most negative (a very poor rating) and 5 being the most positive (a very good rating). For ease of discussion the following descriptors are used for each of the ratings (1 - very poor; 2 – poor; 3 – satisfactory; 4 – good; 5 – very good).

It is generally preferable to define a rating 3 as the benchmark. On the rating proforma that follows on page 97, this allows us to see relatively easily which towers meet the benchmark and which do not. However, this may not be possible in all instances – particularly where towers are generally well under the benchmark. Thus, for many of the indicators, the benchmark rating will be rating 4 or rating 5. This allows for a better scaling of towers as they are.

## **Proposed indicators for assessing a high-rise tower**

In constructing a framework for assessing high-rise towers, both Australian and overseas literature which examines the links between different factors associated with high-rise public housing has been drawn on. For example, material from the United States and the United Kingdom shows that the design of the surrounds of a tower has implications for interaction among tenants and the levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. However, these are not necessary relationships and the framework for assessment is constructed in such a way that a number of theories of relationships between different factors may be considered.

Table 1 below outlines a broad framework for assessing high-rise towers. The table outlines the seven dimensions, the proposed standards for each dimension and a number of indicators for each dimension. The table proposes a measure and a benchmark for each indicator. In all

30 indicators are proposed. Table 2 outlines a 1 to 5 scale that can be used for ranking each tower on each of the 30 indicators.<sup>24</sup>

The preliminary assessment of a tower/area across these seven dimensions will involve an extensive process of discussion between the stakeholders. Stakeholders may believe that other indicators or measures more accurately reflect how a tower is working. Ultimately, the stakeholders need to reach agreement about each of the indicators to be used, their measurement, their benchmarks and the rating scale. Those presented in this report provide a starting point for discussion.

The following provides a brief discussion on each dimension and the 30 proposed indicators.

### **Building**

The building dimension focuses specifically on the physical condition of the building and reflects different aspects of the building. The five building indicators seek to assess different aspects of the building

- # 1: Condition of the building structure
- # 2: External condition of the building
- # 3: Condition of units
- # 4: Condition of services, and
- # 5: Energy efficiency

These indicators seek to assess the building in terms of its compliance with required building, fire and safety standards as well as, whether and when it requires upgrading and contemporary community standards. The proposed measure for each of these indicators contains a range of elements upon which an assessment is based. For example, an assessment of the external condition will have to make an overall assessment of the condition of roofs, walls, cladding and general appearance.

### **Surrounds and common areas**

The surrounds and common areas dimension seeks to assess how well the surrounds and common areas meet good design principles for high-density housing. The indicators which focus specifically on the design and condition of these areas take into account the cumulative experience and understanding of housing managers and architects about the factors that contribute to effective high-density housing. The perspective is not so much the physical condition of these areas but rather the appropriateness of the location, design and materials used.

Three indicators of the surrounds and common areas are proposed:

- # 6: Tower within the local neighbourhood
- # 7: Design of surrounding area
- # 8: Condition of common areas

Thus, they assess towers in terms of whether they stand out as distinctively public housing, whether tenants can exercise some control over, and responsibility for, areas surrounding the

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<sup>24</sup> The broad framework outlined in Table 1 and the scales used for ranking outlined in Table 2 have yet to be piloted. Such piloting would refine the indicators, measures, benchmarks and scales and may result in modifications to the framework. In particular, indicators relating to the tenants needs and social environment dimensions may need further work. Indicators for these dimensions may be further refined in such a way that they more clearly reflect the standard outlined for these dimensions and are of particular significance to the working of a tower in these two dimensions.



tower and the condition of common areas such as entrances, foyers, laundries, drying areas, carports, stairwells and laundries.

### **Tenant needs**

The tenant needs dimension seeks to assess the degree to which the tower and the units meet the needs of current tenants. Four indicators of tenants needs are proposed:

- # 9: Proximity to services
- # 10: Tower is preferred by tenants
- # 11: Adequacy of lifts
- # 12: Access for people in wheelchairs

These indicators focus specifically on the needs of current tenants. They are not concerned with whether the tower and the units will meet the needs of future tenants. Thus to a large extent whether a tower meets this criteria will depend upon the tenants living in the tower and their needs. Indicator 9 would require a survey of tenants to find out what services they require.

### **Social environment**

The social environment dimension seeks to assess the extent to which the social dynamics among tenants and between tenants and the local community are positive. Five indicators are proposed:

- # 13: Overt criminal and anti-social activity
- # 14: Safety and personal security
- # 15: Interaction among tenants
- # 16: Use of local services
- # 17: Involvement in local activities

The first three of these indicators focus specifically on the interaction among tenants in a high-rise tower. The more positive the opportunities and actual interaction, the more tenants will feel safe and regard their unit as home. The last two indicators focus on interaction between tenants and the local community. They attempt to gain some sense about this interaction.

Most of these indicators rely heavily upon the results of a survey of tenants and thus, the development of appropriate questions in view of the dimension and standard being assessed.

### **Tenancy management**

The tenancy management dimension seeks to assess whether the tenancy manager is successfully managing their relationship with tenants and tenancies. Three indicators are proposed:

- # 18: Responsiveness to tenants
- # 19: Duration of vacancies
- # 20: Rent arrears

Two aspects of responsiveness to tenants are measured - whether a tenant can converse in their language of choice in their dealings with the tenancy manager and responsiveness to maintenance.

### Tower management

The choice of dimensions distinguishes between tenancy management and tower management. Tenancy management focuses on the relationship between the landlord and each individual tenant whereas tower management focuses on those areas which relate to the common good of the tower. Four indicators are proposed:

# 21: Maintenance and cleaning (of the common areas)

# 22: Turnover

# 23: Meetings with tenants

# 24: Liaison with local services

Each of these indicators picks up aspects of a tower over which tower managers have some control.

### Finance and economy

The finance and economy dimensions seek to assess the financial and economic performance of the neighbourhood area or tower. Six indicators are proposed:

# 25: Management costs

# 26: Maintenance costs

# 27: Life-cycle costs

# 28: Rate of return on investment

# 29: Financial viability of operations

# 30: Land use optimisation

The first three of these indicators specifically focus on costs. Indicator 27 measures the life-cycle costs of a tower. It thus takes a longer term view than the costs of maintenance or the extent to which the tower requires upgrading.

Indicator 28 (Rate of return on investment) reflects, in financial terms, the effectiveness of the use of capital tied up in the tower. A low return may indicate that capital funds could be used better elsewhere (and would also provide tenants with better value). Other possible measures that could be adopted instead of this measure are the net rate of return, the internal rate of return and net present value, depending upon the availability of data. Indicator 29 (Financial viability of operations) reflects the extent to which rental revenue from tenants covers the costs of providing their housing.

Indicator 30 measures the extent to which current usage of the land occupied by and surrounding the tower is optimal. This indicator rates the usage of land in view of its highest and best use.

**Table 1: Assessing high-rise towers: dimensions, standards, indicators, proposed measures and proposed benchmarks**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Proposed measure</b>	<b>Proposed benchmark</b>
<b>Building</b>	The building structure and units are structurally sound, safe, comply with required building standards and meet community standards of amenity	1	Condition of building structure	Soundness of building Capacity to rectify	Building is safe and sound
		2	External building condition	Overall assessment of building condition Extent of works and upgrading required	External building is in good condition and no works and no upgrade will be required in the next 5 years
		3	Condition of units	Overall assessment of building condition Contemporary community standards	All units meet contemporary community standards
		4	Condition of services (water, sewerage, gas, electricity, telecommunications etc.)	Overall assessment of condition of services Extent of works and upgrading required	Services are in good condition and no works and no upgrade will be required in the next 5 years
		5	Energy efficiency	Temperature within units without supplementary heating or cooling	Temperature range within all units is 17°C - 23°C
<b>Surrounds and common areas</b>	The surrounds and common areas meet good design principles for high-density housing	6	Tower within the local neighbourhood	Extent to which tower/ neighbourhood area draws attention as public housing within the local streetscape	Tower/neighbourhood blends into the local streetscape
		7	Design of surrounding area	Extent of public open spaces Access to common areas	No public open spaces and access to common areas is restricted
		8	Condition of common areas	Overall assessment of condition of common areas Extent of works and upgrading required	Common areas are in good condition and no works and no upgrade will be required in the next 5 years

## Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower

**Table 1: Assessing high-rise towers: dimensions, standards, indicators, proposed measures and proposed benchmarks (continued)**

Dimension	Standard	#	Indicator	Proposed measure	Proposed benchmark
<b>Tenant needs</b>	The units meet the needs of current tenants	9	Proximity of tower to services (shops, public transport, health, education, child care etc.)	Mapping of local services compared with needs of residents	Tower provides access to essential services for 95% residents
		10	Tower is preferred by tenants	Proportion of tenants seeking transfers out of tower Proportion of hard-to-let units	Less than 10% tenants are seeking transfers and less than 1% hard-to-let units
		11	Adequacy of lifts	Size Wait-time Downtime	At least one lift can transport an ambulance stretcher Average wait-time is less than 3 minutes Average downtime is less than 5 hours per month
		12	Access for people in wheelchairs	Level of assistance which people in wheelchairs require to negotiate entry, foyer doors and lifts	People in wheelchairs can access flats without assistance
<b>Social environment</b>	The social dynamics among tenants and between tenants and the local community are positive	13	Overt criminal and anti-social activity	Extent of vandalism and graffiti Complaints from tenants	Minimal vandalism and graffiti Less than 3 complaints per month
		14	Safety and personal security	Survey of extent to which tenants feel safe and secure	70% tenants feel safe and secure
		15	Interaction among tenants	Survey of extent to which tenants recognise other tenants	80% tenants recognise 80% of residents on their floor.
		16	Use of local services	Survey to extent to which tenants use local services	90% tenants use more than 5 local services per week
		17	Involvement in local activities	Survey of extent to which tenants are involved in local activities	40% tenants are involved in voluntary activities

**Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower**

**Table 1: Assessing high-rise towers: dimensions, standards, indicators, proposed measures and proposed benchmarks (continued)**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Proposed measure</b>	<b>Proposed benchmark</b>
<b>Tenancy management</b>	Tenancies are well managed	18	Responsiveness to tenants	Preferred language for communication Maintenance requests	90% tenants can converse in their language of choice and 90% maintenance requests are completed within RTA requirements
		19	Vacancies	Average duration of vacancies	Average duration of vacancies is less than the average for all public housing dwellings
		20	Rent arrears	Average level of rent arrears	Average rent arrears is less than the average for all public housing tenancies
<b>Tower management</b>	The tower is well managed.	21	Maintenance and cleaning	Spot inspections	Common areas are maintained and clean
		22	Turnover	Proportion of tenancies less than 12 months Proportion of tenancies more than 5 years	Less than 10% of tenancies are less than 1 year More than 50% of tenancies are more than 5 years.
		23	Meetings with tenants	Extent of regular meetings between housing manager and tenants	1 meeting per month
		24	Liaison with local services	Extent to which housing manager meets regularly with local services	1 meeting per month

**Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower**

**Table 1: Assessing high-rise towers: dimensions, standards, indicators, proposed measures and proposed benchmarks (continued)**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Proposed measure</b>	<b>Proposed benchmark</b>
<b>Finance and economy</b>	The tower/ neighbourhood area is economically and financially viable.	25	Management costs	Average cost of management per dwelling	Average cost of management is comparable to the average cost for all public housing dwellings
		26	Maintenance costs	Average cost of maintenance per dwelling (includes all maintenance and cleaning for building)	Average cost of maintenance is comparable to the average cost for all public housing dwellings
		27	Life-cycle costs	Estimated life-cycle costs	Estimated average life-cycle costs is comparable to the average cost for all public housing dwellings
		28	Rate of return on investment	Total market rent as a proportion of total market value	Rate of return is comparable with the rate of return for all public housing dwellings
		29	Financial viability of operations	Total cost of operations as a proportion of total revenue collected (actual rent receivable)	Proportion is less than 100%
		30	Land use optimisation	Current usage provides best and highest value for money	Number of dwellings is greater than that allowed under current local planning requirements

**Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower**

**Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers**

**Building dimension:** *The building structure and units are structurally sound, safe, comply with required building standards and meet community standards of amenity*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
1	<b>Condition of building structure</b>	The building structure is unsound and requires immediate demolition	The building structure is basically sound but identified problems must be rectified immediately to maintain the integrity of the building.	The building structure is basically sound but does not comply with some major aspects of current building, fire and safety standards	The building structure is basically sound but does not comply with some minor aspects of current building, fire and safety standards	The building structure is very sound and complies with current building, fire and safety standards
2	<b>External building condition</b>	External building is in very poor condition and requires immediate major upgrading	External building is in relatively poor condition and, requires major works immediately and will require major upgrading within 5 years	External building is in good condition but requires some immediate minor works and will require major upgrading within 10 years	External building is in good condition but requires little immediate work and will require some work within the next 10 years	External building is in very good condition and will require no works within the next 10 years
3	<b>Condition of units</b>	Internal building condition is generally of a very poor standard and requires immediate major upgrade to bring it up to contemporary community standards	Internal building condition is generally of a relatively poor standard and will require major upgrade within 5 years to bring it up to contemporary community standards	Internal building condition is generally of a good standard but will require a major upgrade within 10 years to bring it up to contemporary community standards	Internal building condition is generally of a good standard but requires some works to maintain it at contemporary community standards	Internal building condition is generally very good and meets contemporary community standards
4	<b>Condition of services</b>	All or most services are in poor condition and require immediate upgrade	Some services are in poor condition and require immediate upgrade	All or most services are in reasonable condition but will require upgrading within 5 years	All services are in good condition but will require upgrading within the next 15 years	All services are in very good condition and will not require upgrading within 15 years
5	<b>Energy efficiency</b>	Less than 10% of units are within the temperature range of 17°C - 23°C for more than 6 months of the year	Less than 50% of units are within the temperature range of 17°C - 23°C for more than 6 months of the year	50% of units are within the temperature range of 17°C - 23°C all year round	70% of units are within the temperature range of 17°C - 23°C all year round	All units are within the temperature range of 17°C - 23°C all year round



**Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower**

**Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers (continued)**

**Surrounds and common areas dimension:** *The surrounds and common areas meet good design principles for high-density housing*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
6	<b>Tower within the local neighbourhood</b>	Tower stands out in the local streetscape and is highlighted as public housing.				Tower blends into local streetscape.
7	<b>Design of surrounding area</b>	Surrounding the tower are extensive areas of public open space which are used by or accessible to residents and non-residents and, which are not subject to casual surveillance.	Surrounding the tower are extensive areas of public open space used by or accessible to residents and non-residents – some of these areas are subject to casual surveillance	Landscaping, entrances, fences, gates etc. define the tower as private property to some extent, the surrounds have many undefined public open spaces and common areas within or adjacent to the tower which are subject to casual surveillance to some extent	Landscaping, entrances, fences, gates etc. define the tower as private property, the surrounds have limited public open spaces, the surrounds provide adequate buffers between private and public/common areas, and, most public and common areas within or adjacent to the tower are subject to casual surveillance	Landscaping, entrances, fences, gates etc. define the tower as private property, the surrounds have no public open spaces, the surrounds provide adequate buffers between private and public/common areas, common areas are defined and generally used by 6-8 households and, public and common areas within or adjacent to the tower are subject to casual surveillance
8	<b>Condition of common areas</b>	The surrounds and common areas are in a very poor condition and require immediate upgrade	The surrounds and common areas are in poor condition and will require an upgrade within 5 years	The surrounds and common areas are in fair condition but require some immediate repairs/painting and will require an upgrade within 5 years	The surrounds and common areas are in good condition requiring some immediate repairs/painting and will require an upgrade within 10 years	The surrounds and common areas are in very good condition and will not require an upgrade within the next 10 years

**Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers (continued)**

**Tenant needs dimension:** *The tower and the units meet the needs of current tenants*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
9	<b>Proximity of tower to services</b>	Less than 40% of residents have access to essential services	More than 40% of residents have access to essential services	More than 60% of residents have access to essential services	More than 90% of residents have access to essential services	More than 95% of residents have access to essential services and a range of other services
10	<b>Tower is preferred by tenants</b>	More than 30% of tenants are seeking transfers or more than 5% of dwellings are hard-to-let	20-30% of tenants are seeking transfers or 3-5% of dwellings are hard-to-let	10-20% of tenants are seeking transfers or 2-3% of dwellings are hard-to-let	Less than 10% of tenants are seeking transfers and less than 2% of dwellings are hard-to-let	Less than 10% of tenants are seeking transfers and less than 1% of dwellings are hard-to-let
11	<b>Adequacy of lifts</b>	Average lift wait time is greater than 5 minutes and average lift downtime is more than 10 hours per month	Average lift wait time is 3-5 minutes and average lift downtime is 5-10 hours per month	Average lift wait-time is 2-3 minutes Average lift downtime is 4-5 hours per month	Average lift wait time is 1-2 minutes and average lift downtime is 2-3 hours per month	Average lift wait time is less than 1 minute and average lift downtime is less than 1 hour per month
12.	<b>Access for people in wheelchairs</b>	People in wheelchairs require regular assistance with all three of entry, foyer doors (entrance and floors) and lift to gain access to flats	People in wheelchairs require regular assistance with two of either entry, foyer doors (entrance and floors) and lift to gain access to flats	People in wheelchairs require regular assistance with one of either entry, foyer doors (entrance and floors) and lift to gain access to flats	People in wheelchairs require occasional assistance to gain access to flats	People in wheelchairs can access flats without assistance

**Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower**

**Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers (continued)**

**Social dimension:** *The social dynamics among tenants and between tenants and the local community are positive.*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
13	<b>Overt criminal/anti-social activity</b>	Extensive graffiti and vandalism and more than 10 complaints per month of overt criminal/anti-social activity	Extensive graffiti and vandalism and 3-10 complaints per month of overt criminal/anti-social activity	Some graffiti and vandalism and less than 3 complaints per month of overt criminal/anti-social activity	No graffiti or vandalism. No evidence of criminal activity, but some reports of non-violent anti-social activity such as strange behaviour	No graffiti or vandalism and no complaints of any criminal or anti-social activity
14	<b>Safety and personal security</b>	Less than 50% residents feel safe.	50-60% residents feel safe.	60-70% residents feel safe.	70-90% residents feel safe.	More than 90% residents feel safe.
15	<b>Interaction among tenants</b>	Less than 50% tenants recognise at least 80% of residents on their floor	50-60% tenants recognise at least 80% of residents on their floor	60-70% tenants recognise at least 80% of residents on their floor	70-80% tenants recognise at least 80% of residents on their floor	More than 80% tenants recognise at least 80% of residents on their floor
16	<b>Use of local services</b>	Less than 50% tenants use more than 5 local services per week	50-60% tenants use more than 5 local services per week	60-80% tenants use more than 5 local services per week	80-90% tenants use more than 5 local services per week	More than 90% tenants use more than 5 local services per week
17	<b>Involvement in local activities</b>	Less than 10% of tenants are regularly involved in voluntary activities	10-20% of tenants are regularly involved in voluntary activities	20-30% of tenants are regularly involved in voluntary activities	30-40% of tenants are regularly involved in voluntary activities	More than 40% of tenants are regularly involved in voluntary activities

Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers (continued)

**Tenancy management dimension:** *Tenancies are well managed.*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
18	<b>Responsiveness to tenants</b>	Less than 60% of tenants can converse in their preferred language or less than 80% of maintenance requests are completed within RTA requirements	60-70% of tenants can converse in their preferred language and at least 80% of maintenance requests are completed within RTA requirements	70-80% of tenants can converse in their preferred language and at least 90% of maintenance requests are completed within RTA requirements	80- 90% of tenants can converse in their preferred language and at least 90% of maintenance requests are completed within RTA requirements	More than 90% of tenants can converse in their preferred language and 100% of maintenance requests are completed within RTA requirements
19	<b>Duration of vacancies</b>	Average duration of vacancies is very high compared with the average for public housing	Average duration of vacancies is high compared with the average for public housing	Average duration of vacancies is very close to average for public housing vacancies	Average duration of vacancies is low compared to the average for public housing vacancies	Average duration of vacancies are very low compared with the average for public housing vacancies
20	<b>Rent arrears</b>	Average rent arrears are very high compared with average public housing rent arrears	Average rent arrears are high compared with average public housing rent arrears	Average rent arrears are very close to average public housing rent arrears	Average rent arrears are low compared with average public housing rent arrears	Average rent arrears are very low compared with average public housing rent arrears

**Resource 2: A tool to undertake a preliminary assessment of each tower**

**Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers (continued)**

**Tower management dimension:** *The tower is well managed.*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
21	<b>Maintenance and cleaning</b>	Common areas are maintained and clean at less than 40% of spot inspections	Common areas are maintained and clean at 40-60% of spot inspections	Common areas are maintained and clean at 60-80% of spot inspections	Common areas are maintained and clean at 80-100% of spot inspections	Common areas are maintained and clean at every spot inspection
22	<b>Turnover</b>	More than 20% of tenancies are less than 12 months or, less than 20% of tenancies are more than 5 years	More than 20% of tenancies are less than 12 months and at least 20% of tenancies are more than 5 years	15-20% of tenancies are less than 12 months or 20-50% of tenancies are more than 5 years	10-15% of tenancies are less than 12 months and at least 50% of tenancies are more than 5 years	Less than 10% of tenancies are less than 12 months and more than 50% of tenancies are more than 5 years
23	<b>Meetings with tenants</b>	No meetings with tenants	An occasional meeting with tenant groups	At least an average of 1 meeting every 3 months with tenant groups	At least an average of 1 meeting per month with tenant groups	More than an average of 1 meeting per month with tenant groups
24	<b>Liaison with local services</b>	No meetings with local services	An occasional meeting with local services	At least an average of 1 meeting every 3 months with local services	At least an average of 1 meeting per month with local services	More than an average of 1 meeting per month with local services

Table 2: Rating scale for each indicator for assessing high-rise towers (continued)

**Financial and economic criteria:** *The tower/neighbourhood area is economically and financially viable.*

		<b>1 (very poor)</b>	<b>2 (poor)</b>	<b>3 (satisfactory)</b>	<b>4 (good)</b>	<b>5 (very good)</b>
25	<b>Management costs</b>	Average management costs per dwelling are very high compared to average public housing management costs	Average management costs per dwelling are high compared to average public housing management costs	Average management costs per dwelling are comparable with average public housing management costs	Average management costs per dwelling are low compared to average public housing management costs	Average management costs per dwelling are very low compared to average public housing management costs
26	<b>Maintenance costs</b>	Average maintenance costs per dwelling (including common areas costs) are very high compared to average public housing maintenance costs	Average maintenance costs per dwelling (including common areas costs) are high compared to average public housing maintenance costs	Average maintenance costs per dwelling (including common areas costs) are comparable with average public housing maintenance costs	Average maintenance costs per dwelling (including common areas costs) are low compared to average public housing maintenance costs	Average maintenance costs per dwelling (including common areas costs) are very low compared to average public housing maintenance costs
27	<b>Life-cycle costs</b>	The life-cycle costs are very high compared with the average cost of all public housing dwellings	The life-cycle costs are high compared with the average cost of all public housing dwellings	The life-cycle costs are moderate compared with the average cost of all public housing dwellings	The life-cycle costs are relatively low compared with the average cost of all public housing dwellings	The life-cycle costs are low compared with the average cost of all public housing dwellings
28	<b>Rate of return on investment</b>	Rate of return is well below the rate of return for all public housing dwellings	Rate of return is below the rate of return for all public housing dwellings	Rate of return is comparable with the rate of return for all public housing dwellings	Rate of return is above the rate of return for all public housing dwellings	Rate of return is well above the rate of return for all public housing dwellings
29	<b>Financial viability of operations</b>	Costs are more than 120% rental revenue	Costs are 105-120% rental revenue	Costs are 95-105% rental revenue	Costs are 90-95% rental revenue	Costs are less than 90% rental revenue
30	<b>Land use optimisation</b>	Number of current dwellings is well below the current local planning requirements	Number of current dwellings is below the current local planning requirements	Number of current dwellings is comparable with the current local planning requirements	Number of current dwellings is above the current local planning requirements	Number of current dwellings is well above the current local planning requirements

## **Preliminary assessment proforma: some examples**

By working through each of these indicators and rating a tower, a summary picture of how well a tower is working can be developed. Table 3 and Table 4 provide some examples of a proforma which summarises the rating of a tower for each indicator. The final column allows comments to be made about each indicator.

### **Proforma – Example 1**

The proforma in Table 3 outlines an assessment of an older-person tower and as such provides a snapshot of its performance against the 30 indicators.

**Building:** Many aspects of the tower have been recently upgraded and thus for most indicators of the building dimension it rates relatively high. However, it does not meet some aspects of fire standards and rates relatively low on energy efficiency due to poor shading of windows in summer and poor heat retention of windows in winter.

**Surrounds and common areas:** The tower rates relatively high on the surrounds and common areas dimension. The tower is located on a street and is surrounded by other dwellings. Thus, it is not highly visible as public housing within the local streetscape. Little work has been done on the common areas and while in good condition they will require an upgrade within 5 years.

**Tenant needs:** The tower rates relatively high on two indicators of the tenant needs dimension but also rates relatively low on two other indicators. It is close to services – shopping, public transport etc. Few tenants have applied for transfers and very few units are hard-to-let. On the other hand, the lifts are too small for an ambulance stretcher and with only one lift stopping at each floor the wait times are relatively long. In addition, the entrance doors are difficult to negotiate for someone in a wheelchair and they are unable to reach the lift buttons for some floors.

**Social environment:** A survey of tenants indicates that the tower rates well on the social environment dimension. Some tenants were disturbed by the strange behaviour of other tenants. For an older-person tower, the relatively low level of involvement in local activities is to be expected.

**Tenancy management:** The tower rates well on the tenancy management dimension except that the Vietnamese speaking tenants were unable to converse with the Office of Housing in their own language.

**Tower management:** The tower rates relatively high on two indicators of the tower management dimension and relatively low on two other indicators. Both turnover and maintenance and cleaning of common areas were managed well. However, tenancy managers only had occasional meetings with tenants and service providers.

**Finance and economy:** The tower rates relatively well on the finance and economy dimension. The worst rating is a satisfactory for “financial viability of operations” mainly due to the low income of tenants rather than high costs.

Possible strategies for this tower might include:

- improve tenancy management by employing a Vietnamese-speaking housing officer
- improve tower management by meeting more regularly with tenants
- upgrading of windows and external building to improve energy efficiency, and
- upgrading of lifts and foyer doors to improve access for tenants and for people in wheelchairs.

Table 3: Proforma for rating a high-rise tower (Example 1 – an older-person tower)

#	Indicator	(-) 1	2	3	4	(+) 5	Comments
<b>Building</b>							
1	Condition of building structure			X			Deficient fire standards
2	External building condition				X		
3	Condition of units					X	Recently upgraded
4	Condition of services					X	Recently upgraded
5	Energy efficiency	X					Windows and shading poor
<b>Surrounds and common areas</b>							
6	Tower within local neighbourhood				X		
7	Design of surrounding area				X		
8	Condition of common areas			X			Upgrade within 5 years
<b>Tenant needs</b>							
9	Proximity to services					X	
10	Tower is preferred by tenants					X	
11	Adequacy of lifts		X				Lifts too small
12	Access for people in wheelchairs		X				Doors & lift buttons poor
<b>Social environment</b>							
13	Overt criminal and anti-social activity				X		Some strange behaviours
14	Safety and personal security				X		
15	Interaction among tenants					X	
16	Use of local services				X		
17	Involvement in local activities		X				
<b>Tenancy management</b>							
18	Responsiveness to tenants			X			High Vietnamese speaking
19	Duration of vacancies				X		
20	Rent arrears					X	
<b>Tower management</b>							
21	Maintenance and cleaning				X		
22	Turnover					X	
23	Meetings with tenants		X				
24	Liaison with other services		X				
<b>Finance and economy</b>							
25	Management costs				X		
26	Maintenance costs				X		
27	Life-cycle costs				X		
28	Rate of return on investment				X		
29	Financial viability of operations			X			Rental revenue relatively low
30	Land use optimisation					X	



### Proforma – Example 2

The proforma in Table 4 outlines an assessment of a mixed household tower. It provides a snapshot of the tower which contrasts markedly with the older-person tower in Example 1.

**Building:** The tower has not been upgraded and thus for most indicators of the building dimension it rates relatively low. The condition of the building structure, the external condition and the condition of the services are satisfactory but some works are required. The units in the tower have not been upgraded for 30 years and are now well below contemporary community standards. In addition, the tower rates very poorly on energy efficiency due to poor shading of windows in summer and poor heat retention of windows in winter.

**Surrounds and common areas:** The tower rates very poorly on the surrounds and common areas dimension. The tower is located within an open area with the entrance approximately 30 metres from the street. It is highly visible as public housing within the local streetscape. The common areas such as entrance, foyers, balconies and stairwells are in very poor condition and require immediate upgrade.

**Tenant needs:** The tower rates high on only one indicator of the tenant needs dimension, i.e. proximity to services. While the number of tenants in the tower seeking transfers is not relatively high, it does have a relatively high number of hard-to-let units. The lifts are too small for an ambulance stretcher and with only one lift stopping at each floor the wait times are very long. In addition, the average downtime per month for each lift is relatively high. For someone in a wheelchair, the automatic entrance doors are easy to negotiate. However, they are unable to reach the lift buttons for some floors and the foyer doors on each floor are difficult to negotiate.

**Social environment:** A survey of tenants indicates that the tower rates poorly on the social environment dimension. The tower has extensive graffiti and vandalism and some tenants complain regularly about loud music and arguments late at night. In contrast to other indicators in this dimension, tenants are involved in local activities, particularly through the local Community Health Centre.

**Tenancy management:** The tower generally rates satisfactory on the tenancy management dimension. However, the duration of vacancies is a concern. In addition, the tower has a diverse range of ethnic groups and many were unable to converse in the language of their choice.

**Tower management:** The tower generally rates poorly on the tower management dimension. While the maintenance and cleaning of common areas is satisfactory, turnover is high with more than 20% of tenancies of less than 12 months. At the same time, more than 20% of tenancies were 5 years or more. However, tenancy managers never met with tenants and only occasionally met with service providers.

**Finance and economy:** The tower has various rating for the indicators for the finance and economy dimension. The tower rates poorly in regard to management and maintenance costs. It also rates poorly in relation to the optimal use of land, due to the large areas of under-utilised land surrounding the tower, much of which is carparking. The remainder was supposed to be used as a children's playground and for recreational activities, but was only occasionally used for this purpose. The rating for "financial viability of operations" and "rate of return on investment" was satisfactory with life-cycle costs rated as good.

**Table 4: Proforma for rating a high-rise tower (Example 2 – mixed household tower)**

#	Indicator	(-) 1	2	3	4	(+) 5	Comments
<b>Building</b>							
1	Condition of building structure			X			Fire and safety deficient
2	External building condition			X			Some works required
3	Condition of units	X					No upgrade for 30 years
4	Condition of services			X			Some services upgraded
5	Energy efficiency	X					Windows and shading poor
<b>Surrounds and common areas</b>							
6	Tower within local neighbourhood	X					Tower prominent
7	Design of surrounding area	X					Large areas of open space
8	Condition of common areas	X					Entrance, foyers & balconies in poor condition
<b>Tenant needs</b>							
9	Proximity to services					X	
10	Tower is preferred by tenants			X			High number of hard-to-let
11	Adequacy of lifts		X				Long wait times and downtime
12	Access for people in wheelchairs			X			Doors & lift buttons poor
<b>Social environment</b>							
13	Overt criminal and anti-social activity		X				Extensive graffiti & vandalism
14	Safety and personal security		X				
15	Interaction among tenants		X				
16	Use of local services		X				
17	Involvement in local activities				X		Particularly through Community Health Centre
<b>Tenancy management</b>							
18	Responsiveness to tenants		X				Diverse range of languages
19	Duration of vacancies		X				
20	Rent arrears			X			
<b>Tower management</b>							
21	Maintenance and cleaning			X			
22	Turnover		X				
23	Meetings with tenants	X					
24	Liaison with other services		X				
<b>Finance and economy</b>							
25	Management costs		X				
26	Maintenance costs		X				
27	Life-cycle costs				X		
28	Rate of return on investment			X			
29	Financial viability of operations			X			
30	Land use optimisation		X				Due to large surrounding area of under-utilised land



## ◀ RESOURCE 3 ▶

# POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING ISSUES AFFECTING HIGH-RISE HOUSING

This section of the report outlines and discusses a broad range of strategic options available to address issues with high-rise towers. The options most relevant to a particular tower or neighbourhood should be determined following careful analysis. This analysis should assess the tower or the neighbourhood's strengths and weaknesses, the factors contributing to these strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities available for addressing the particular issues identified.

The options discussed in this resource document are:

- tenancy management and tower management
- alternative management approaches
- short-term intensive management
- allocations and transfers
- community development
- social infrastructure and support services
- asset management strategies:
  - upgrade tower and flats
  - upgrade and redesign common areas
  - reconfigure size of dwelling
  - reconfigure areas surrounding towers
- demolition and redevelopment of site
- sale of tower, dwellings and site.

The order of these options indicates a broad priority for consideration – from the most basic to the more extensive. Often the need for upgrading of buildings and common areas drives the priorities of the Office of Housing. The order of the options highlights the importance of other strategies for improving high-rise towers.

For each of these options a range of particular strategies is also suggested. This is not a definitive list of strategies. Rather the strategies are indicative of what could be considered. The most creative and positive options will be those that not only address the issues for each tower but also signify a new vision for high-rise housing for people on low incomes.

## Tenancy and tower management

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Good tenancy management and tower management not only prevents many problems from occurring but can also enhance the living conditions within a tower. A critical element is the type of presence a housing manager has within a tower. Chapter 4 noted that tenancy managers are at the sharp end of delivering services to tenants. Their capacity to make a difference depends upon whether other areas of the Office of Housing and the Department of Human Services have done their jobs properly. The effectiveness of tenancy management is dependant upon:

- the design of areas surrounding the high-rise, its buildings and common areas
- adequate maintenance and upgrading programs
- an appropriate strategic and policy framework for high-rise towers, and
- adequate social infrastructure and support services for residents.

The Office of Housing has an Area Office on most of the high-rise estates. Security guards often supplement this presence on the estate for part of the night. In some older-person towers, the Office of Housing has appointed a caretaker or resident liaison officer to assist residents on a day-to-day basis: all are residents and are paid for approximately 2 hours each day.

In previous years, the Office of Housing employed resident housing officers who lived and worked on the high-rise estates. These were progressively phased out in the 1980s. This reflected the shift away from estate management to an emphasis on tenancy management where housing officers work with individual tenants in housing scattered throughout a local area.

### Tenancy management options

Many different approaches are possible to the management of towers and these can vary on the following aspects:

- coverage of responsibilities
- location of staff
- role of staff
- type of presence
- style of management, and
- extent of responsibilities.

**Exhibit 1:  
Possible tenancy management  
strategies**

- Establish an office in a high-rise tower for a housing manager with full responsibilities, or
- Employ a caretaker or concierge as part of the high-tech access system to a tower

- ❑ **Coverage** could range from a local area to a neighbourhood to a single high-rise tower.
- ❑ A housing manager could be **located** in a regional office, a local area office, a neighbourhood office or in a high-rise tower.
- ❑ The **role of staff** within a high-rise tower can vary extensively ranging from a manager with full responsibility for the management of a tower to a caretaker, a concierge, a cleaner, a gardener and security guard. These roles are discussed further below.
- ❑ The **presence** of staff may be static (in one place) or it could be mobile (moving about from place to place).
- ❑ The **style of management** may seek to communicate with tenants face-to-face or may communicate with tenants indirectly over the phone or through letters.

- The **extent of responsibility** possible for housing managers is varied. It may be limited to transactions regarding tenants or dwellings, and thus responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act. It could also include activities which support tenancies (such as linkages with support agencies) or, ongoing evaluation of the impact of housing policies and their implementation or, ensuring implementation of appropriate community development activities.

Each of these management components has a number of alternative elements. Table 1 presents a matrix of the components of housing management and the alternative approaches, thus highlighting the diversity of management approaches possible. The key issue for the Office of Housing is: what type of management will work for a tower/local area? Given the diversity between high-rise towers, the most appropriate type of management will vary from tower to tower. Finding the right type of management is a key strategic issue for dealing with the issues arising in a high-rise tower.

**Table 1: Components and possible management approaches**

<b>Coverage of responsibilities</b>	<b>Location of staff</b>	<b>Roles of staff</b>	<b>Type of presence</b>	<b>Style of management</b>	<b>Extent of responsibilities</b>
<b>Local area</b>	<b>Regional office</b>	<b>Housing manager (full responsibilities)</b>	<b>Static</b>	<b>Face to face</b>	<b>Residential Tenancies Act</b>
<b>Neighbourhood</b>	<b>Local area office located in a particular neighbourhood</b>	<b>Housing officer (limited responsibilities)</b>	<b>Mobile</b>	<b>Indirect</b>	<b>Supportive management</b>
<b>High-rise tower</b>	<b>Neighbourhood office located in the neighbourhood</b>	<b>Caretaker</b>		<b>Intensive</b>	<b>Impact of housing decisions</b>
	<b>Neighbourhood office located in the neighbourhood</b>	<b>Concierge</b>			<b>Community development</b>
	<b>Office located in a high-rise tower</b>	<b>Cleaner, gardener and handyperson</b>			
		<b>Custodian</b>			
		<b>Security guard</b>			

### **Roles of staff**

The roles of various staff responsible for a high-rise tower and the division of responsibility among them are key issues for future management of high-rise towers. The Priority Estate Project in the UK, the Report of the Policy Action Team 5 on Housing Management<sup>25</sup> and other reports place a emphasis on strong management as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour and as a way of improving neighbourhoods with a high proportion of public housing.

A key element of management is the presence of staff on site. This can take a number of forms. One option is to locate a housing manager in each tower with responsibility for all aspects of a tower’s management. This would include responsibility for budgets, contracts, monitoring and evaluating all contractors, liaison with tenants, allocation of tenants, transfers etc. Another option is to employ either a caretaker or concierge. Each of these two roles are different, with different responsibilities, and both undertake very limited housing officer responsibilities.

<sup>25</sup> Reviewed in Literature Review - What can we learn from others?

### Resource 3: Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise housing

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The concierge role is generally static at the main entrance to a tower and it is a position that usually operates only during the day. The concierge facilitates entry and exit from the tower. A concierge could also play a role in holding delivered goods and where necessary providing access to flats. Another role is liaison with tenants and between tenants.

A caretaker, on the other hand, tends to be on-call for extended periods and may live in the tower. This role is generally more mobile, moving around the building and grounds sorting out day-to-day issues in the tower including access to services and other difficulties. A caretaker may also assume the roles of cleaner and gardener particularly where incidents occur out of business hours.

Both a concierge and caretaker can also play a role as liaison between a tower and housing officers, reporting maintenance and other issues, and suggesting courses of action for housing officers.

Until recently, cleaners and gardeners have provided a visible Office of Housing presence in and around towers. They also played a role in reporting maintenance and other issues in and around towers. As a result of contracting out, these roles have been more strictly defined and they are no longer a visible presence of the Office of Housing.

Introduction of security guards is one common response to trying to manage problems in neighbourhoods with high proportion of public housing, particularly after hours and on weekends. The type of security can vary from the traditional security guards to custodians. They can be mobile or static, or some combination of both, and their area of coverage also varies.

Security guards are a very high cost response to critical incidents. Their presence can provide reassurance to residents but at the same time their presence is ambivalent because they also heighten the sense that a neighbourhood is unsafe. Moreover, their effectiveness in preventing critical incidents and in dealing with incidents is limited to times when they are present and in the right location. The employment of security guards indicates that some of the basic conditions within a neighbourhood or within a tower are not working - these need to be addressed. Security guards may be most effective as a short term measure for improving the safety and quality of life for tenants while a broader long-term strategy is put in place.

In the long term, the issues of security are better addressed through community development strategies and the upgrade and redesign of common areas. The security of residents and interaction between residents are inter-related. Usually, a resident will only interact with other residents when the perceived risks are relatively low. Personal risks are higher where:

- residents are regularly confronted by unknown persons
- the environment is largely uncontrolled
- residents cannot control the extent of their interaction
- residents are sometimes confronted by abnormal or unwelcome behaviour such as violence and intimidation, or evidence of violence such as vandalism.

A resident who feels secure about their tower is most likely to interact more and this interaction will further consolidate that feeling of security as residents get to know their neighbours.

Exhibit 1 on page 102 outlines some possible tenancy management strategies.

## Alternative management approaches

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The Office of Housing has extensive experience managing high-rise housing. It is a difficult task and not always successful. Within the province of the Office of Housing, high-rise tenancy managers are caught up in a specific culture, specific ways of operating and policies not necessarily well suited to higher density public housing. It appears that the high-rise tenancy managers have yet to come to terms with the most enduring and common complaints from tenants - lift breakdowns, cleaning and maintenance.

On the other hand, few, if any, community or private organisations have experience managing high-rise housing. However, the philosophy and style of management of these organisations may add new dimensions to the management of high-rise housing. These organisations are not subject to the same constraints as the Office of Housing.

It is time to consider alternative management proposals such as those proposed in Exhibit 2. Serious consideration should be given to piloting and evaluation of these options to assess their impact in addressing issues in particular towers/local areas.

### **Exhibit 1: Alternative management proposals**

- Lease a high-rise tower to an alternative social housing manager. This manager will have full responsibility for all aspects of the management of the tower including:
  - working with an integrated budget for all aspects of management of a tower
  - all contracts such as maintenance, security, cleaning and gardening
  - allocations and transfers
  - employment of staff
  - liaison and consultation with tenants
  - expenditure on repairs and maintenance for the whole building
  - staging and type of capital expenditure.
- Appoint a public housing tenancy manager for a tower and give them full responsibility for all aspects of management of the tower as outlined above. (This compares with the current approach where responsibilities are widely spread between different parts of the Office of Housing – making achievement of an integrated approach for an individual tower difficult.)



## Short term intensive management

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At times a tower may experience a series of problems which cause it to move into a spiral of increasing “distress” which can quickly affect tenants and staff managing the tower as well as other residents in the local area. It is a major challenge to turn around a tower that has evident signs of distress, but experience shows that it can be done.

Early intervention in a tower with developing problems has the potential not only to halt the decline of a tower but also reduce the potential necessity of other more expensive strategies such as security guards, upgrade of surrounding and common areas, and upgrading dwellings.

As part of tenancy and tower management arrangements, housing managers need a monitoring system which will provide early warning that a tower is becoming distressed. This would include maintaining a record of critical incidents.

Intensive management aims to stabilise a tower. This stabilisation can be achieved by employing additional experienced staff with a high level of personal and housing management skills for relatively short periods. Their role could include:

- ❑ Providing a higher management presence in the tower.
- ❑ Identifying “hot-spots” and issues for tenants, and developing appropriate responses.
- ❑ Formal discussions with tenants about issues and possible solutions.
- ❑ Early (if not immediate) response to vandalism, graffiti and noise complaints - this involves investigation and actions such as:
  - procedures for warning tenants through to eventual eviction
  - immediate repair of vandalised areas and removal of graffiti, and
  - involvement of police if warranted

Some overseas housing managers have adopted a “one strike and you’re out” policy for individuals who engage in unacceptable behaviour. Such a policy may be necessary in some circumstances. However, the underlying theme of the “one strike and you’re out” policy is conveying to tenants that some behaviours are not acceptable and that tenants will be held responsible for their behaviour.

- ❑ Developing collaborative responses with police and support services.
- ❑ Early response to rental arrears.
- ❑ A more thorough review of allocations, with a view to ensuring that allocations are appropriate to the tower.
- ❑ Employment of security guards as a short-term interim measure.

### **Exhibit 2: Possible intensive management strategies**

Establish a roving high-rise team with:

- extensive experience in high-rise tenancy management
- understanding of the social and design dynamics of towers
- high level communication skills
- high level problem-solving skills

in order to:

- deal with difficult situations in high-rise towers
- develop solutions to difficult situations
- provide training to high-rise tenancy managers

## **Allocations and transfers**

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Allocations and transfers can be used to change the characteristics of tenants in a tower, for example, change the social mix or achieve some balance between different types of residents.

The review of literature indicates that in both the US and UK, housing managers have used allocations to achieve particular goals in areas with a high concentration of public housing. An active allocations policy can address a range of issues including:

- tenants' dissatisfaction with their housing
- high turnover of tenants and high vacancies due to anti-social behaviour, and
- the concentration of people experiencing multiple difficulties and disadvantages.

The make-up of tenants in a tower is the result of many different policies and practices including:

- the size of dwellings (number of bedrooms)
- whether and to what extent dwellings in a tower are owned privately or by other social housing providers (social-private mix)
- eligibility criteria for social housing
- priority criteria and policies for public housing through the segmented waiting list
- waiting times for public housing and broadbanning which effect the extent to which public housing applicants can exercise choice over where they live
- practices of allocating applicants to dwellings, and
- transfer policy.

These policies and practices serve to include or exclude applicants from high-rise housing. They also influence how an applicant feels about being housed in high-rise housing.

High-rise towers have particular characteristics that make it imperative for the Office of Housing to consider seriously policies that impact on allocations. Unlike an allocation to an individual dwelling, an inappropriate allocation to a high-rise tower may affect a large number of current tenants and influence the choices of people applying for public housing. This is what makes the allocation policy critical to the sustainability of high-rise towers.

There is a need for careful consideration of a number of issues about allocations and transfers including:

- the importance and rights of tenants to make choices about their housing
- the disproportionate impact an individual tenant can have upon other tenants in a high-rise tower
- whether a concentration of low income and disadvantaged people or people with more complex support needs is detrimental to the living environment of residents in a tower
- whether a social mix is desirable (This will require clarification of what is meant by social mix and what is an appropriate social mix for high-rise housing.)
- the preconditions for a sustainable community

### Resource 3: Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise housing

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- the extent to which additional support services, additional management or different styles of management within a tower can diminish the impact of social and economic disadvantage
- the parameters for applying a selective allocations policy including considerations of:
  - equal access for all applicants to public housing
  - potential for discrimination against some applicants
- the rights of current tenants under the Residential Tenancies Act to due process, e.g. notice of termination of tenancy.

Discussion about many of these issues will be subject to fierce debate. The factors that contribute to distressed high-rise towers are still unclear. The debates are many and complex because they depend upon whether a range of other factors are in place or not. Many of the arguments relate not so much to high-rise as a form of housing but more to the social and economic circumstances of tenants.

For example, it could be argued that high-rise may not be appropriate for children for two reasons: the first is a management reason - the impact of children on high-rise facilities; the second concerns their development as children. Children particularly of late primary school and secondary school age place great pressure on the high-rise. At this age they are very mobile, moving between flats and moving in and out of the flats. This increases lift usage and the level of noise throughout a tower. Pre-school and early primary school children cannot be confined to a flat all day. Where housing is on the ground floor, parents can create safe and easily supervised spaces for children, however this is very difficult in a high-rise flat.<sup>26</sup>

In the early years of the high-rise the policy was to house families with pre-school children in the bottom six floors only. In the UK, some housing managers have adopted policies that restrict all families with pre-school and school aged children to the bottom floors and use the upper floors for single people, couples and families with adult children. These policies both increase the ease of access for children to the outside and limit the total number of children in a tower.

A key question that needs further research is - what particular aspects of disadvantage make high-rise towers more difficult to sustain, to what extent can these be addressed and how can they be addressed? It is clear that the problems are not simply a matter of income nor the source of income, nor the need for higher support. For example, where unemployment is high and where most adults are women, it is particularly difficult for boys to find good role models. Where there is a culture of boredom, rejection, hopelessness, anger, frustration and despair it may be difficult for some young people to avoid the status and identity that accompanies the illicit drug culture.

#### **Exhibit 3: Possible allocation and transfer strategies**

- Allocate one-third of dwellings to those ineligible for public housing, one third to those in Segment 4 and one-third to remaining priority segments
- Transfer tenants (even with arrears) whose behaviour impacts detrimentally on other tenants in a tower
- Reduce the proportion of families with primary and early secondary children
- Rededicate some older-person towers to single adults
- Provide high-rise public housing only to those who wish to live in high-rise

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<sup>26</sup> Some issues for families with children living in the high-rise can be found in an article by H.MacDonald & H.Brownlee "High Rise Parenting" in *Family Matters* Australian Institute of Family Studies, December 1993, No.36 pp.4-15. Also see B.Adams & J.Conway *The Social Effects of Living Off Ground* Oxford 1974 for some issues in the British context of the 1970s.

### Resource 3: Potential options for addressing issues affecting high-rise housing

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If it were shown that a high-rise tower requires a certain mix of incomes to be sustainable, then this may throw into question the appropriateness of the current eligibility criteria. If it were shown that sustainability is linked to people choosing rather than strongly resisting high-rise housing, then an allocations policy which facilitated the entry of people to a particular high-rise tower would be essential. It throws into question the appropriateness of the current broadbanning policy and allocations policies. If it were shown that high-rise housing is not appropriate for some people (because of their negative impact on a whole tower), then an allocations policy would need to be flexible enough to exclude them from this housing option while providing them with other more appropriate options.<sup>27</sup>

The transfer of current tenants who are causing difficulties within a tower is a further issue. Under the current policy, a tenant in arrears will only be transferred if they have made a significant effort to repay those arrears. In many situations this may provide an incentive to tenants to repay rental arrears. For some tenants, rental arrears reflects dissatisfaction with their current housing. Within high-rise towers, a delay in transferring some tenants will have implications for other tenants. In assessing applications for transfers from high-rise towers, the needs of other tenants should also be taken into account as well as the impact that a transfer will have on the outcomes for the tenant. In assessing this, a housing manager may need to work closely with the support agencies to identify how to achieve the best outcome for the tenant.

These questions need to be investigated and considered as a basis for adopting a different approach to allocations in high-rise towers.

Exhibit 4 on the previous page outlines some possible allocation and transfer strategies.

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<sup>27</sup> Criteria excluding some applicants for high-rise public housing could include:

- the attitude of the applicant to being housed in a high-rise tower
- their previous housing history
- the suitability of a particular tower for an applicant, e.g. whether a young person would be vulnerable to pressure from others and exposed to significant dangers and risks, and
- the impact an applicant would have on a site, e.g. whether the “culture” of the applicant significantly contrasts with tenants currently on the site, for example an applicants approach to loud music.

## Community development

Community development strategies seek to develop more cohesive and sustainable communities. These strategies include a range of approaches such as facilitation, education, participation and collaboration.<sup>28</sup> Community development strategies are important for a number of reasons:

- to develop trust among residents and an appreciation for different cultures and ways of doing things
- as a way in which residents can get to know who lives in their tower
- to develop the skills and confidence of residents so they can better participate in the life of the local community
- as a way in which residents can address their disadvantage, whether that be unemployment (and subsequent lack of income) or other exclusion from society (such as capacity to use new technologies).

Various community development projects were successfully tried in the 1980s. The Office of Housing funded many of these and many had a primary focus on public housing estates (some of which included high-rise towers). This is understandable given the high needs of residents on these estates. In many past and existing community development initiatives, the community has largely been defined as a public housing estate. A key issue for community development is whether the community should extend beyond residents of public housing estates.

Maintaining public housing within an increasingly gentrified inner urban area will also be a key issue for the future of high-rise public housing. A key goal of any regeneration, then, is the physical and social integration of public housing into local neighbourhoods. Physically, this can be partly achieved by the introduction of streets, the orientation of buildings towards streets, the redesign of the areas surrounding low and high-rise flats and the construction of new dwellings. All these measures will break-up current public housing estates into a number of discrete units. Socially, this can partly be achieved by re-focusing community development activities from public housing estates to local areas. Instead of highlighting the unseen “social” boundaries that contain public housing estates, a focus on local areas will blur the “social” boundaries between public housing residents and other residents.

Exhibit 5 outlines a range of activities which can contribute to the goal of achieving more cohesive and sustainable communities.

### Exhibit 4: Possible community development strategies

- Establish and support local tenant groups to:
  - facilitate interaction among tenants within a tower, and
  - advocate to housing managers and others for change.
- Where residents speak a range of languages, provide the resources and the means to facilitate communication between residents.
- Take the opportunities available in a local area to bring different groups of residents together through activities such as:
  - recreational activities
  - language classes
  - education and training
  - working together on local issues
  - cultural days/fetes etc.
  - community gardens
  - excursions
  - school holiday programs
  - after school programs.

<sup>28</sup> Thomson Goodall Associates (2000), *Rental Housing Support Program Review: Discussion paper* website: [http://chirs.infoxchange.net.au/library/rhsp\\_review/index.htm](http://chirs.infoxchange.net.au/library/rhsp_review/index.htm) p.7. See also the series of information and discussion papers on sustainable communities produced by the National Community Housing Forum – website: [www.nchf.org.au/issues.htm#sustain](http://www.nchf.org.au/issues.htm#sustain)

## Social infrastructure and support services

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A broad range of strategies must be used to address social issues in high-rise housing such as those outlined in Chapter 5 of this Report. Aspects of public housing policies and practices often contribute to social issues and these must be addressed using other options described in this section. However, these options alone may not be sufficient to address many of the social issues in high-rise public housing. Indeed, social issues arise not because of the nature of high-rise housing, nor do they arise simply because of the concentration of disadvantaged people in one area. There are broader social issues which have an impact on particular local areas and which the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments need to address in a concerted and integrated way. Residents in high-rise public housing may be a particular target group for these strategies.

Many needs can be addressed through mainstream social infrastructure and support services. The following can all play a role in addressing the broad range of social issues which can become concentrated in high-rise towers: schools, kindergartens, police and hospitals as well as aged care services, mental health services, disability support services, legal services, financial counselling services, domestic violence services, child support and child protection services, employment and training services, refugee and migrant services and, recreational services.

The key issues for social infrastructure and support services are the need for adequate resources to meet the most pressing needs and an effective, co-ordinated and integrated approach to local issues operating within a broader strategic framework for the state and region.

A previous section discussed allocations and transfers. Provision of adequate support services to tenants may reduce the need for more selective allocations policies and also reduce transfers of tenants whose need for support services is increasing. For example, the provision of support services may assist in mitigating the impact of some tenants whose activities disrupt others. How well a high-rise tower works will also depend upon the extent, the quality and the appropriateness of support services.

**Exhibit 5:  
Possible strategies for social  
infrastructure and support services**

- Local Council facilitate a local forum of social infrastructure and support services to identify the key local issues and develop and implement co-ordinated and integrated strategies to address them.
- Social infrastructure and support services develop services which are culturally appropriate and particularly geared towards local neighbourhoods with high concentrations of disadvantaged people. This could include:
  - employment and training programs
  - specific education programs based in the local schools, and
  - information about health issues and support services



## Asset management strategies

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There is a range of asset management strategies available to address issues with high-rise towers. Asset management approaches have often been the most common responses to addressing issues with high-rise towers and there is no question that improving the physical environment is important. However, an upgrade of buildings or their common areas by itself may not be sufficient. Physical improvements alone may not meet the needs of tenants or address the complex social issues among tenants and between tenants and the local community. They may not address a history of stigma attached to a particular public housing neighbourhood.

Tenant involvement in any upgrade or major building project is essential - unless tenants are involved in the upgrading process it further exacerbates their sense of alienation. Unless accompanied by other strategies the impact of physical improvements may be undermined and the financial investment in upgrading may be wasted. The processes that precede and operate alongside physical improvements are critical.

### *Upgrade towers and flats*

In common with other types of buildings, public housing normally requires *ad hoc* repairs and programmed maintenance. An adequate system of repairs and programmed maintenance generally keeps dwellings in good condition.

However, as dwellings age their fittings and facilities become increasingly outdated, they no longer adequately meet the needs of tenants and they become less and less acceptable to tenants. As well, the costs of maintenance increase and they may no longer meet contemporary housing standards.

As long as a building is structurally sound, an internal upgrade of the building can restore its capacity to meet the needs of tenants, reduce the ongoing costs of maintenance, address the issues of health and safety and bring the buildings up to contemporary housing standards. A timely upgrade will prevent the condition of a building becoming a factor in low demand for high-rise housing. Exhibit 7 outlines some possible upgrades to towers and the flats.

#### **Exhibit 1: Possible upgrades to towers and flats**

- Refit of flats, particularly kitchens and bathrooms, including:
  - provide for laundry facilities in flats
  - lay carpet on lounge, hallway and bedroom floors
  - lay ceramic or equivalent tiles in kitchen, bathroom/laundry and toilet
  - improve external venting system in kitchen and bathroom
- Fit new windows to reduce external wind noise.

### *Upgrade and redesign common areas*

Common areas such as entrances, foyers, lifts, stairwells, balconies and laundries are subject to significant wear and tear and abuse such as graffiti and vandalism. Unless this is rectified, the building takes on a neglected look. The upgrade and redesign of common areas can address issues of poor amenity and feelings of insecurity among tenants. Reducing the time that residents have to wait for lifts can alleviate some of the problems of vandalism.

The aim of any upgrade and redesign of common areas is to ensure that these areas are safe, to reduce the perceived risks of interaction with other residents and, to enhance the tenants' sense that this is their home and that they can be proud of it.

**Exhibit 1:  
Possible changes to common areas**

- Reduce waiting times for lifts by:
  - providing access to both lifts on all floors
  - installing, where necessary, a third lift in 20 storey and 30 storey towers
- Upgrade surfaces – carpet floors, paint walls, resurface stairs etc. – to provide a “warmer” and welcoming feel to a tower
- Restrict entry to a high-rise tower by installing a security system at entrance
- Restrict entry to each floor by installing a security system at the entrance to each floor

### *Reconfigure size of dwellings*

As we have seen in Chapter 6, two inner urban trends have resulted in the low demand for particular sized dwellings in high-rise towers. On the one hand, the demand for bedsitter units has decreased. While a number of older persons prefer bedsitters (particularly older males), most tenants prefer a 1-bedroom dwelling. On the other hand, the public housing demand for 1 and 2-bedroom dwellings in the inner city has increased, reflecting a general increase in demand for 1 and 2-bedroom dwellings among single people and couples.

The Office of Housing is addressing the issues of dwelling size by converting bedsitter units to 1-bedroom units (two bedsitters to one 1-bedroom unit) and by converting 3-bedroom units to 1-bedroom units (one 3-bedroom unit to two 1-bedroom units). For technical reasons the extent of these conversions is limited and no units in the first four floors can be converted.

Moreover, a strategy of reconfiguring dwelling sizes is limited by social considerations. Such a strategy has the potential to impact dramatically not only on the character of a tower and its social mix but also on the management of a tower and the direct and indirect support services currently being provided. For example, the conversion of 3-bedroom units to 1-bedroom units and subsequent decrease in children housed in a high-rise tower may have implications for the local schools and their continued viability. It is therefore a strategy which needs to be considered within the context of planning the future for a high-rise tower, in particular the target group for the tower.

**Exhibit 1:  
Possible strategies for reconfiguring the size of dwellings**

Consider the conversion of bedsitters and 3-bedroom dwellings to 1-bedroom dwellings within the context of:

- technical limitations
- a master plan for the future of a tower
- its impact on local social infrastructure, particularly schools, and support services



### *Reconfigure areas surrounding towers*

The design of a neighbourhood provides signals to both residents and non-residents. The definition of private, public and common areas is critical to whether tenants can control and influence their space and feel secure.

In current estates characterised by large open areas, tenants have little control or ownership of surrounding areas. Much of the estate becomes “no-man’s land” and estates are subject to easy intrusion by non-residents. Where too many people use common areas, tenants are unable to exercise some control or some responsibility for the area. An estate distinctly identified as public housing is vulnerable because responsibility for the estate is diffuse and its day-to-day management is often absent or unstructured.

As outlined in Chapter 6, recent private sector high-rise developments have little open space area. They front directly on to streets and tend to merge into the local streetscape. In contrast, public housing estates have large areas of open space. The vacant areas under many high-rise towers highlight the open space. On some estates this is used extensively, whereas on others it is rarely used. As the number of families in high-rise towers diminish, the need for playgrounds and other facilities diminishes. Often car parks take up large areas of valuable land.

Exhibit 10 outlines a number of possible options for better integrating high-rise towers into the local neighbourhood. The feasibility of each proposal depends largely upon the location and context of a high-rise tower. For example, housing and commercial opportunities are possible around the high-rise towers on Brunswick Street, Fitzroy and Elizabeth Street, Richmond, whereas commercial opportunities would appear very limited in North Melbourne or Flemington.

**Exhibit 1:  
Possible ways of reconfiguring areas  
surrounding towers**

- Break up estates into small lots with each high-rise tower a single unit
- Make streets through an estate, make each high-rise front a street and make this the main, if not the only entrance to the tower
- Examine the opportunities to use the current estate grounds for new housing or commercial developments
- Improve carparking arrangements and provide more secure carparking by considering local opportunities to:
  - make new car parks available for external permanent or casual parking while continuing to provide car parks for residents at nominal fees
  - increase available carparking space by making multi-storey car parks
  - provide 24 hour surveillance of car parks
  - contract out the management of car parks to a private manager, or
  - Sell or hand over open space to the local council for general use.

## Demolition and redevelopment of site

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Demolition of a tower(s) and redevelopment of the whole site or part of the site is an option where retention of the site for social housing purposes is considered important and:

- a high-rise tower has reached the end of its physical life, i.e. the building is no longer structurally sound or the fabric of the building has deteriorated to such an extent that it can not be rehabilitated, or
- a high-rise tower has reached the end of its economic life, i.e. it is more cost-effective to demolish and rebuild rather than refurbish the tower, or
- the site is under utilised and better usage of the site warrants demolition of one or more towers, or
- despite genuine, sustained and resourceful approaches to addressing the issues of a tower(s) there are still major housing management difficulties, or
- the social dynamics among tenants and with the local community are so negative that the situation is irretrievable, or
- dwellings are not acceptable to tenants and applicants and cannot be made so.

Consideration of the demolition and redevelopment option must also take into account revenue losses incurred as towers are vacated, the costs of acquiring stock for relocating tenants as well as the financial and social costs of relocating tenants and demolishing the tower.

## Sale of tower, dwellings and site

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As indicated in the broad approaches to high-rise housing outlined in Chapter 6 of the Report, Future Directions, the motivation for selling a tower or towers, individual dwellings, part of the site or the whole site can vary enormously.

At one extreme, the motivation can be to shed responsibility and opt out of high-rise housing in inner Melbourne as a social housing option for low-income households. This involves selling to individuals or to the private sector. It involves relinquishing any direct control (other than planning controls) over how the buildings and site are utilised and who utilises them.

On the other hand, the motivation can be to create actively a positive future by transferring the ownership of high-rise housing to a quango (quasi autonomous non-government organisation) or another social housing provider. This involves retaining the use of the buildings and the site as some form of social housing and some control over the future use of buildings and the site.

The sale of a tower or site to a quango or another social housing provider could be considered where there are strong reasons for retaining the tower or site as social housing and:

- the Office of Housing is not considered the most appropriate owner, or
- management by a quango or social housing provider will be further enhanced by their ownership of the tower/site, or
- a quango or social housing provider has access to sources of capital funds or other operational funds to finance regeneration of the tower and these are not available to the Office of Housing.

Chapter 6 of the Report, Future Directions, outlined four critical questions for the future of high-rise housing:

- What do the trends in the inner Melbourne housing market tell us about the need for this housing and its possible role in the housing market?
- To what degree does the demand match the stock available and is it possible to address any mismatch?
- How well is high-rise public housing working now and is it possible to address the evident problems?
- How cost effective are the different possible approaches to the future of high-rise public housing?

The sale of a high-rise tower, individual dwellings or the site hinge upon an assessment of a tower/site in relation to these four questions.

### **Exhibit 11: Possible ways of selling a tower, dwellings and site**

- “sale” of tower to quango or statutory authority with specific responsibility/expertise in the regeneration and management of high-rise towers
- “sale” of tower as is to a social housing provider for regeneration and management
- outright sale of site to private developer
- outright sale to rental property trust and securitisation of rental stream
- strata-title tower and sale of individual units to tenants or other individuals
- social-private joint venture partnerships resulting in sale of part of site to private developers for retail, commercial or residential uses

The outright sale of a tower/site may be the best option available where:

- the issues for high-rise public housing arising from gentrification cannot be addressed and result in the alienation of tenants from the local neighbourhood
- despite the regeneration of towers and reconfiguration of dwelling sizes there is a very low demand for high-rise social housing in the local area
- despite genuine, sustained and resourceful approaches to addressing the problems of towers there are still major housing management difficulties
- the social dynamics among tenants and with the local community are so negative that the situation is irretrievable
- dwellings are not acceptable to tenants and applicants and cannot be made so, and
- options for regeneration are not cost-effective.

The cost-effectiveness of the outright sale option will depend upon the price that can be obtained for a tower/site, the extent of rental revenue losses and a range of costs such as acquiring stock for tenants relocating, the cost of tenant relocation and the costs of preparing the tower for sale. These in turn will depend upon a number of decisions/factors:

- the timing of the sale in relation to residential, commercial and retail property markets<sup>29</sup>
- potential uses of the site and buildings given its particular location
- the sale option chosen - strata-titling and sale to individuals, sale to an investment vehicle and securitisation of rental income, joint venture arrangement with the private sector or outright sale of whole or part of a site<sup>30</sup>
- the costs of preparing the tower for sale, depending upon the type of sale, e.g. strata-titling would require some upgrading of services
- whether tenants will be relocated into newly acquired stock or existing public housing stock
- the cost of any newly acquired stock
- the impact of Office of Housing activity on local market house prices
- the proportion of tenants, if any, relocated in the local area or other urban areas, and
- the time period over which tenants are relocated.

Some of these decisions, particularly those regarding the relocation of tenants, may involve externalising costs by passing these on to tenants or to current applicants for public housing.

Another alternative that could be considered is partial sale of the site. One way in which to retain some control over the timing and usage of this part of the site (and possibly maximise returns from the sale) would be to undertake a social-private joint venture. Under this arrangement, the Office of Housing or social housing provider and the private sector partner would jointly plan its development. Where the partnership focuses on residential development, this could be one way of providing achieving a social mix on the site.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the discussion of this issue by Anderson Consulting (1997) in *High-rise Scoping Study* (Draft), Office of Housing

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion of “Creating sustainable communities” in Resource 4: Learning from others. See also the discussion of social-private joint ventures in *Raglan/Ingles Estate Redevelopment Strategy* prepared for the Raglan/Ingles Estate Redevelopment Advisory Committee by Peddle Thorpe Architects, October 2000, Office of Housing, Department of Human Services.



## ◀ RESOURCE 4 ▶

# LEARNING FROM OTHERS- A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of readily accessible literature informs our thinking with the experiences and reflections of other people. Reflection on these experiences can provide an important stimulus for consideration of issues, future directions and strategies for high-rise public housing. While the scale and societal context are different in many overseas countries, all appear to be faced with a number of problematic issues relating to their provision of social housing. These include run-down stock, a mismatch between type of stock and tenant needs, a range of social and tenancy management problems and severe financial constraints.

We need to recognise that the circumstances and conditions of social housing in other countries, such as the United Kingdom and United States are very different from Australia. Thus, the strategies adopted overseas are not necessarily appropriate to our circumstances nor will they work in the same way.

While this review reports on their experience, the following key differences should be noted:

- ❑ The scale of high-rise estates overseas is far larger than in Victoria.
- ❑ Most overseas high-rise estates are located within local areas which are themselves distressed.
- ❑ Different countries have adopted different targeting and allocations policies which impact differently on estates.
- ❑ Different countries have different types and levels of supports in place for tenants on high-rise estates – the level of income support and services will impact differently on estates.
- ❑ In the United Kingdom, and even more so in the United States, race relations is a prominent issue and overlays a number of other issues.
- ❑ At this time, the extent of the social problems, particularly crime and violence, are far less intractable in Australia, compared to overseas.

The literature reporting on the American and British experiences with estate redevelopment/renewal indicate that the issues are complex and varied, and that sometimes potentially conflicting objectives are being pursued. A clear message that emerges from the commentators on reform and estate “rescue” programs is that addressing the problems experienced with concentrations of public housing and concentrations of poverty and disadvantage requires a multi-pronged approach.

### **Approach to the literature review**

The range of literature which could be reviewed is very wide indeed. We have sought to limit this review to issues which have a particular relevance to the high-rise public housing estates. The review was not limited to high-rise material only but incorporated material which threw

further light on strategic approaches to the range of issues confronted by those seeking to improve high-rise public housing estates.

Specific areas examined included:

- the regeneration or renewal of public housing estates within a larger economic and social context and thus linkages between programs which sought to regenerate public housing estates and broader urban renewal programs with a local, regional or national focus
- strategic approaches to the renewal of public housing estates
- the security and design of public housing estates, and
- tenancy management strategies.

## Sources

The search of literature indicates that there is very little recent and readily available work that has evaluated the outcome of different Australian approaches to design, management and improvement of public housing. Despite a range of public housing initiatives progressively implemented for over a decade, little systematic and publicly available examination of the costs and benefits or evaluation of the outcomes for tenants and local communities appears to have been undertaken.<sup>32</sup> The Australian material that is available is descriptive, rather than evaluative.

The one exception in recent years is the evaluation of different renewal strategies in NSW by Judith Stubbs and Max Hardy. This evaluation is discussed below. Also discussed below is the evaluation framework proposed by Spiller Gibbon Swan in a project for the Australian Housing Research Fund sponsored by Housing Queensland.

One significant piece of work which was not available for this report is a project being undertaken by the Urban Frontiers Program in New South Wales. This project is seeking to develop best practice models for resident participation, social cohesion and sustainability in neighbourhood renewal.

SHAs particularly in Victoria and New South Wales have over many years of learning built up a practical knowledge base about the functioning of high-rise estates. They have also on occasion undertaken particular studies and have implemented a range of initiatives on estates. However, little of their learning experience has been publicly documented.

Lack of available documentation of the Australian experience of high-rise estates and public housing renewal has forced us to look elsewhere. In particular, this review has looked at material from the United Kingdom and the United States.

Both the United Kingdom and the United States have developed different approaches to addressing problems with public housing and disadvantaged neighbourhoods which in part reflect the differences in the nature of the problems being faced, as well as their political and policy environment. The approaches in the United Kingdom and the United States were both reported on at the Urban Renewal Seminar held in Adelaide in 1998.<sup>33</sup>

Current sources for information on the United Kingdom experience are the reports of the Social Exclusion Unit, of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and of the UK Department of

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<sup>32</sup> Arthurson K (1998), "Redevelopment of Public Housing Estates: The Australian Experience" in *Urban Policy and Research* 16, pp.33-44, Victoria

<sup>33</sup> Black G (1998) "South Australian Housing Authority Approach to Urban Renewal" in *Revitalising Housing Areas: Proceedings of the 1998 National Urban Renewal Seminar*, AHURI, Melbourne



Environment, Transport and the Regions. Current sources of information on the United States experience are reports from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

## **Strategic approaches to distressed estates**

As illustrated in the following two quotes – one from the UK and one from the US – there is a common recognition that many public housing estates have concentrated on the poor, are physically rundown and require strategies that can resolved complex issues:

*Over the last generation, this has become a divided country. While most areas have benefited from rising living standards, the poorest neighbourhoods have tended to become more rundown, more prone to crime, and more cut off from the labour market. The national picture conceals pockets of intense deprivation where the problems of unemployment and crime are acute and hopelessly tangled up with poor health, housing and education. They have become no go areas for some and no exit zones for others.<sup>34</sup>*

*The concentration of the poorest families creates problems that predictably become unmanageable, and the larger the public housing development, the more complex the problems.<sup>35</sup>*

While the condition of many public housing estates as described in these two quotes provides the impetus for action and change, the strategies employed by governments and housing authorities can vary. The literature outlines five broad types of strategies:

- asset management and options for retention, demolition and redevelopment or disposal of high-rise estates
- creating sustainable communities in particular by reducing concentrations of disadvantaged households
- tenancy and estate management
- design of estates, and
- community renewal

Housing managers' plans for addressing problems usually incorporate one or more of these strategies and rarely rely on any single strategy.

### ***Asset management strategy***

The asset management strategy is the most straightforward for housing managers. This approach is narrowly defined here to include repair, upgrade, demolition and redevelopment, full or part sale of units/estate. It involves the regeneration of the physical structure, addressing any backlog in maintenance and bringing it up to contemporary standards. The development and implementation of this type of strategy largely dominated estate improvement strategies in Victoria in the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

Graham Towers in *Shelter is not enough: transforming multi-storey housing* discusses the changing asset management approaches in the UK as housing providers sought to come to

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<sup>34</sup> United Kingdom. Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* Executive Summary, page 1

<sup>35</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development 1999 quoted in "Mixed-Income Housing: Factors for Success" *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* Volume 3 Number 2 1997, page 3

<sup>36</sup> Victoria. Ministry of Housing (1988) *1988 Estate Improvement Strategy* Estate Improvement and Technical Services Group, Ministry of Housing



terms with the technical and managerial problems of multi-storey council housing.<sup>37</sup> While some managers sought to rid themselves of the problem through demolition and redevelopment, others adopted partial demolition – lopping off the upper floors. Other managers sought to sell of their stock. Some attempted to deal with the technical problems in a piecemeal fashion. He notes that:

*The most successful approach, however, involved the comprehensive modernisation of multi-storey housing.*<sup>38</sup>

The disposal of high-rise towers was also the approach taken by the Office of Housing in 1997 when it commissioned Andersen Consulting to develop a decision-making framework for the redevelopment/disposal of high-rise towers. This report is reviewed later in this Chapter.<sup>39</sup>

In recent years, the focus has moved away from asset management strategies partly because of their limited success in the longer term and partly because of the limited availability of capital. As other strategies received some prominence, housing managers have begun to view asset management strategies as part of a broader strategy of regenerating public housing estates.<sup>40</sup>

### **Creating sustainable communities**

The literature indicates a number of different ways in which housing managers can create sustainable communities. Four approaches are discussed here:

- public/private mix
- mixed income
- allocations policy, and
- community development.

The first two approaches are used in relation to new or redeveloped public housing, while the third approach is used by managers of existing public housing. The common theme of each approach is to reduce concentrations of disadvantaged households and create mixed estates. The fourth approach works with residents on existing public housing estates to address their current issues.

#### **Public/private mix**

The public/private mix debates in Australia have their origins in the 1970s when the Henderson Inquiry into Poverty highlighted the stigma attached to residents living on public housing estates. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, State Housing Authorities had acquired stock through large developments in the inner suburbs (high-rise and low-rise flat complexes) and in the outer suburbs (housing estates). The high demand for housing in the post-war period focused policy makers on the construction of dwellings. Large development enabled some measure of economies of scale and opportunities “to renew” inner urban areas and expand the City of Melbourne. In the 1970s they moved away from this and gradually adopted an acquisition policy which focused on the spot purchase of dwellings scattered throughout the suburbs and small-scale developments.

In recent times, housing managers have continued this new acquisition policy by applying it to existing estates. There have been a number of initiatives in Australia to reduce public housing concentrations in existing developments as well as initiatives to achieve a mix

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<sup>37</sup> Towers, G. (2000) *Shelter is not enough: transforming multi-storey housing*, Policy Press, Bristol pp.90ff

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.90

<sup>39</sup> Andersen Consulting (1997) *High-rise Scoping Study* (Draft), Office of Housing

<sup>40</sup> For example, see Graham Towers *op.cit.* Chapter 6

between public and private housing in new developments. It is evident that there is little consistency between the level of public/private mix that has been sought. There is in fact considerable diversity in the proportions of public and private housing, and individual projects have been driven by different combinations of financial and social objectives which has influenced the mix sought. The following illustrates the diversity found in the public/private mix of some existing projects.

- ❑ Woodara, East Preston Redevelopment Project in Victoria has 43% of its 287 new medium density housing for public housing tenants. Across the wider area the proportion of public to private housing would be closer to 35%.
- ❑ The Parks, Adelaide, developed by the South Australian Housing Trust and Pioneer Projects Australia was based on an anticipated percentage of public housing tenants of approximately 25 - 30%.
- ❑ Dight Street, Collingwood, Melbourne was redeveloped without any change to the mixture of tenants.
- ❑ Lynch's Bridge, Kensington, Melbourne is a new infill development which has 20% public housing.
- ❑ New release subdivisions on the urban fringe areas in South Australia have a public housing presence of no more than 20%, and typically 12-15%.

There is no Australian research available on whether there is some positive advantage in maintaining concentrations of public housing.<sup>41</sup> Overall little research appears available to guide decisions about when it is a better strategy to redevelop and upgrade without changing concentrations rather than to demolish and rebuild or disperse the housing. The directions taken with existing initiatives appear to be driven by practical, financial and political issues.

Interestingly, public housing tenants in areas with large and highly concentrated public housing estates which have attracted adverse publicity have been reported to be quite content to remain where they are. The redevelopment of The Parks, in South Australia found that before redevelopment 45% of current tenants expressed a preference to continue to live in the area after redevelopment. This may have been attributable to the area and new amenities but also indicates the tenants had positive experiences of the area before re-development. Those involved with the redevelopment maintain that tenants were quite happy with the social mix in their community before redevelopment.<sup>42</sup>

There is little research that is recent and specific about the impact of varying concentrations of public housing tenants. The arguments around concentration and dispersal are in terms of achieving sustainable communities. There is evidence to suggest that lower income neighbourhoods have a greater social dependency on their neighbourhood and tend to satisfy their needs within a geographically contained area. Public housing communities develop their own social ties, dependencies and linkages.

Tenants and policy makers in general express concerns regarding some of the implications of high densities of public housing, particularly external perceptions. Housing estates with a high concentration of public housing tenants can attract a negative stigma which can lead to discrimination and adverse attention.

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<sup>41</sup> Arthurson K (1998), "Redevelopment of Public Housing Estates: The Australian Experience" in *Urban Policy and Research* 16, pp.33-44, Victoria. However, see the discussion of this issue in a very recent report on the Raglan/Ingles Estate Redevelopment in Port Melbourne - Peddle Thorpe Architects (October 2000) *Raglan/Ingles Estate Redevelopment Strategy* prepared for the Raglan/Ingles Estate Redevelopment Advisory Committee, Office of Housing, Department of Human Services

<sup>42</sup> South Australian Housing Trust and Urban Pacific Ltd (date unknown) *The Parks Urban Renewal Project: Investing in People, Housing and Land*, South Australian Housing Trust, South Australia p.159f

A Victorian report on older people in high-rise public housing found that there were a number of positive features about living in close proximity to others. One feature was that close living assists with fostering mutually supportive relationships within small networks of residents. A reported strength of the older persons' high-rise units was the increased opportunity it provided to develop social networks, to seek companionship and develop friendships. However changes in the mix and types of tenants (for example younger old people with mental illness) can result in frail, older residents becoming frightened by newer tenants, particularly the introduction of tenants with difficult behaviours.<sup>43</sup>

### Mixed income housing

Mixed income housing is a popular concept in the United States<sup>44</sup>. Through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development Hope VI program, a number of run down public housing estates have undergone major upgrading or demolition and redevelopment. Brophy and Smith define mixed-income housing as “a deliberate effort to construct and/or own a multifamily development that has the mixing of income groups as a fundamental part of its financial and operating plans.”<sup>45</sup> Mixed income housing was seen as a way of addressing the difficulties associated with the *culture of poverty* and the physical concentration of poor households. Brophy and Smith describe the theory of mixed-income housing as follows:

*...a mixture of income levels will reduce the social pathology caused by concentration. Anticipated results of mixed-income housing include the following:*

- The behaviour patterns of some lower income residents will be altered by emulating those of their higher income neighbours. The quality of the living environment, not housing quality alone, leads to upward mobility.*
- Nonworking low-income tenants will find their way into the workplace in greater numbers because of the social norms of their new environment (for example, going to work/school every day) and the informal networking with employed neighbours.*
- The crime rate will fall because the higher income households will demand a stricter and better enforced set of ground rules for the community.*
- Low-income households will have the benefit of better schools, access to jobs and enhanced safety, enabling them to move themselves and their children beyond their current economic condition.<sup>46</sup>*

Their evaluation of seven successful mixed income housing developments identified a range of issues that they consider need further consideration before mixed income housing can be regarded as a success.

### Allocations policy

Both public/private mix and mixed-income housing are put in place as part of a housing development. More broadly, however, allocations policies and practices, and their outcomes, are believed to contribute to social problems and management difficulties on housing estates.

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<sup>43</sup> Victoria. Department of Human Services *The Support Needs of Older People in High-Rise Public Housing* Department of Human Services (Aged, Community and Mental Health) Melbourne 1998

<sup>44</sup> An edition of *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* published by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development has been devoted to this issue. Volume 3, Number 2 1997 available on-line at [www.huduser.org/periodicals/cityscpe/vol3num2/current.html](http://www.huduser.org/periodicals/cityscpe/vol3num2/current.html).

<sup>45</sup> Paul Brophy and Rhonda Smith (1997) “Mixed-income housing: factors for success” in *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* Volume 3, Number 2 p.3

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.6

In the UK and USA considerable discussion has ensued about the desirability of congregating large numbers of disadvantaged and vulnerable people in one area. In both countries, discussion has ensued whereby factors other than acute housing need are taken into account when allocating households to housing stock.

In the USA, the discussion has revolved around the notion of “mixed income housing” whereby it has been proposed that where housing is redeveloped it would be occupied by households with different income levels.

In the UK, both local housing authorities and housing associations have to some extent relaxed their allocations policy by adopting local lettings policies or flexible allocations policies. These allow housing managers to deviate from strict allocations policies based on needs to allocate housing stock to households appropriate to an area, to those who have ties in the area and to those positively seeking to live in a particular area. Community lettings were recently reviewed in a Joseph Rowntree report.<sup>47</sup> The report is generally positive about the impact of community lettings.

*Underlying community lettings schemes are assumptions that benefits derive from: creating and sustaining mixed communities; giving a degree of preference to local people with ties to particular areas; involving tenants in policy formulation and allocations decisions; and excluding those with a known history of anti-social behaviour...*<sup>48</sup>

The authors also added a warning that the importance and impact of community lettings in solving problems should not be over-estimated because these problems originate from broader social and economic forces.

### **Community development**

Two Australian studies have focused on community development and community cohesion as strategies for regenerating public housing estates. They are the evaluation of three neighbourhood renewal strategies in NSW by Judy Stubbs and Max Hardy and the two reports on estates in the City of Yarra by Jesuit Social Services. These studies are reviewed later.

## ***Tenancy and estate management strategies***

### **Getting the basics right**

Stubbs and Hardy<sup>49</sup> in their evaluation of the three neighbourhood renewal projects in Sydney noted that the main area of ongoing complaint from tenants was problems with repairs and maintenance. It is these areas which largely contributed to a negative view of the housing manager and undermined attempts to forge better relationships between tenants and the housing manager. Among a range of recommendations Stubbs and Hardy included:<sup>50</sup>

- participation by residents in identifying priorities for maintenance
- participation by residents in carrying out or organising work to be done

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<sup>47</sup> *Community Lettings: Local Allocation Policies in Practice* by Margaret Griffiths, John Park, Robert Smith, Tamsin Stirling and Tony Trott (1996) is published by York Publishing Services for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A summary of findings is available on-line at [www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/H171.htm](http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/H171.htm). See also Cope, H (2000) *Flexible allocations and local letting schemes* National Housing Federation, London

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.1

<sup>49</sup> Stubbs, Judith and Hardy, Max (2000) *Evaluation of three neighbourhood renewal strategies* NSW Department of Housing (South West Sydney Region)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.137-138

- employment of a local handyman as a quick response to minor maintenance and repairs, and
- a higher staff to stock ratio to facilitate better communication with residents and contractors and to monitor maintenance works.

### On-site management

One trend in the UK, already noted above, is towards on-site management. For many years, Anne Power<sup>51</sup> has advocated on-site management rather than centralised management as a way of better managing public housing estates. This theme has been picked up and reviewed more closely in a Social Exclusion Unit report.<sup>52</sup> This report reviews a range of housing management issues including the definition of housing management, the primary role of housing managers on estates, the relationship between housing managers and other services, on-site management, allocations policy, service agreements between tenants and housing managers, and the role of new technologies.

The report reviews various forms of on-site management such as the location of housing staff, concierges, caretakers and “super-caretakers” (operating in Denmark). The evidence indicates that on-site management is generally positive, particularly on difficult estates. It does however recognise that further work still needs to be undertaken on the costs and benefits of on-site management.

### Constructive relationships with tenants

In the past there has been little evaluation of the degree to which changed tenancy management strategies, improved provision and co-ordination of support to tenants, and community development initiatives, can address problems associated with particular housing sites or particular segments of the tenant population. Two recent reports about changed management strategies that have been able to address a number of major problems on the Claymore estate in Sydney indicate the importance of considering a range of possible approaches for tackling current problems.<sup>53</sup>

### Design of estates

Over the past two decades, public housing managers in the UK and USA have become more aware of the relationship between the design of public housing estates and crime, anti-social behaviour, sense of community etc. The social elements of design rather than the architectural and engineering elements have now become paramount as housing managers seek to improve large housing estates.

A major proponent of better design was Oscar Newman from the USA. He noticed that some estates had higher crime rates than others and this was related to the type of building design. His theories and some practical examples are outlined in *Creating Defensible Space*.<sup>54</sup> In the USA context, Newman’s particular focus has been on the reduction of crime. However, many of the principles could also be transposed into a community building context and as such some of the proposed strategies may be useful in the Australian context.

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<sup>51</sup> See page 128

<sup>52</sup> *Report of Policy Action Team 5 on Housing Management* (National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal) (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions) August 1999. This report is available on-line at [www.housing.detr.gov.uk/local/pat5/indexcon.htm](http://www.housing.detr.gov.uk/local/pat5/indexcon.htm).

<sup>53</sup> Stubbs, Judith and Hardy, Max (2000) *op.cit.*

<sup>54</sup> *Creating Defensible Space* by Oscar Newman (Institute for Community Design Analysis) U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research April 1996. This book is available on-line at [www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/defensib.html](http://www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/defensib.html).



The UK, through the work of Alice Coleman, adopted a particular version of Oscar Newman's work. As Graham Towers<sup>55</sup> outlines in his book, the British success in using "defensible space" was limited because of over-reliance on this one particular approach. Again, he concludes that a one dimensional design approach was not sufficient to address the critical issues of high-rise towers.<sup>56</sup>

### **Community renewal**

The work of the UK Social Exclusion Unit has had a particular focus on "joined-up" solutions for local areas.<sup>57</sup> In Australia, a number of State Housing Authorities have become involved in community renewal projects which do not specifically focus on public housing but rather spread across a local area. Many of these projects are in areas with high concentrations of public housing or areas which were formerly developed by the State Housing Authority. For this reason, the State Housing Authority has often taken a leading role in bringing together the stakeholders with a view to regenerating the local area. State Housing Authorities in Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania have each produced material on their community renewal projects.

## **Other strategic approaches**

The themes outlined above are re-iterated by a number of other prominent authors on estate renewal.

### **United States of America**

#### **Lawrence Vale**

Vale,<sup>58</sup> in critiquing approaches for addressing severely distressed public housing in the United States comments that:

*It is not enough for conditions in redeveloped public housing to look better; the goal must be to improve the quality of life of residents in as many dimensions as possible. Put simply, all those who participate in turnaround efforts must view the developments as communities first, buildings second. This is not at all to denigrate the crucial importance of physical reconstruction and design improvements. It is only to underline that such improvements, in themselves, are not enough to address the broader and deeper causes of resident distress.*

#### **Michael Stegman**

In a keynote address to the 1998 National Urban Renewal Seminar<sup>59</sup> held in Adelaide, Michael Stegman, Professor of Public Policy and Analysis, University of North Carolina outlined that the transformation of American public housing involved much more than bricks and mortar and had four key components as follows:

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<sup>55</sup> Towers, Graham (2000) *op.cit.* 113ff

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p.116

<sup>57</sup> The work of the UK Social Exclusion Unit is discussed in Section 7.4.

<sup>58</sup> Vale, L (1994) "Seven Kinds of Success: Assessing Public Housing Comprehensive Redevelopment Efforts in Boston" in *Future Visions, Urban Public Housing Forum Proceedings*, Ohio, USA, p.165

<sup>59</sup> Stegman M (1998) "Overview of the USA Experience in Urban Renewal" in *Revitalising Housing Areas: Proceedings of the 1998 National Urban Renewal Seminar*, (Adelaide) ed. B.Badcock & K.Harris AHURI, Melbourne

1. ***Replace the worst public housing*** with less dense economically integrated developments that will spur neighbourhood renewal. New places are built with a premium placed on their architectural and physical dimensions; they must be near public transport, provide recreational areas for children and young adults and blend rental units with private homes. One example cited was of a development that looked like a private housing development, but had a mix of public housing residents and moderate income families. It was financed through a private/public mix and the design incorporated principles of defensible space, aimed at reducing crime. The lessons learnt from this development were that rebuilding structures is not enough - public housing can't be transformed without rebuilding a sense of community among residents, helping tenants to regain some control over their lives and their environment.
2. ***Correct chronic management and operational deficiencies*** in troubled public housing authorities through swift and decisive action.
3. Infuse public housing with ***positive incentives that support and reward responsible residents*** who commit themselves to achieving self sufficiency. A key issue here was to remove economic disincentives to families earning income to work their way out of poverty and become more self-sufficient.
4. Introduce ***tougher expectations that hold public housing tenants accountable for their actions and do not tolerate those who engender fear, intimidation and abuse and threaten other resident's rights*** to live in peace and safety. Residence in public housing is viewed as a privilege that imposes on tenants reciprocal obligations - to work toward self sufficiency, contribute to the community, and respect the rule of the law. It is the view that the rights of tenants need to be protected and this is done through a "one strike and you're out" policy which enables housing authorities to use tenant screening and eviction policies to protect law abiding residents from those intent on breaking the law.

### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has for some time been attempting to address major problems with their social housing and areas with high concentrations of disadvantage and distress. While the concentrations of social housing and disadvantage are on a far larger scale in the United Kingdom than Australia, the findings and approaches being developed provide some stimulus for reflection.

#### Anne Power

Anne Power<sup>60</sup>, a well known British researcher in the housing field, identifies a number of lessons from the United Kingdom experience of public housing in the 1980s. She outlines what she considers to be four clear lessons that have emerged from the experience of social housing and local area reform in the 1980s. They are:

- *the poverty, social isolation and disorder of unpopular council estates have grown rapidly;*
- *localisation of housing management, beat policing and other services have had a significant impact on estate conditions where they have been introduced in a coherent and concerted fashion;*
- *resident involvement is now widely recognised as an essential prerequisite to successful programmes of estate rescue;*

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<sup>60</sup> Power, A (1996) "Area-base Poverty and Resident Empowerment" in *Urban Studies*, Vol.33, No 9, pp.1535 – 1564, UK



- *residents can only succeed if their efforts are linked to the wider community and if they receive sustained, consistent and sensitive support.*

Another useful contribution from Power is her summary of what appear to be the essential common elements of successful area action programs to improve unpopular and difficult housing areas. She outlines key features of successful area rescue programmes based on a study of 20 unpopular estates in Britain and four other European countries. These features were:

- *upgrading the physical conditions and encouraging mixed uses;*
- *rehousing a broader mix of people and reducing the concentration of extreme dependence and disarray;*
- *increasing community stability and reducing the exodus of committed residents by increasing the attractions of the area;*
- *involving the police and the community in local security programmes;*
- *providing special support for the integration of minorities;*
- *creating a dedicated resource from existing budgets (housing, education, health, social services, police) to provide a locally based, long-term service structure;*
- *maximising the bridges between the area and the outside world, both physically, such as transport, and organisationally through locally based workers, external training, visits to other projects, representation, and so on;*
- *encouraging all sorts of activity, such as shops, churches, voluntary agencies, credit unions, in order to create 'social buffers with the wider community'... These organisations help develop skills and commitment to the area by people with talents, potential and experience;*
- *engaging schools, adult education and vocational training since they should reach all households with children and young people and they can potentially transform the community's self-image. Education may be the central vehicle for reconnecting disadvantaged areas into the social and economic system.*
- *...create as many different channels for change and support as possible.*

### **Social Exclusion Unit**

More recent approaches being developed in Britain through the work of the Social Exclusion Unit have focused on the development of a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal.<sup>61</sup> This approach outlined in *Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal* seeks to “develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, and bad schools etc”.<sup>62</sup> It acknowledges that social exclusion can happen from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. This underpins their approach to the relationship between housing policy and neighbourhood management.

Key features of this strategy are learning from past mistakes and:

- *investing in people, not just buildings*
- *involving communities, not parachuting in solutions*

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<sup>61</sup> Reports of the SEU are available on the internet at: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm). More general information about the SEU and its work can be found at: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm).

<sup>62</sup> United Kingdom. Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal* Internet: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm)

- *developing integrated approaches with clear leadership*
- *ensuring mainstream policies really work for the poorest neighbourhoods*
- *making a long term commitment with sustained political priority.*

As part of a national strategy, the UK Government established eighteen Policy Action Teams to investigate and develop action plans around eighteen different areas. The six Policy Action Team (PAT) reports most relevant to the renewal of public housing estates cover:

- Neighbourhood management
- Housing management
- Neighbourhood wardens
- Unpopular housing
- Anti-social behaviour
- Community self-help.

Each of these reports deals with particular issues within the action framework outlined above.<sup>63</sup> For example, the approach of the Social Exclusion Unit to neighbourhood management describes the key elements as involving a management base of a board, a manager, and a multi-disciplinary team to implement an annual action plan which is audited. It places an emphasis on building human and social capital, providing accessible services and emphasis on prevention (notably that new housing developments learn the lessons from the past). It seeks to provide for community building and flexibility in the administration of government policies to target resources to areas of greatest need with a focus on sustainability and performance measures which reward improved outcomes. These objectives will be supported at all levels of government by aligning the work of all departments to create the most favourable context for neighbourhood management.

### Graham Towers

In a recent book<sup>64</sup>, *Shelter is not enough: transforming multi-storey housing*, Graham Towers outlines a new approach to high-rise estates in the UK. He reviews the history of high-rise in the UK outlining their origins and ideals as exemplified by Le Corbusier, the critiques of the high-rise, the causes of the failures and the various strategies to redeem high-rise estates. Towers rejects past attempts to regenerate high-rise estates as partial and incomplete. The evidence indicates that regeneration that relies solely on one strategy such as estate based management, the architectural solutions proposed by Oscar Newman (USA) and Alice Coleman (UK), major upgrading, 'high-tech' and other security measures were generally unsuccessful resulting in the dynamiting of many sound and adequate buildings. Towers argues for plurality of approaches. He proposes a model framework consisting of seven components for the transformation of high-rise estates: participation, opening options, open

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<sup>63</sup> United Kingdom. Social Exclusion Unit (2000) *Report of Policy Action Team 4 on Neighbourhood management* Internet: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm)  
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United Kingdom. Social Exclusion Unit (2000) *Report of Policy Action Team 8 on Anti-social behaviour* Internet: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm)  
United Kingdom. Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Report of Policy Action Team 9 on Community self-help* Internet: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/pat.htm)

<sup>64</sup> Towers, G. (2000) *Shelter is not enough: transforming multi-storey housing*, Policy Press, Bristol

design process, technical adequacy, social appropriateness, local management and maintenance and, social and economic programmes. He identifies three participant groups: residents, designers and managers. He presents some case studies of this approach. He concludes by summarising his main findings (which represent the key chapters of the book) as follows:<sup>65</sup>

- *Many of the problems of multi-storey estates derive from economies made when they were built.*
- *Many attempted solutions have been partial or governed by single-minded preconceptions.*
- *To achieve successful regeneration an holistic approach is required.*
- *All types of multi-storey housing have the potential for successful transformation.*
- *A successful strategy might not concentrate directly on the worst estates.*
- *There is a need for a diversified approach which reintegrates estates into the wider community.*

## **Recent Australian approaches**

### **Spiller Gibbins Swan**

In *Public Housing Estate Renewal in Australia*<sup>66</sup> Spiller Gibbins and Swan examine estate renewal undertaken by State Housing Authorities throughout Australia. In particular they are interested in developing a methodology whereby proposed projects can be evaluated. Spiller Gibbins Swan favour what they call a “Sectorised Cost-Benefit Analysis” over the other traditional evaluation techniques – financial analysis, cost effectiveness analysis, cost benefit analysis, planning balance sheet and goals achievement matrix. A Sectorised Cost-Benefit Analysis is favoured because it not only incorporates the requirements of a financial analysis but also can be expanded to incorporate non-financial impacts.<sup>67</sup> This approach is most relevant where State Housing Authorities are seeking to evaluate proposed projects, and where the options differ considerably from one another.

An appendix to their main report is a manual which outlines the main elements of the Sectorised Cost-Benefit Analysis and provides a framework for trialling their proposed methodology.

### **Judy Stubbs and Max Hardy, NSW**

In 1999, Stubbs and Hardy<sup>68</sup> undertook an evaluation of three neighbourhood renewal strategies in South West Sydney for the NSW Department of Housing. This evaluation compared the different strategies adopted in each of the neighbourhood areas. In the first neighbourhood, the strategy was based primarily on physical improvements. In the second, a number of strategies were adopted including an upgrade of properties, transfer of housing management to a community housing manager and an emphasis on skilling and involving tenants in the management of the area. In the third, the major strategies involved intensive

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid* p.206ff

<sup>66</sup> Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty. Ltd. (forthcoming) *Public Housing Estate Renewal in Australia* Australian Housing Research Fund Project No.212

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*. p.22ff and p.49

<sup>68</sup> Judith Stubbs and Max Hardy *Evaluation of three neighbourhood renewal strategies* NSW Department of Housing (South West Sydney Region) 2000

management with policy and procedural flexibility and again an emphasis on tenant participation.

The evaluation compared outcomes in seven different areas for each of these neighbourhoods in:

- crime, nuisance and annoyance
- housing turnover and resident stability
- resident satisfaction with the area, the housing provider and the neighbourhood renewal strategies
- communication, consultation and participation
- social stigma: resident and outsider perceptions
- asset management, and
- social and economic development.

They concluded that asset-based community renewal strategies were more effective when undertaken in conjunction with, and preceded by more intensive management and participatory processes.<sup>69</sup>

### Andersen Consulting

In 1997 the Victorian Office of Housing commissioned Andersen Consulting to undertake a scoping study of high-rise public housing estates.<sup>70</sup> The study's purpose was to provide a decision-making framework for the redevelopment/disposal of high-rise towers and, to identify and evaluate options for their redevelopment/disposal. The brief provided to Andersen Consulting was not about whether or not to dispose of high-rise towers but rather about a decision-making framework for their disposal. The key reason for a total focus on disposal appears to be the mismatch between the supply (size and type of housing stock) and the demand (household types and size of households) of high-rise public housing.

The *High-Rise Scoping Study* provides some useful background information on high-rise public housing and where appropriate, potential options for the redevelopment/disposal of high-rise towers. It provides a brief history and description of the high-rise estates, their changing role and the demographic, economic and housing policy reasons for this changing role. It also reviews the different high-rise strategies used in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The framework was built around three criteria: a social criteria and two financial criteria:

- the social criteria was that no tenant would be significantly disadvantaged by the disposal of the high-rise;
- the first financial criteria was the cost of holding the current portfolio as measured by the Net Present Value (NPV) per unit basis - the estate with the lowest NPV would be considered for sale first;
- the second financial criteria was the potential return on the asset as measured by the NPV of a feasible alternative use of land and a feasible alternative use of the land and buildings. The estate with the highest NPV on land use would be considered for sale first whereas the estate with the highest NPV for land and building use would be considered for sale at a later stage.

The study was divided into two major parts: the first considering the social criteria and the second the financial criteria. The financial criteria were only applied to estates which met the social criteria.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid p.19

<sup>70</sup> Andersen Consulting (1997) *High-rise Scoping Study* (Draft), Office of Housing

The study expands the social criteria by considering the impact of the redevelopment/disposal of a high-rise estate on four stakeholders – tenants, other recipients of housing assistance, current and future local communities around the estates, and taxpayers. It adopts a balanced scorecard approach to the decision-making framework. This approach identifies the issues and impacts on each of these stakeholders and then gives a weighting to each of the stakeholders and their respective impacts. By quantifying these impacts an overall score for a particular option and the different impacts on each stakeholder was calculated. The study argues that the balanced scorecard approach allows decision-makers to see whether a particular objective is being achieved, whether this is being achieved at the expense of other objectives and how this objective will impact on the different stakeholders.

The second part undertakes a financial analysis of high-rise estates in view of the two financial criteria. In doing so it:

- explores different possible uses of high-rise estates including residential, hotel, serviced apartments, aged care, office, retail, industrial and mixed use;
- options for the disposal/redevelopment of land and buildings including sale to tenants, securitisation of assets, joint venture arrangements with the private sector, outright sale of all or part of an estate, and sale and leaseback of an estate, and;
- evaluates these options.

The study concludes with a discussion of principles for best practice, change management and processes for consultation with the key stakeholders.

### **Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne**

Two recent projects conducted under the auspices of Jesuit Social Services provide insight into the needs of residents on high-rise estates. *Assessment of service needs for young people and families living on the North Richmond housing estate* by Kate Digney<sup>71</sup> and *Assessment of the service needs of low income families: Collingwood and Fitzroy housing estates* by Catherine Guinness<sup>72</sup> seek to provide a greater understanding of issues affecting these communities, their needs, the services provided and the service gaps. They provide an important insight into current high-rise public housing estates. While there are major differences between these three high-rise estates and other estates, many of the issues are similar.

These two projects document the high concentration of people who are disadvantaged and the broad range of unmet needs on high-rise estates including:

- high levels of unemployment
- isolation of many residents
- the poor physical environment
- illicit drug dealing and drug use with its associated problems of violence, fear and withdrawal from common areas
- the difficulties refugees and migrants have accessing English classes
- low level of education and training compounding issues of interaction with other people
- intergenerational conflict and the need for more culturally appropriate forms of mediation

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<sup>71</sup> Kate Digney (1999) *Assessment of service needs for young people and families living on the North Richmond housing estate* Jesuit Social Services, Richmond, also available on the following website: [www.jss.org.au/publications.html](http://www.jss.org.au/publications.html)

<sup>72</sup> Guinness, C (2000) *Assessment of the service needs of low income families: Collingwood and Fitzroy housing estates* Jesuit Social Services, Richmond, also available on the following website: [www.jss.org.au/publications.html](http://www.jss.org.au/publications.html)

- mental illness, and
- children's services

These assessments of the service needs of residents on high-rise estates raise some basic questions about the adequacy and delivery of key services. These reports conclude with a long list of recommendations calling for additional resources to meet the needs of residents on these estates.

The key concept underlying their approach is the notion of sustainable community and its relationship to social mix – “whether the social mix will provide the human resources to meet many of the community's own needs”.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusions

The experiences and directions in the United States and United Kingdom highlight the importance of developing an integrated series of strategies to address the complex range of issues affecting public housing and public housing tenants. Improving the amenity of estates through an asset management strategy is not the only strategy and is not advisable as the leading strategy. An asset management strategy, by itself, will not engender long-term and sustainable changes on housing estates.

The literature highlights a number of other approaches which must be considered integral to any serious attempts to radically address the complex issues on high-rise estates. These include:

- extensive involvement and participation by public tenants themselves
- a community development process whereby the trust and relationships between public tenants are enhanced and public tenants develop the knowledge and skills to influence the future development of the estate
- better design of public housing estates so that tenants have a stronger influence over the spaces they use
- good sustainable management by housing managers with a focus on both tenancy management and estate management
- a flexible allocations policy that takes account of the social sustainability of an estate and allocates appropriate applicants to the estate, and
- a primary role for housing managers in facilitating solutions and resources for tenants.

Most of the literature examined in this Chapter is based on the experience of a range of housing professionals. Very little literature has formally evaluated these various strategies and provided us with evidence-based research on the outcomes of these strategies. Do they work and how well do they work? Under what conditions do they work?

The literature provides us with information and ideas. It does not provide us with easy solutions. Any idea must be evaluated in terms of whether it is appropriate to a particular situation. Through formal evaluation of our strategies we can develop a better understanding of what works in what circumstances and what doesn't.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.39



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# APPENDIX I: MEMBERS OF THE HIGH RISE PUBLIC HOUSING REFERENCE GROUP

Lyn Sweeney/Fiona Reidy	City of Melbourne
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Alan Wood	Bedford Street Tenancy Advice Services
Doan Hoang	North Richmond Community Health Centre
Terry Burke	Swinburne University of Technology
Kath Hulse	Swinburne University of Technology
Robbi Chaplin/Jo Howard	Inner South Community Health Service

# APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANTS IN CONSULTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

## Individual interviews

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Peter McNicol, Office of Housing, Inner East Area Office

Barry Pullen, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service

Lyn Sweeney, City of Melbourne

## Group interviews

African Communities Elderly Association Victoria – public housing tenants (7 participants)

Atherton Gardens Residents Association (Fitzroy) (7 participants)

Bedford Street Tenancy Advice Service (3 participants)

Brotherhood of St. Laurence Rental Housing Support Service (5 participants)

Emerald Hill Court Residents Association (South Melbourne) (4 participants)

Inner South Community Health Service (Prahran) (12 participants)

Inner South Community Health Service (South Port) (4 participants)

Jesuit Social Services (5 participants)

Long-term public housing tenants, Prahran (4 participants)

Older public housing tenants, Melrose Street, North Melbourne (6 participants)

Tenants Union of Victoria, Public Tenants Advice Service (10 participants)

Vietnamese Women's Group, Richmond – public housing tenants (5 participants)

## Participants in Workshops on draft report

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
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