*Positioning Paper*

# A review of housing management tenant incentive schemes

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## AHURI POSITIONING PAPER SERIES

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Positioning Paper is the first output of a research project that reviews established Tenant Incentive Schemes (TIS) and assesses their potential usefulness to Australian State and Territory Housing Authorities. The Project has three specific objectives:

- To document and review the use of TIS in the UK, US and other overseas countries and assess their potential for Australian social housing;
- To explore the utility of TIS as a vehicle for assisting long-term sustainability of social housing;
- To model a range of appropriate TIS for social housing organisations and evaluate their applicability for state housing authorities.

The Positioning Paper prepares the way for the later empirical component of the research project. It describes the theoretical and practical context of contemporary housing management practice. It discusses the current state of knowledge about TIS, drawing on the Australian and international academic literature, policy documents and professional information and also on insights obtained from an interview with one of the world's leading proponents of TIS. It then reviews the current work of Australia's State Housing Authorities (SHAs) in devising innovative practices to address the impact of residualisation and engender good relationships with their clients. From that exploration of available sources, the Positioning Paper identifies four principal areas that require further investigation and indicates how the empirical work in three case studies, to be undertaken in New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania, will explore them.

'Tenant Incentive Schemes' (TIS) is a generic term. It refers to housing management schemes that offer additional or enhanced benefits to reward those public housing tenants who abide by the provisions of their tenancies. Examples of TIS benefits include rent discounts, accelerated repair and maintenance services, shopping and leisure centre vouchers, entry in competitions for concert tickets and seasonal prizes and insurance discounts. Such schemes can be designed to promote specific aspects of 'good' tenant behaviour such as prompt rent payment; giving full notice before vacating; leaving properties in good order or maintaining a record free of anti-social behaviour. It is claimed that they can rebalance management activities that may have become overly focused on the minority of problem tenants and they can also go some way towards countering community disengagement, thereby potentially making an innovative contribution to the sustainability of public housing.

To date, experience of TIS is mostly drawn from the UK and is dominated by the 'Gold Star Service' scheme established by Irwell Valley Housing Association (IVHA). This scheme has served as the prototype for TIS in over 40 UK housing associations and municipal authorities. It is being reviewed for implementation by Dutch housing organisations and is currently under consideration for use in North America. Benefits attributed, at least in part, to the introduction of TIS include: considerable cost savings; improved rent recovery rates; improved staff morale; lower vacancy rates; an enhanced commitment of tenants to their home and their neighbourhood and improved tenant satisfaction ratings. However, there is a shortage of evidence concerning the use of TIS outside the UK. In addition, much of the available literature has been produced as promotional material and is therefore of limited use in reaching an objective assessment of the effectiveness of such schemes.

From the review of all available sources, including an interview with the IVHA Chief Executive Tom Manion, the Positioning Paper identifies four potential risks for housing organisations that seek to adopt Gold Star Service versions of TIS, namely:

1. The potential cost of the scheme;

2. The capacity of such a scheme to accentuate the divide between 'good' and 'bad' tenants, leading to further alienation of those who are excluded;

3. The impact of the required changes on the culture and practice of the organisation, which may prove incompatible with existing expectations and accountabilities derived from a public service tradition and political control;

4. The adverse impact on third parties, such as tenants' children, that such conditionality may bring.

The Positioning Paper also identifies four areas that require further investigation before drawing any conclusions on the practicality and merits of using TIS in Australia. The three planned case studies will be directed towards these areas to achieve:

- Greater understanding of the potential of TIS in terms of service delivery, tenant satisfaction, community well-being and staff organisational culture;

- Greater appreciation of the resources required and institutional changes required to implement TIS;

- An assessment of the role tenants can play in the development of TIS;

- The development of appropriate evaluation tools and key performance indicators for TIS.

The Positioning Paper concludes that TIS, as developed by IVHA, represent a significant and radical innovation in housing management practice. Objective assessment of their achievement remains somewhat elusive. Their potential for transplantation into the context of Australian public housing is uncertain: potential risks as well as possible benefits have been identified. However, some SHAs are currently trialling tenant incentive strategies. The project's three empirical studies will explore further the scope for adapting TIS, or aspects of TIS, to the Australian context. Their findings will form the principal subject matter of the Final Report.

# 1   INTRODUCTION

This Positioning Paper is the initial output of the research project being undertaken by the AHURI Southern Research Centre to review the utility of Tenant Incentive Schemes for Australia's State and Territory Housing Authorities (SHAs). The current environment of declining revenue budgets and changing tenant profile has encouraged SHAs[1] to pursue innovation in policy and service delivery to achieve their objectives. Examples of such innovation include the fostering of mixed development schemes, public/private partnerships and tenant empowerment strategies. Tenant Incentive Schemes have been proposed as a further addition to that list. This research project is designed to provide a timely, evidence-based contribution to the discussion of their practicality and appropriateness for the Australian public housing sector.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the development of housing management schemes that reward public housing tenants who fulfil their tenancy obligations by offering an additional tier of benefits to those normally supplied by the landlord. The generic term to describe these schemes is 'Tenant Incentive Schemes' (TIS). Examples of TIS benefits include rent discounts, accelerated repair and maintenance services, shopping and leisure centre vouchers and insurance discounts. Though TIS are at an early stage of development in Australia they have been used in the UK and are claimed as a major factor in the improvements achieved by some housing organisations in their performance outputs such as rent collection rates, vacancy turnover and tenant satisfaction surveys. As this Positioning Paper reports, UK housing organisations who have established TIS assert that once start up costs have been met, TIS can result in considerable cost savings, lead to improvements in staff morale and help foster an enhanced commitment from tenants towards their home and neighbourhood. The major pioneer and promoter of TIS in the UK is Irwell Valley Housing Association (IVHA), a medium sized association based in Manchester. Their TIS, entitled 'Gold Star Service' (Gold Star), has been a prototype for schemes adopted by at least 40 UK housing organisations as well as housing organisations in the Netherlands (Housing Today: 2003).

This Positioning Paper examines the Tenant Incentive Schemes that have been established by IVHA and other UK housing organisations. It considers how far, and at what cost, they have achieved their stated objectives, namely to enhance the landlord/tenant relationship and to reward tenants who maintain their conditions of tenancy. It then introduces a discussion of their transferability to the Australian public housing sector. This discussion will be concluded in the Final Report in the light of findings from the empirical component of the research project.

Chapter One introduces the Positioning Paper and discusses some of the key ideological debates that shape contemporary housing management practice. Chapter Two highlights current Australian housing management practices, showing how State Housing Authorities (SHAs), despite operating within tight budgets, seek to counter the effects of residualisation. Their strategies address tenant participation, allocations, anti-social behaviour, rent recovery, repairs and vacancy turnover. Chapter Three outlines the use of TIS by IVHA and other UK housing organisations. Chapter Four summarises the existing incentive schemes currently employed by State and Territory housing authorities in Australia. Chapter Five describes the methodology for the empirical stage of the research project when interviews and focus groups with SHA personnel and tenants in New South Wales Queensland and Tasmania will explore the potential for TIS in the Australian context. Finally Chapter Six provides a conclusion in which the main themes within the report are addressed. Subsequent research outputs (the Final

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[1] For reasons of cost, the project's remit is limited to State Housing Authorities only. However, following the publication of the Final Report, discussions with the Community Housing Sector will be undertaken to explore the possibility of further investigation to examine TIS' utility for community housing organisations.

Report and Research and Policy Bulletin) will set out the empirical findings of the project.

## 1.1 Context

To understand contemporary housing management, in particular the emergence of new practices such as TIS, it is helpful to set out the ideological debates that have informed professional practice. This is especially useful as a context for the discussion that is set out in Chapter 2 explaining the challenges that confront SHAs and the policy responses that have been developed.

In this chapter four key discourses that have shaped professional practice are identified: '*social control*', '*consumerist*', '*managerial*' and '*social welfare*' (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Ideological Influences Affecting Housing Management Practices.**

| Ideology/discourse | Explanation | Practical Examples |
|---|---|---|
| *Social Control* | Housing management as an instrument for social control and regulation of the socially excluded | Tenant Incentive Schemes<br><br>Anti-Social Behaviour Orders<br><br>Landlord/Tenancy contract |
| *Consumerist* | Elevates the rights of housing tenants as consumers of services | Responsive and customer friendly services provision emphasising repairs, maintenance etc. |
| *Managerial* | Advances a business paradigm for housing management | Emphasis on the landlord's business functions (e.g. rent collection, void turnover) |
| *Social Welfare* | Promotes social equality and universalist principles | Primary aim: welfare of tenants: housing management as a vehicle for social inclusion - tenant empowerment and participation strategies |

Before each discourse is described, it should be noted that these different ideological perspectives are commonly intertwined and their individual influence waxes and wanes. Though all SHAs have an element of social control, the extent to which each of these ideologies exerts influence on housing management direction depends on two primary factors. First, there is the constellation of practical problems currently encountered by managers such as rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and limited resources for property maintenance. Secondly, there is the variable success of housing professionals, policy makers and politicians in promoting an agenda commensurate with their own interests (Darcy and Manzi 2004; Kemeny 2004). For example, housing managers within the profession have generally promoted a social welfare perspective and called for additional resources to address the problems that they confront in their everyday practice. On the other hand, in recent years, senior policy makers within State Housing Authorities have advanced a *managerial* perspective (Marston 2004). This perspective describes housing management as akin to a commercial enterprise and extols the business components of housing practice in order to valorise the role of senior staff within the Authority. Housing management has also been shaped by ideologies that emphasise the importance of *consumerism* and *social control*. The influence of *consumerism* within housing management has come about primarily because of tenant demands for more accessible service delivery. The emphasis on *social control* reflects a recent predisposition among politicians to highlight individual fecklessness as the primary explanation of crime and poverty, rather than factors relating to structural inequality. The impact on housing management of these four ideologies is discussed in more detail below.

*Social control* is the term used to describe the ideological influence on public sector management of practices that emphasise discipline and surveillance. This ideology has contributed greatly to shaping current housing management practice and provides the rationale for policies that advance regulation and control. The promotion of social control policies is based on the (unspoken) premise that tenants are unwilling to accept their responsibilities. New strategies are therefore required to address the negative consequences of this perceived failure of responsibility. Dean (1999) has argued that Australian welfare policies are increasingly 'disciplinary' toward those individuals regarded as socially excluded. He suggests that such policies are politically advantageous in that they apportion blame to the poor for their predicament thereby offsetting criticisms directed at government institutions. Recently, Marston (2004) has highlighted the disciplinary components of Australian housing management practices, showing how tenants are increasingly subject to strict tenancy agreements that seek to regulate tenant behaviour.

The second ideology, which has been especially influential since the 1980s has been *consumerism*. In Australia, social housing organisations have adopted policies to engender a more consumerist emphasis in their interactions with tenants. Tenants are viewed as customers who can exercise choice and are entitled to standards of service delivery. This ideology is closely linked with the third - *managerial* ideology - that informs contemporary housing practices. It seeks to construct a model of housing organisations as analogous in many ways, to private sector businesses. Finally, *social welfare* ideologies have been especially influential amongst housing managers themselves. Public housing is seen from this perspective as a means to promote social-inclusion and the principles of universalism (Darcy 1999; Marston 2004). In the Australian context, proponents of social welfare ideology call for extra resources to increase the supply of public housing. In combination, these four ideological discourses have exerted a major influence on contemporary housing practices. For example, *social welfare* discourses have been used by managers within the housing profession when making the case for additional funds to be spent on community empowerment strategies. On the other hand the clear, if tacit, rationale of some housing policy developments is that tenant behaviour can be 'regulated' by the establishment of conditional contracts between landlord and tenant. Strategies such as 'good neighbour'

agreements, probationary tenancies and anti-social behaviour regulations are evidence of the extent to which *social control* discourses have influenced contemporary practice.

One of the key challenges for housing researchers is to ensure that promotional claims made by interest groups in support of specific policies and practices are critically assessed and objectively scrutinised. TIS are no exception. As with other policies and practices, the promotion of TIS is underpinned by a set of ideological discourses. For example, TIS seek to control behaviour (*social control*) and at the same time portray the tenant as a consumer or customer of housing services (*consumerist*). It is also possible to see the influence of managerial discourse when TIS are promoted as a means to reduce costs and reinvigorate the organisational culture of a housing organisation. The central purpose of this research project is the evaluation and assessment of TIS and their transferability to Australian public housing authorities.

This brief introduction has provided a definition of TIS. It has also summarised current theoretical influences on housing management, highlighting those that encourage government agencies to focus on individual behaviour. It has identified the principal ideological bases of TIS and in this way provides the foundations for the evaluation and assessment that are developed later in this Positioning Paper. The next chapter provides an analysis of the challenges that confront SHAs and the policies that have been developed to address these.

# 2 CONTEMPORARY HOUSING MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN AUSTRALIA

## 2.1 Public housing policy objectives

As the introductory chapter of this Positioning Paper has indicated, it is necessary before examining the utility of tenant incentive schemes to set out the context in which SHAs are currently operating. This chapter therefore highlights the main pressures on contemporary public housing management by examining how the roles, purposes and expectations of public housing have changed over time, and how this has resulted in a series of tensions and difficulties faced by public housing managers (and by tenants) today.

A number of writers and commentators have highlighted how public housing provision in Australia has changed over time (Hayward 1996; Milligan 2003). While it is not necessary to attempt to summarise such past analyses in any detail, a couple of historical points are worth reiterating. The first is that governments in Australia have not generally relished their role as large-scale rental housing providers, and that the history of public housing provision is a history of 'unenthusiastic' landlordism. As Hayward (1996: 1) observed, 'Australian governments have played the role of reluctant, rather than willing, landlords'. This appears to differentiate Australian SHAs from public housing providers in many European countries, where government housing provision was fully embraced at an operational level. Second, perhaps partly as a consequence of this reluctance to promote public housing provision,[2] the roles and purposes of public housing have changed significantly over time. The tenure has moved from providing assistance predominantly for working families (Burke 2001: 7) by means of a mixture of rental housing and then sales to occupants, through a period of relative marginalisation, means-tested and broadly targeted to those in poverty and other housing need, to the highly residualised tenure of today, where a range of housing management challenges present themselves. As discussed below, some of these challenges are associated with the changing tenant profile of public housing, and the tenancy management issues this change presents. Other challenges arise from the age, type, condition, configuration and location of stock. The physical legacy of past development may not suit the changed needs of today's tenants or applicants.

A further significant factor that has shaped the current environment for housing authorities is the declining level of government support that has been available. This has impacted on the both the types of housing management issues which now manifest themselves, and the capacity of SHAs to adequately respond to those issues. During the 1990s, public housing providers adopted managerialist administration practices that led to a strong emphasis on operational efficiency and promoted strategies for reducing costs to government, and rationing services. Most SHAs now see themselves as 'high need housing providers' (SA Department for Families and Communities 2005).

Indeed, the cumulative effect of all these evolving policies and processes is that, today, as Burke suggests, the function of public housing is 'essentially a welfare housing role, i.e. providing housing for welfare beneficiaries' (2001a: 7). Data on work force participation from the 2003 National Social Housing Survey indicate that 'the vast majority of tenants (seventy-five per cent) say they are neither employed nor looking for work'. By contrast, the Survey indicates that only sixteen per cent of tenants are presently in full- or part-time employment (Colmar Brunton 2004: 134).

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[2] Other major drivers include ideological positions on the role of government, shifting views of whether, and how, to ration public services, and a recovery post-1945 in the building industry's capacity to build enough houses for demand during the 1950s and 1960s.

Today, despite being frequently stigmatised as providing 'housing of last resort' or residual housing, public housing management nevertheless continues to pursue a range of diverse and demanding objectives. They may be grouped around three main themes. The first is principally focused on outcomes for tenants. This includes providing quality housing, and delivering safe, appropriate and affordable housing which matches need. It also includes 'maximising the numbers of new households in need that are provided with secure, appropriate and affordable housing' (Hall and Berry 2003). Many management strategies aim to achieve other positive social and economic outcomes for tenants through housing provision. These have recently been extended by the prevailing concern expressed in the current Commonwealth State Housing Agreement that incentives should be increased to encourage public tenants to seek work if they are presently social welfare or income support recipients (CSHA 2003).

A second set of objectives for public housing focus on the commercial aspects of running public housing. This requires the social aims of tenancy management to be balanced with a 'business-like approach' to property management. The principal aims here are the reduction of the cost to government of housing assistance and the promotion of 'innovative approaches to leverage additional resources into Social Housing, through community, private sector and other partnerships' (CSHA 2003).

The third theme focuses on the management of neighbourhoods and communities. Public housing estates may be perceived as dominating the social and physical environment of adjacent areas. Social problems experienced in the estates and nearby may be attributed to the estates' apparently high concentration of low-income households, many with multiple or complex needs, and to poor management of the resulting 'risk'. There is a growing expectation that public housing should contribute to the establishment or maintenance of sustainable communities. This includes an expectation of active management of neighbour and neighbourhood relations (Burke et al 2004) linked to an expectation of better integration with existing neighbourhoods.

This summary list highlights major current policy objectives affecting public housing provision and it shows that SHAs are driven by multiple imperatives in their delivery of housing assistance. Tenant outcomes are central. The interests of individual tenants may not necessarily be paramount; they may have to be balanced against competing priorities. In the context of tenant incentives, the significance of this is subtle but important: it cannot be assumed that State Housing Authorities will always see retention of any given tenant as the main aim. There may be common situations, or specific circumstances in which other policy objectives or service commitments take priority. For example, there may be instances in which individual tenant actions are perceived to have a negative impact on the organisation and or other tenants (i.e. anti social behaviour, rent arrears etc).

### 2.1.1 Public housing management challenges and pressures

In addition to the diverse policy demands made on public housing, outlined above, managers are also required to respond to an array of challenges and pressures at the service delivery level. These challenges can present considerable difficulties for managers, and indeed often for tenants. They can be grouped thematically into challenges arising from *sector* management issues, from *stock* management issues, and finally from *tenancy* management issues.

State Housing Authorities face particular challenges from the changing role of rental tenure in Australia. As home ownership has become unaffordable for many low- or irregular income earners, pressure has built on the rental market. Research has shown that households are now renting for longer than in the past, when rental was seen as a transient tenure before or between periods of home ownership (Dalton and Maher 1996; Wulff and Maher 1998). At the same time, private rental affordability has

become a significant problem for many low-income households, in rural and regional Australia as well as in urban areas. This has been exacerbated by the loss of affordable private rental housing (Wulff et al 2001; Yates et al 2004), particularly in inner-urban areas, including large scale reductions of boarding house and rental caravan park supply. Recent research indicates that problems encountered or anticipated with private rental are the main motivations in applying for public housing. Principal among these are affordability and high rental costs followed by the desire for greater security of tenure and stability. Additional concerns identified include the condition of rental premises, management standards and discrimination in the private rental market. Indeed, households with specific accommodation needs, such as people with a physical disability, older people, and larger families, all face difficulties in securing appropriate housing options. Others, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a mental illness and young people, face discrimination in the private market (Colmar Brunton 2004; Burke et al 2004). Further pressure has been placed on public housing by the impact of deinstitutionalisation, and the growth of tenancy databases used to screen out 'risky' tenants from the private market (Seelig 2003; Short et al 2003).

In addition to intense demand, resulting in part from market failure in the private rental market, SHAs have also been faced with the need for increased expenditure at a time of reduced income (Burke 2001b). Funding and policy support from State agencies and the Commonwealth Government have both been falling for a decade. Greater targeting to those on statutory incomes has resulted in a declining rental income base. This has coincided with higher stock management costs, as dwellings approach the end of their useful or habitable life and the legacy of years of poor maintenance and renovation planning has to be faced. In addition, the changing tenant profile has introduced other costs. Operating as a 'high needs housing provider' involves more intensive (thus more costly) tenancy management. It may also require stock to be upgraded, adapted, reconfigured or replaced. Indeed, the principal stock management issues public housing providers have been attempting to address in recent years concern problems such as poor or inappropriate housing design, inadequate housing standards in some estates and higher density sites, ongoing problems of maintaining ageing stock, and the cost of general repairs and maintenance demands.

Another of the stock management issues in public housing is the issue of 'churning': 'people circulating in and out of the system and in the process creating costs of vacant properties and administrative expenses' (Burke et al 2004: 12). In 2002/03, the total size of Australia's public housing sector was in the order of 348,000 dwellings, including some 5,400 un-tenantable dwellings (and the total number of households renting public housing was approximately 338,000 (DFaCS 2004). This implies a relatively low vacancy rate of around 3 per cent. Paradoxically, the failure to retain all tenants, and the creation of vacancies provides the opportunity to house more people from the waiting lists. Thus, despite tenancy establishment costs and vacancy costs (in 2003, it took an average of 37 days to re-tenant vacant dwelling (DFaCS 2004)), 'churning' may be presented as an opportunity for the system, even if it often represents a threat to the tenants involved.

This brings the discussion to the area of tenancy management issues in public housing. Eligibility, managing demand, allocations, and the intense competition to secure access to housing have already been alluded to as important considerations, and they loom large as key challenges in managing public housing. The level of expressed demand for public housing as measured by the total number of household applicants on SHA public housing waiting lists suggests that, whilst levels do vary from year to year, the underlying trend is of sustained unmet need over the last ten years (see Table 2 below). In June 2003, even though the accumulated waiting list data indicate a considerable drop in numbers (either due to faster allocations, tighter eligibility, the deterrent effect of publicised waiting periods, or simply reduced demand

(or perhaps data issues)), there were still some 208,000 households waiting for public housing.  In essence, State Housing Authorities operate in an environment of high demand for public housing, which significantly exceeds the capacity to supply (Burke and Hulse 2003).

**Table 2: Public Housing Waiting Lists - (Australia 1994-2003)**

| Year at 30 June | Total number of applicants Public housing waiting lists |
|:---:|:---:|
| 1994 | 235,372 |
| 1995 | 234,667 |
| 1996 | 236,237 |
| 1997 | 221,409 |
| 1998 | 217,184 |
| 1999 | 213,930 |
| 2000 | 213,041 |
| 2001 | 221,313 |
| 2002 | 223,290 |
| 2003 | 208, 056 |

Source: DFaCS 2003; 2004

In the past, public housing was generally allocated on a wait-turn basis, whereby households were queued chronologically, and offered housing once they reached the top of the list.  However, while policies and processes for assessing needs and allocating public housing vary among SHAs (Burke and Hulse 2003), most jurisdictions now operate 'segmented' or 'categorised' waiting lists. These stream access to public housing according to the nature and urgency of the applicants' needs and capacity to access alternative housing options (Productivity Commission 2005).  Even the two agencies that maintain waitlist approaches have a supplementary priority access system for some forms of housing need. The implicit or indirect incentive for tenants, once housed, to 'obey the rules' and maintain eligibility is clear – if you exit or are evicted from public housing, you may have to wait a considerable period of time before being assisted again.  And yet, considerable 'churning' does take place.  A total of 33,400 new households were assisted in 2002/03, almost half of whom were assessed as having 'special needs' (FaCS 2004).  A third of new applicants waited less than three months to be housed, but another third waited more than one year (and more than 20 per cent waited more than 2 years).

It is difficult to estimate precisely how long tenants remain in public housing.  However, the rate of new annual allocations suggests turnover in the order of ten per cent per annum. At the same time, half of the tenants who responded to the last National Social Housing Survey indicated they had resided in public housing for more than ten years. It should be noted that respondents to the survey might not be entirely representative of the tenure's population as a whole in this regard.  Nevertheless some generalised conclusions can be drawn from this data about the broad types of households renting in public housing.

A significant cohort is likely to be made up of longer-term tenants, many of whom are likely to be aged pensioners or those with a disability.  Other groups of renters are probably using public housing as either a short term or medium term housing option.

The former perhaps include those with urgent or complex needs, and the latter households such as sole parents, and the unemployed who formally remain in the labour force, who each require a period of stability or affordability, but are not looking for permanency in public housing.  Certainly, as Burke (2001a: 7) suggests, 'whereas the tenant composition (in public housing) was quite homogeneous up to the mid-1970s, by the 1990s it was highly diverse'.  The one thing public housing tenants have in common is their low income: nearly 90 per cent of public rental households receive some implicit rent rebate because they are paying less than market rent (FaCS 2004). This is largely a result of tight targeting and means-testing at the eligibility stage, but it is also related to two other factors. First, the proportion of public tenants who experience a significant change in their circumstances post-allocation, such as access to work or increased incomes; and secondly, whether such households elect to, or are allowed to, remain in the public sector.

The whole question of labour-force participation rates, and whether the form of public housing in Australia, with income-based rents and reasonable tenure security, creates 'workforce disincentives' is now of considerable policy interest to all jurisdictions.  The present Commonwealth State Housing Agreement includes *inter alia* a broad guiding principle that 'housing assistance supports access to employment and promotes social and economic participation' (CSHA 2003). However, elsewhere the Agreement makes it clear that in fact there is now a requirement that SHAs remove workforce disincentives through various measures. Jurisdictions that are not compliant could lose five per cent of their base CSHA funding. This will prove to be a considerable burden to many States, given that many of their current and future tenants are among the least likely population groups to either be in the labour force in the first place, or to have realistic employment prospects.  It could be speculated that this imperative in the CSHA is aimed more at income-based rents, and the claims that these establish high marginal tax rates, rather than necessarily at increasing employment among public housing tenants.

This workforce issue aside, tenant diversity creates enormous challenges to State Housing Authorities in their endeavour to align stock types and housing need. In some States, the limited range of dwelling types, sizes and locations inevitably results in considerable mismatches between needs and available stock, sometimes leading to inappropriate allocations.  The increasing incidence of multiple and complex needs has necessitated the development of linkages with other human service agencies. Lack of suitable or available services for tenants with particular support needs, such as mental illness or intellectual disability, remains as an issue of concern.

In the section above on stock management issues in public housing, a tension between retaining tenancies and making new allocations was referred to.  One of the more recent debates within public housing tenancy management has been around sustaining tenancies. Is it the role of the sector to support tenants even if they default in their rental obligations for whatever reason, or should only those 'deserving' tenants who always fulfil their responsibilities be assisted? An example of the latter approach will be examined later in this chapter.  Some SHAs, on the other hand, have made unambiguous policy commitments to 'sustain' tenancies wherever possible and appropriate to do so (Seelig and Jones 2004. For examples, see NSW DoH 2002; QDoH 2003; TAS DHHS 2004; SA Dept Families and Communities 2005).

Seelig and Jones (2004: 21) suggest that 'sustaining tenancies' can be regarded as seeking to avoid eviction and 'tenancy failure', by encouraging positive experiences and successful housing outcomes for the tenant, or through, 'supportive landlord practices. These may include balancing social and economic imperatives and linking housing with other services particularly for those tenancies considered 'at risk' of failure'.  The authors also highlight how the sustaining tenancies debate shifts attention away from quantitative issues of supply and demand, towards a qualitative focus on

public housing: its features, processes and outcomes for both tenants and the provider. Whatever the position of each jurisdiction in respect of explicit 'sustaining tenancies' approaches, SHAs are generally expected to be supportive tenancy managers as well as effective housing providers in today's housing policy environment. In the context of the residualised nature of the public sector, and the ever-greater concentration of disadvantage and complex needs that it is required to accommodate, this is not always an easy expectation to fulfil.

Notwithstanding all the challenges and difficulties SHAs face in delivering public housing, and the housing and other problems that public renters experience, tenant satisfaction with public housing is generally quite high. In the last National Social Housing Survey of public tenants, only 17 per cent of tenants were dissatisfied overall with their housing. Three-quarters of households were happy with their amenities - lack of storage space was the most significant concern, and the vast majority (almost 90 per cent) were satisfied with the location. Safety concerns with the local neighbourhood was the most significant worry for renters. Interestingly, 'satisfaction with day-to-day maintenance service is one of the three strongest drivers of overall satisfaction with service' (Colmar Brunton 2004: 15). In terms of tenants' own perceptions of the benefits of public housing, most felt that public housing had assisted them in providing affordability and stability (Colmar Brunton 2004: 105). This in turn had, helped them to 'manage their rent and money better … (and) to continue living in the same area' (Colmar Brunton 2004: 18).

## 2.2 Housing management approaches and indirect tenant incentives

Chapter Four of this Positioning Paper considers specific examples of direct tenant incentive initiatives among State Housing Authorities. However, there is a range of other housing management policies that aim to make the experience of public housing tenancies a better one for both provider and resident. Indirectly, these housing management policies and practices could be described as contributing to the general mix of rights and responsibilities that operate between the SHA as landlord, and its individual tenants. Thus, they act as some form of *de facto* incentives to public tenants to meet their tenancy obligations. The housing management approaches which provide tenant incentives indirectly can be broadly divided into those that are centred around the management of the tenancy itself, and those that concern the management of the property or stock as an asset.

### 2.2.1 Tenancy management approaches

The chief tenancy management approaches providing indirect incentives to tenants span those which are generally 'positive' (which correspond with direct 'reward-based' incentives) and those that are more 'negative' (based more on sanctions or the threat of punitive action). The former include tenant consultation, participation and engagement, as well as a raft of policies and practices aimed at positioning the SHA as a 'supportive landlord'. The latter include 'renewable tenancies' and rental bonds in the public sector, as well as strong policies towards evictions, 'anti-social behaviour', and debt recovery or prior-debt policies.

Tenants and landlords have a range of options to address problems and a helpful way to represent the spectrum of strategies that can be deployed by SHAs and tenants is provided in Table 3 below. It provides examples of the obligations of SHAs and tenants as well as the strategies that can be used when problems occur.

**Table 3: Landlord and Tenant Obligations and Strategies for Compliance.**

| State Housing Authority - Obligations: | Tenant - Obligations: |
|---|---|
| - Provide adequate, affordable & secure housing<br> - Respond to tenant complaints<br>- Provide timely repairs to dwelling<br><br>- Publicise and maintain transfer waiting list<br>- Maintain public areas | - Demonstrate evidence of need/disadvantage (i.e. to qualify for public housing)<br>- Maintain property in good condition<br>- Pay rent on time<br>- Considerate to neighbour<br>- Respectful to housing authority staff and other agencies |
| *Tenant can pursue collective and/or individual strategies when problems arise:* | *When tenants break the conditions of their tenancy a SHA can pursue positive and/ or punitive strategies:* |
| **Collective strategies: (examples)**<br><br>⇩ | **Positive strategies to ensure compliance/enhance relationship: (examples)** ⇩ |
| - Participate in Tenants Unions<br>- Attend Neighbourhood Forums to enhance tenants lobbying capacity<br>- Join Neighbourhood Watch Schemes | - Fund and support consultation and participation processes to assist tenancy management, esp. for those at risk (includes home visits)<br><br>**Tenant incentive schemes**<br>- Run programmes to reward good behaviour:<br>- Receive transfers/dwelling upgrades<br>- Expedited repair service<br>- Cash bonuses/rent discounts/ gifts/prizes |
| **Individual strategies (examples)**<br><br>⇩ | **Punitive strategies (examples)**<br><br>⇩ |
| - Request SHA to respond to problem<br><br> - Seek redress through legal action<br>- Request transfer<br>- Withhold rent<br>- Relinquish tenancy | - Serve eviction notice<br><br>- Fixed term and Probationary tenancies<br><br><br>- Debt recovery<br>- Prior debt policies |

Most jurisdictions operate 'tenant participation' programmes, which facilitate the establishment and support of local or regional tenant groups. Tenant representative bodies are another mechanism that has helped SHAs to consult and engage with their tenants. While these approaches provide some forums for involving tenants in policy and programme development, they have tended to operate more at the 'consultative', rather than at the more participative or collaborative level (O'Neill and Burke nd).

The concept of 'supportive landlord' meanwhile is based on the principle that a public housing provider has a range of social obligations or objectives, which sit alongside those concerning tenant and property management. Thus, for example, the supportive landlord will generally seek to assist a tenant who falls into rent arrears to resolve the underlying problem, rather than resort in the first instance to action related to a breach of tenancy. In most cases, SHAs acknowledge that the public rental sector is now often

the real 'tenure of last resort' (Yates 1996). This implies that invariably there are significant costs to government if households in high housing and other need are evicted from public housing, only to reappear at a crisis housing service or another government agency.

In 2001, the South Australian Housing Trust took a bold step, and in pursuit of its strategic direction 'Successful Tenancies' instituted several service integration demonstration projects in collaboration with other agencies. The projects were based on 'early intervention and prevention principles to assist customers to build successful tenancies' (SAHT 2001: 32). The projects aimed 'to improve customer access to services at the same time as maximising resource opportunities' (SAHT 2001). The Trust also actively pursued early intervention more generally 'to support customers at risk of eviction and reduce the long-term cost to the community' (SAHT 2001: 16). Tenancy management strategies deployed for this purpose included home visits and probationary tenancies. The two years to 30 June 2002 saw a 46 per cent decrease in evictions by the Trust compared with the previous two year period. Subsequently the demonstration projects were evaluated and have been used to shape current services. In the context of its strategic directions, a successful tenancy has more recently been described by the Trust as 'a partnership between the Trust, the customer and sometimes other agencies where tenancy needs and conditions of tenancy are met' (SAHT 2003). This appears to stress the concept of mutual obligation and tenant responsibilities, as much as support and retention of tenancies. The Trust goes on to state: 'The objectives for creating Successful Tenancies are to improve the quality of life for Trust customers and to reduce the long term cost to the community', again referring to a balance of interests.

At the other end of the tenancy management spectrum, some SHAs have experimented with the notion of 'renewable tenancies', the introduction of rental bonds for new public tenancies, and strong policies towards evictions, 'anti social behaviour', and debt recovery or prior-debt policies. These operate, in part at least, to send unambiguous signals to tenants about the consequences of not complying with their rental obligations. NSW has recently instituted a policy of renewable tenancies, which allows the SHA to initially let public housing on a series of fixed term tenancies, reviewed and renewed on the basis of tenant performance as well as eligibility. According to the NSW Department of Housing:

> Renewable tenancies aim to encourage public housing tenants to understand their responsibilities as tenants and to abide by their Tenancy Agreement. They enable tenants and the department to identify early any breaches which may otherwise lead to the termination of a Tenancy Agreement. Renewable Tenancies form part of our strategy to provide policies and procedures, as well as advice and information about services to help tenants maintain successful tenancies. (NSW Department of Housing 2005)

The renewable tenancies process establishes three classes of tenant: 'Satisfactory', 'Less than Satisfactory' and 'Unsatisfactory'. Satisfactory tenants are those who have not breached any significant terms of their tenancy, and who rectify any minor or 'unsubstantiated' breaches. Such renters will be granted extended tenancy entitlements (either another 3 year lease, or a periodic tenancy at the end of their second 3 year agreement). Tenants deemed 'less than Satisfactory' are those renters in breach of more significant (and substantiated) tenancy conditions, but who are making some efforts are to rectify the problem. These tenants will only be offered a one year lease before being reviewed again. 'Unsatisfactory tenants' are those in breach of specific significant terms, those who have a record of repeat breaches, or other breaches where no or 'unsatisfactory' rectifying steps have been undertaken.

Unsatisfactory tenants usually have their tenancies terminated, and consequently are no longer entitled to live in public housing (NSW Department of Housing 2005).[3]

A scan of various SHA tenancy management manuals and other documents indicates a number of other SHAs now have, or have previously had, a 'probationary' period at the start of a public housing tenancy, although none used restricted tenancies as widely or as repeatedly as envisaged under the NSW scheme. Similarly, SHAs employ various policies and strategies aimed at dealing with problematic tenancy situations or 'anti-social behaviour' (Jacobs and Arthurson 2003). These operate in a variety of ways: through processes for dealing with tenant complaints, through the enforcement of residential tenancies legislative provisions, and through the use of 'good neighbour policies' and independent community justice or mediation services. It is clear that the very essence of policies towards termination of tenancies where there have been breaches of tenant obligations is that they act as strong incentives towards compliance, even if they do not always deliver.

### 2.2.2  Stock management approaches

While SHA policies relating to allocations and transfers, and to repairs and maintenance, are all closely connected to tenancy management, the practice of allocating households to specific dwellings, and the standards to which those dwellings are maintained, also provide opportunities to indirectly affect tenant attitudes and behaviour.  Thus, the regularity and quality of repairs and maintenance work, the availability of housing transfers where sought, and more wide scale dwelling upgrades and urban renewal initiatives may all impact on tenants' views of, and behaviour towards, the State Housing Authority as their landlord.  While urban and estate renewal programmes have been implemented in many States, overall reductions in the level of constructions and acquisitions have resulted in net losses to the stock of public housing in Australia, reducing housing choice for tenants and housing management options for SHAs.

## 2.3  Summary

This chapter has set out the complex array of transactions that involve SHAs and tenants and  shown that SHAs are required to respond to a number of diverse and complex challenges ranging from welfare provision for tenants to asset management of the housing stock.

Housing management practices and challenges in today's public housing are likely to have an important bearing on the development of formal Tenant Incentive Schemes in Australia. The utility of TIS in the context of Australian housing management practice is therefore contingent on a number of practical questions. For example, what are the various benefits and costs of implementing TIS? To what extent can TIS assist SHAs to achieve their objectives? What are the risks in pursuing TIS? However, before these questions can be explored it is necessary to review some of the emerging literature on TIS.

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[3] Postscript: Since the production of this paper, the NSW Department of Housing has announced that fixed term tenancies will now apply to new public housing tenancies from July 2006, with lease lengths to match determined need. Few other details are available at time of press.

# 3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapters One and Two of the Positioning Paper have provided a general introduction to the rationale for TIS, the major challenges faced by State and Territory housing authorities and a variety of initiatives that have been put in place including mixed-tenure development schemes, community employment programmes and public/private partnerships. While these initiatives have led to significant improvements, it remains the case that many social housing tenants are likely to have few assets and often experience disadvantage in terms of accessing material entitlements and improvements (as discussed in Chapter Two). Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999) data[4] has shown that social housing tenants are amongst the most socially excluded in society and that the limited sense of neighbourhood ownership experienced by many tenants is an ongoing concern. This limited sense of ownership also has a negative impact on the day-to-day running of housing organisations themselves; for example, considerable resources are spent addressing the concerns of households who do not adhere to their tenancy conditions at the expense of the majority of tenants who do. For these reasons, the view that tenants' lack of engagement with their neighbourhood is one of the most significant impediments to achieving the sustainability of social housing has become a dominant paradigm within housing management practice.

The purpose is to summarise international practice as well as update data on Australian versions of TIS. Data were collected by e-mail and telephone contact with State and Territory housing representatives and by accessing relevant websites. In addition, an interview was conducted with the Chief Executive of the Irwell Valley Housing Association, Tom Manion, who is the pioneer of the TIS known as the 'Gold Star Service'. As discussed below, there is a dearth of information on other nation states' TIS although this is likely to change as more organisations seek to implement similar practices. In Australia, there are, as yet, few examples of TIS in operation, although in South Australia plans are under way to establish pilot schemes.

## 3.1 Tenant Incentives in the United Kingdom

A small number of UK social housing organisations have put in place TIS to address problems relating to community disengagement and to enhance the morale of front-line housing staff. The underlying principle of TIS is that many housing management practice activities are too focused on problem tenants (i.e. the impact of anti-social behaviour and chasing rent arrears) and not on the majority of tenants who adhere to the conditions of their tenancy (ODPM 2003). As stated, the most extensive TIS project to date is the Irwell Valley Housing Association's (IVHA) 'Gold Star Service'. IVHA is responsible for 6,000 properties in Manchester, England and began the Gold Star Service in 1998. The housing association sought innovative ways to deal with problems of low demand and high turnover for their properties and also with concerns that the authority was spending 80 per cent of its resources on 20 per cent of its tenants in dealing with anti-social behaviour complaints and collecting rent arrears (IVHA 2003: 5).

Under the Gold Star Service, tenants have the choice of becoming members and as many as 80 per cent of IVHA tenants had signed up to the scheme in 2003 (ODPM 2003) and 90 per cent in 2004 (Manion 2004). Those who do join the scheme are able to activate a range of services and incentives. Examples of these include vouchers for local retail outlets and one-off competitions as well as access to enhanced management services such as fast track repair and maintenance and rent discounts. Tenants also receive £62 a year for paying their rent on time after two years (Manion 2004). Tenants can also choose to pool their Gold Star Service rewards for the benefit

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[4] ABS (1999) *Australian Housing Survey - Housing Characteristics, Costs and Conditions*, Cat No4182.0 Canberra report that 87 per cent of all public tenant's income is low enough to receive a rental rebate.

of the wider community (for example communal gardens). The scheme was originally targeted at tenants, but now also includes partner agencies, leaseholders and owner-occupiers within localities managed by IVHA.

Alongside incentives for tenants, the introduction of the Gold Star Service also entails a restructuring of the Housing Authority's organisation. The introduction of Gold Star has resulted in the replacement of generic positions with specialist teams to work in the areas of community housing management, legal services, marketing and lettings, repairs and maintenance, and supported housing. The Chief Executive of IVHA reported that since the introduction of Gold Star rent arrears have fallen, numbers of empty properties have declined and tenants report a significant improvement in their neighbourhood (Manion 2004). In addition, IVHA collected 100 per cent of rent in a year and whilst IVHA has a stringent eviction policy they have the lowest rate of evictions per capita.

IVHA's Gold Star service has been hailed as a successful housing management innovation by the UK government and other social housing agencies have followed their lead. In 2004, fifty organisations in the UK were looking at implementing incentive schemes and forty were paying IVHA for advice on incentive schemes. IVHA have set up their own consulting company called Au79 to sell the idea to others and the USA is beginning to be seen as a market for TIS (Manion 2004).

### 3.1.1  Other UK Examples

Though IVHA has been the pioneer, other UK housing organisations have developed TIS. For example, the Andernglen Housing Association in Glasgow, Scotland established a 'Gold Scheme' in June 2002, based on the model developed by IVHA. Andernglen only had 500 tenancies and in 2002 55 per cent of their tenancies participated in the TIS (Aberdeen City Council 2003:8). Incentives under the Andernglen TIS include a bond that can be used in supermarkets and some shops (£52) and competitions for concert tickets and seasonal prizes.  In 2002, they were also looking to develop a scheme that matches funding for community groups (Aberdeen City Council 2003:8). A year after the scheme was introduced, there had been no noticeable change in vacancies or rent-arrears, but the Association expected that this would take time. They did note, however, that communication between tenants and staff had improved since the introduction of the scheme. They also noted that staff workloads had increased, and that they had underestimated the work involved in implementing the service. However, they expected that 'embedding this service into the day to day working practice will produce an overall positive effect on staff and service delivery in the future' (Aberdeen City Council 2003:8).  The TIS established by Andernglen is examined further in a study by Flint (2004).

In Birmingham, England, Castle Vale Housing Action Trust have introduced a TIS service also based upon the IVHA Gold Star Service which they have titled 'VIP Gold', for tenants residing within an area undergoing regeneration (ODPM 2003).  Benefits of Castle Vale VIP Gold service are available to tenants who have a clear rent account or have an agreement to pay off their arrears. Purchasers and owners are also eligible so long as they do not fall behind with service charges payable to the Housing Action Trust. All members receive similar benefits; for example, shopping discount cards, appointments for repairs service, a club magazine, home contents insurance, faster repair services and prizes. The Castle Vale Trust noted that establishing the scheme has been expensive. The consultants' fees, staff training, marketing and the 'incentives' themselves all added cost. The ODPM report examined the success of their incentive scheme and noted for example, arrears had fallen from £244,444 in July 2001 (before the implementation of Gold Service) to £159,716 in April 2002. However, the authors of the ODPM report were not confident in being able to attribute this considerable reduction entirely to the introduction of VIP Gold.

In Somerset, in the west of England, SHAL Housing Association (formerly known as Sedgwater Housing Association Trust) offers £50 supermarket vouchers to tenants who are not in arrears over the financial year. Following this innovation, management reported that rent arrears have fallen by 8 per cent (Housing Today 2003). SHAL also provide £200 to tenants who provide four weeks notice before terminating their tenancy and leave their property in good order. Other TIS services operated by housing associations in the UK include schemes established by Derby Homes, Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing and Family Housing Association in Manchester. All three organisations operate prize draws to encourage tenants to pay their rent on time.

So far, mention has been made of housing associations that generally manage smaller numbers of properties than municipal housing authorities. Some larger municipal authorities have also developed TIS. For example, Newham Council in east London have developed TIS 'New Gold' specifically to address problems of anti-social behaviour (Housing Today 2003). In return for good behaviour and paying rent on time, tenants are offered discounts at local shops and leisure centres and a fast-track repair service. A number of municipal housing authorities in Scotland have also established similar TIS, including Aberdeen City Council (2003) and Edinburgh City Council. Table 3 below provides a summary of examples of some of the different types of schemes that have been developed by UK housing organisations.

**Table 4: Summary of TIS developed by UK housing organisations**

| Housing Organisation | Details of TIS | Eligibility | Commencement of TIS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Kirklees Local Authority** | Christmas hamper and regular prize draws | Tenants with a clear rent account | December 2003 |
| **Castle Vale Housing Action Trust, Birmingham** | Bonus bonds, discount cards, cut price insurance, magazine, specific appointment for repairs | Tenants who have a clear rent account for 8 weeks or who have kept an arrears arrangement for 12 weeks | July 2001 |
| **Family Housing Association, Manchester** | Monthly draw to win prizes up to £500 | Tenants with a clear rent account | N/A |
| **Irwell Valley Housing Association, Manchester** | Accelerated repair service, greater choice, cash and bonus bonds | Tenants who adhere to their tenancy agreement and pay rent on time | October 1998 |
| **SHAL Housing, Somerset** | £50 supermarket voucher or £200 cash prize | Tenants with a clear rent account | April 2002 |

Source: Adapted from Bennett (2003)

## 3.2  Assessing the effectiveness of TIS

One of the challenges of assessing the effectiveness of TIS is the fact that much of the literature is written specifically as promotional material, with the aim of showing the advantages of TIS. It is therefore important to balance this with data that seeks to reveal a more objective perspective on the utility of schemes such as Gold Star. However, at this juncture, there is very little data that can be accessed and there have not been any reports that have taken an overtly critical approach. (The ODPM report

only contained a few veiled criticisms and was very favourable to the principles of a TIS.) There are three ways of addressing this gap in the literature; first, to make comparisons with other associations' performance; second, to track key performance indicators over time to monitor improvements; and third, to examine surveys to gauge the view of tenants.

### 3.2.1  Comparative analysis with similar housing associations

In terms of comparative analysis, the most useful report is the UK Housing Corporation's Inspection of Irwell Valley Housing Association undertaken in 2003 (Housing Corporation 2003). In contrast to the promotional literature, the inspection report provides a detailed assessment of the services provided such as repairs and maintenance, tenant participation, customer services and responses to anti social behaviour. The report also provides answers to specific questions including 'how good is the service?' and 'is the Association working for continuous improvement?'. While generally supportive of the services provided by IVHA, the Housing Corporation's report highlights a number of concerns. For instance, though recognising that Gold Star had 'brought about an improved customer service' it comments that the Association needs to monitor its service standards to ensure it has allocated sufficient resources to deliver the current high level of performance it has set itself. Another criticism voiced by the Housing Corporation's inspectors was that IVHA 'needs to be aware that there are potential weaknesses in its processes'. More specifically, recommendations were made that IVHA should consider ways tenants can be informed of the progress of their repairs; feedback from tenants should be sought and communication with tenants should be on a more regular basis. Overall, the rating of the IVHA provided by the Housing Corporation was 'satisfactory'.

Though it is important not to infer too much from the Inspectors' report, it does provide evidence to suggest that the introduction of TIS may not, by itself, lead to significant improvements across all areas of service delivery. In Table 3, details of Irwell Valley Housing Association's performance as compared with similar housing associations are shown.

**Table 5: Selection of performance indicators (Irwell Valley Housing Association in comparison with group and national average [England]**

| Performance Indicator | Irwell Valley Housing Association | Group Average | National Average |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average weekly management costs per home | 10.3 | 9.78 | 10.31 |
| Annual rent increase | 0.5 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Average relet times (weeks) | 4.1 | 6.78 | 5.5 |
| Rent collected per cent | 96.1 | 94.6 | 94.6 |
| Rent arrears | 3.9 | 6.1 | 5.8 |
| Repairs appointment kept | 100 | 94.5 | 93.0 |

Source: Extracted from Housing Corporation (2003) Inspection Report Irwell Valley Housing Association, March.

The performance indicators illustrate that in comparison with similar housing associations, Irwell Valley performs well, particularly in respect of repairs appointments, average letting time for empty properties and rent arrears collection. However, the management costs to achieve these performances are above average for housing associations with a similar profile and stock.

### 3.2.2  Tracking key performance indicators over time

The second way of assessing the effectiveness of TIS is to track key performance indicators over time in service delivery areas such as rent collection, void turnover and tenant satisfaction. For IVHA, the data reveals improvements since Gold Service was first introduced.

**Table 6: Irwell Valley Key Performance Data 1997-2002**

| Performance Indicator | 97/8 per cent | 98/9 per cent | 99/00 per cent | 2000/01 per cent | 01/02 per cent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current and former tenant arrears | 8.49 | 8.29 | 6.74 | 4.78 | 4.77 |
| Percentage of rent collected | 95.49 | 100.4 | 100.12 | 100.4 | 99.39 |
| Empty Properties (Voids) available to let | 2.75 | 2.21 | 1.6 | 1.54 | 1.06 |

The figures in Table 5 suggest that Gold Star has had a beneficial impact.  These data appear to complement IVHA's claim that for every £1 spent, IVHA has benefited by £2 in additional rental income and savings resulting from properties not requiring security. It is claimed management costs have fallen by 9 per cent (ODPM 2003: 11), although this claim is difficult to verify because of changes to staffing structure and stock transfer.

### 3.2.3  Tenant perceptions of TIS

The third method of evaluating TIS is to record tenants' perceptions of the scheme. ODPM (2003) reports that of the 80 per cent of Irwell Valley tenants interviewed in 1998 about the plan to introduce Gold Star 'the overwhelming majority' were in favour. ODPM (2003:12) also reports on a commissioned survey undertaken in 2002 that resulted in a 41 per cent response. Of those who responded, 94 per cent were Gold Star Members. The 6 per cent (116 tenants) who were not members gave a number of reasons for not joining. The largest contingent were those in rent arrears: 59 per cent; 21 per cent did not know of Gold Star; 8 per cent did not support the introduction of Gold Star; 7 per cent stated other reasons for not joining; 3 per cent claimed it was not worth joining and 3 per cent were barred because of breaches to their tenancy agreement. However, no independent evaluation of Irwell Valley's Gold Star Service has been carried out, so it is not possible to provide any corroboration of this data.

## 3.3  Transferability of UK Tenant Incentive Schemes

For the purposes of this Positioning Paper the key question concerning TIS relates to transferability. Specifically: 'can the working practices of the Gold Star Service provided by IVHA be utilised effectively by other housing organisations?'. This question was addressed in a report published by the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (OPDM 2003).

The report found that the two most positive results of TIS were enhanced tenant satisfaction and the encouragement of tenants to comply with their tenancy. However, the report stated that there was only limited evidence to show that tenant incentives by themselves could actually change behaviour. Indeed, it concluded that incentives are 'unlikely to have more than a marginal effect' unless they are 'accompanied by wider changes in the culture and service delivery of the landlord' and that to sustain the benefits of a tenant incentive scheme 'it is essential to 'bed' the service into the culture of the organisation' (ODPM 2003). In outlining the steps taken by IVHA to overhaul its existing working practices to facilitate the introduction of Gold Star, the report describes front line staff meeting with senior management 'to discuss and debate the principles and ideas underlying Gold Star and then have an input into the process'. Nevertheless, despite the incorporation of input from staff the report found it apparent from the publicity produced by IVHA that the impetus for the Gold Star scheme emanated from the leadership style of their Chief Executive Tom Manion. However, the ODPM report suggested that this leadership style is not essential to the success of TIS.

The ODPM report also included information from interviews with UK Landlords interested in adopting TIS. These landlords were concerned about the issue of providing appropriate incentives across a range of cultures and also of making specific arrangements for vulnerable tenants 'in terms of incentives and accessing them' (ODPM 2003). On the other hand, they argued that in making such special arrangements they would have a better knowledge of their tenants and their vulnerabilities.

Perhaps the most significant issues raised by the ODPM report in respect of the transferability of TIS were cost and size. IVHA reported an overall saving after implementing Gold Star. As quoted earlier IVHA, in their financial evaluation of the service, claimed that for every £1 spent on TIS, they saved £2 in negative expenditure (i.e. on repairs, arrears, rent loss through vacancies and management time). However, despite the claims made about the financial benefits of Gold Star as operated by IVHA, the ODPM report found that the size of the authority proposing to implement a tenant incentive scheme was a major factor in its success. If the authority was too small, then they may not be able to cover the costs of implementing a scheme like Gold Star. On the other hand, if they are too big, for example a national housing association, they 'could have a nightmare with identifying achievement of the eligibility criteria for tens of thousands of tenants' (ODPM 2003). In short, TIS modelled on IVHA's Gold Star would be problematic for both very small and very large housing organisations.

## 3.4 Evaluating Tenant Incentive Schemes

One of the key challenges in developing TIS is to devise a robust evaluation methodology that ensures advantages and disadvantages are both made explicit. As already stated, one of the problems with much of the literature on TIS is that it is intended to promote the schemes. There is a shortage of objective, critical literature. For example, the ODPM report team (2003) only interviewed housing organisations that had either adopted TIS or was considering adopting TIS. This of course meant that the sample of interviewees were generally disposed towards TIS. There was no attempt to elicit the views of housing organisations where TIS had been rejected as inappropriate. Nor does there seem to have been any attempt to interview staff who were critical of the operation of Gold Star. In spite of these shortcomings, the existing reviews (ODPM 2003; Flint 2003; Deacon 2004) do allude to a number of potential risks in adopting Gold Star versions of TIS. These are:

- *Potential cost of the scheme*: Though IVHA claims that significant savings can be made in the long term there are high start-up costs, especially if housing organisations restructure their staffing. The authors of the ODPM report stated their concern about the expense including feasibility studies and implementation costs that might make it too dear an investment for smaller associations.

- *Capacity to accentuate the divide between 'good' and 'bad' tenants*: The introduction of a Gold Star style TIS may be negatively perceived by those excluded from membership and that perception could lead to further alienation.

- *Impact on the governance of housing organisations*: Implementing Gold Star style services is not simply about providing incentives to tenants to modify their behaviour. The IVHA version also entails a radical staffing overhaul as part of its attempt to adopt more customer focused practices. In practice, the introduction of commercial working methods adopted from the private sector may conflict with other strategic directions and imperatives, including a public sector ethos. Like UK municipal housing authorities but not UK housing associations, the overall management of Australian SHAs is ultimately tied to the electoral process, as political control of SHAs resides with the governing political parties.

- *Impact on third parties:* The arguments for and against welfare conditionality are provided by Deacon (2004). He contends that TIS are a *prima facia* example of welfare contractualism, the idea that entitlement is dependent on certain conditions relating to behaviour. While Deacon is broadly in favour of conditionality as a component of housing policy, he highlights the more problematic aspects of welfare contracts between landlord and tenant including the potential adverse impact on third parties, especially the children of parents who fail to comply with the conditions that have been imposed. However, Deacon argues that contractualism has been an important component of the UK welfare state and has proved successful and he is critical of those writers who see such contractual arrangements as too overtly disciplinary in either intent or effect.

## 3.5  International Literature (USA, NZ and The Netherlands)

In spite of the publicity surrounding TIS in the UK, there is a lack of evidence of the utilisation of TIS in other countries. Extensive web searches were undertaken and email contact made with housing authorities in the USA, New Zealand and Canada. The search revealed that though innovative housing management practices were being used, housing authorities in these countries have yet to operate TIS along the lines of Gold Star. In other nation states with a similar social housing environment to Australia's, namely the USA, Canada and NZ, the development of TIS has been limited to a small number of *ad hoc* arrangements such as prize draws for tenants who maintain their rent account in credit. However, in all these countries, housing organisations are seeking to develop a more customer orientated focus. For example in Nebraska and Omaha (Housing Today 2003) in the USA, tenants are consulted on a regular basis about issues related to service delivery. In the Netherlands, a recent paper (Housing Today 2003) reported that TIS are being actively considered by 40 housing associations and that IVHA staff are acting as consultants to develop TIS.

## 3.6  Summary

The evidence from the UK shows that the most advanced TIS all draw extensively from the model provided by IVHA. The most controversial aspect of the IVHA Gold Star Service is the two-tier repair service. As discussed above, households who comply with their tenancy agreement and opt into the Gold Star Service agreement are entitled to a fast-track repair service and other benefits. Those tenants accessing Gold Star service who subsequently break tenancy agreement (e.g. fall into rent arrears or engage in anti-social behaviour practices) forfeit their membership entitlements. The lack of international evidence suggests that no TIS like those developed by IVHA are yet in place, though there has been considerable interest in the successes reported by the Irwell Valley Chief Executive (Manion 2004).

# 4 STATE AND TERRITORY HOUSING AUTHORITY POLICIES

This chapter outlines the existing TIS in each SHA in Australia. While no large-scale schemes as extensive as Irwell Valley's Gold Star Service are currently operating in Australia, interest in the potential of TIS appears to be gaining ground. The Western Australian housing authority runs a tenant incentive scheme with a number of incentives provided and the South Australian Housing Trust is currently looking at implementing a range of TIS in the near future. The Northern Territory Housing Services runs a garden subsidy scheme for tenants whose rent is up to date and the ACT and Tasmanian housing authorities run small competitions to reward good tenants. The New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland housing authorities do not run any TIS. Details of each State and Territory's policies are set out below.

## 4.1 Western Australia

Homeswest, under the Department of Housing and Works in Western Australia, provides housing for 39,000 low to moderate-income families. Homeswest currently has in place a 'good tenant' policy. Homeswest 'will recognise the efforts of tenants who consistently comply with' their tenancy agreements (Good Tenant Policy 31). Good tenants are rewarded in the following ways:

A letter of appreciation from Homeswest officers.

New constructions and properties in an area of high demand will generally only be allocated to tenants with a proven tenancy history.

Good tenants may apply for a paint kit to complete painting of all internal walls and ceilings where the property has not been painted for five years.

Good tenants may be considered for increased amenities outside normal guidelines (e.g. security screens).

Tenants may also be provided with a $50 voucher to purchase plants for their garden.

## 4.2 South Australia

The South Australian Housing Trust is currently looking at options for implementing TIS. They are looking at introducing customer incentives in two stages. Stage One will make available some rewards and recognitions to 'good' tenants as soon as possible. A 'good' tenant is defined as a tenant who:

Constantly complies with the terms of the tenancy conditions including paying rent and any outstanding debts consistently; maintaining harmonious relations with neighbours and the general community; and maintaining the property in a clean and tenantable condition, developing and maintaining garden areas and property where appropriate.

Shows commitment to the local area. For example by taking responsibility for regularly cleaning the foyers or communal laundries in flats and for maintaining communal gardens and acting as a handy person in cottage flats.

Provides customer suggestions.

Initiates or participates in an anti-graffiti programme within a Trust area.

Takes part in focus groups.

Stage Two will consider a system that focuses on tenants' behaviour to encourage compliance with the Conditions of Tenancy. The focus will be on strategies that could

cause a positive change in behaviour. The strategies adopted could be drawn from aspects of the South Australian Housing Trust financial management protocols or IVHA's Gold Service (UK).

## 4.3  Northern Territory

Territory Housing runs a Garden Subsidy Scheme, providing funding for tenants to improve the gardens of public housing dwellings. First tenants of new houses and duplexes can receive up to $500, subsequent tenants of houses and duplexes can get up to $200. All tenants of units can receive up to $100. Such garden subsidies are only available to tenants whose rent is up to date and who do not have any other outstanding payment (Northern Territory Housing Services 2004).

## 4.4  ACT

The ACT housing authority runs a garden competition and a tenant of the month competition, which offer a prize in the form of a shopping voucher. However, it does not run any larger-scale TIS.

## 4.5  Tasmania

Housing Tasmania runs a gardening competition where the prize is a voucher for a local plant nursery. They have also provided some prizes to tenants who attended a fire safety expo and to tenants who participated in a 'Home Tick' programme to check building conditions. Tenants who received Centrelink payments and paid their rent through Easy Pay (which automatically transfers tenants' rent from their Centrelink payments, thereby ensuring their rent is on time) also had a chance of winning two weeks free rent in a competition in late 2004.

## 4.6  New South Wales

Housing New South Wales has considered incentives such as offering to paint inside a house or offering gardening tools to good tenants, however Housing New South Wales does not currently offer any positive incentives to good tenants. The Department of Housing does provide a small grants programme for local tenant groups however.

## 4.7  Victoria

Housing Victoria does not offer any TIS.

## 4.8  Queensland

Queensland Department of Housing does not operate any formal tenant incentive schemes as such.  It does, however, provide funding to regional public tenant groups and a state-wide tenant representative organisation (Queensland Public Tenants Association). Local and regional housing groups offer some support for tenant participation practices (e.g. garden competitions) but these are all optional activities, and are not real incentive schemes (there is no penalty for not getting involved, and few individual tenancy-related benefits in doing so).

Two recent changes concerning rent policy signify new incentives to encourage tenants to participate in the labour force.  Rent is now based on net income scales (previously, the first $20,000 of income was viewed as net while any additional monies were treated as gross). There is also a new 'guaranteed rent' system, where if a tenant commences work (full time or part time), their rent is protected from increases linked to rising income for a six month period. The previous arrangements used to offer tenants a 'rent increase holiday' for up to six months from their last rent assessment. In practice few tenants received the whole six months rent increase holiday and many only received two or three months protection because of the timing of their previous assessment.

## 4.9  Summary

**Table 7: Summary of State and Territory Incentives for Tenants**

| State/Territory | Examples of Incentives for Tenants |
|---|---|
| **Western Australia** | Good tenant policy to reward tenants who comply with their tenancy agreement: paint kit, gardening vouchers, increased amenities etc |
| **South Australia** | TIS planned but not yet in operation |
| **Northern Territory** | Garden subsidy schemes for tenants who are not in rent arrears |
| **ACT** | Garden competition, and 'tenant of the month' competition (no conditions on tenants to be eligible) |
| **Tasmania** | Gardening competitions, prizes for tenants who attend security expo and building maintenance programme, Centrelink Easy Pay tenants eligible for a prize draw |
| **New South Wales** | Small grants for local tenant programmes |
| **Victoria** | None at present |
| **Queensland** | None at present though tenant participation practices supported. Changes in rent assessments to encourage eligible tenants to participate in the labour market. |

This chapter has shown that TIS are at an early stage of development in Australia. Unlike the UK, there has not been any key agency promoting their deployment. However, there are a number of practices that have sought to provide incentives for tenants on a small scale. The following chapter sets out the data collection methods for the next stage of the research project to gauge interest in TIS and their potential as effective policy instruments.

# 5  NEXT STEPS

## 5.1  Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to explore the potential of TIS in the Australian context. It will assess their utility in encouraging tenants in public housing to have a greater commitment to their home and environment as well as providing a means for housing organisations to achieve improvements in housing management service delivery. Within this overall aim, the project has three specific objectives:

- To document and review the use of TIS in the UK, US and other overseas countries and assess their potential for Australian social housing.
- To explore the utility of TIS as a vehicle for assisting long term sustainability of social housing.
- To model a range of appropriate TIS for social housing organisations and evaluate their applicability for state housing authorities.

## 5.2  Gaps in Knowledge

The Positioning Paper has provided: an introduction to TIS and their utility for social housing organisations; a commentary on Australian and international housing management practices; a review of the ways in which SHAs are seeking to devise innovative practices to address the impact of residualisation and engender good relationships with their tenants. However, to reach a conclusion on the utility of TIS in the Australian context, further investigation is required to achieve:

- A greater understanding of the potential of deploying TIS in terms of service delivery, tenant satisfaction, community well being and staff organisational culture.

- A greater appreciation of the resources required and institutional changes required to implement TIS.

- An assessment of the role tenants can play in the development of TIS.

- An appreciation of the ways in which TIS can be evaluated and what performance indicators are required to gauge the utility of TIS.

## 5.3  Methodology

The next, empirical, stage of the project will build upon the discussion of housing management and the literature review set out in this Positioning Paper. It will entail three case study investigations to address the four gaps identified above and thereby further an understanding of the utility of TIS in the Australian context. The empirical component of the project will seek answers to interrelated questions (set out below). The questions encompass issues relating to the potential of TIS in terms of service delivery and organisational culture, model development and evaluative concerns.

### 5.3.1  TIS Potential

What can be learnt from international best practice in the development of TIS?

What are the benefits of deploying TIS in terms of a) service delivery b) tenant satisfaction c) community well being and d) staff/organisational culture?

What problems might arise in adopting TIS?

### 5.3.2  Model Development

What organisational steps are required to develop effective TIS?

What institutional capacity is required to implement TIS?

How can residents be effectively involved in the development of TIS?

### 5.3.3 Evaluative concerns

How should TIS be evaluated?

What are the implications for tenants who choose not to participate in TIS and participants who break the conditions of their tenancy?

## 5.4 Scoping the Potential of TIS

This next stage of the research will build upon the findings set out in the Positioning Paper. It will consist of in-depth discussions with senior housing staff, housing managers, tenant focus groups and representatives of peak tenant organisations.[5] The intention is to explore a range of different TIS models (similar to the Gold Star TIS operated by Irwell Valley Housing Association) with key stakeholders to gauge their views on the utility of different aspects of TIS.

Though the research findings have relevance for all SHAs, for reasons of cost, the investigations for the next stage of the research will be restricted to just four states; New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. The data collection techniques that will be used include:

- Three focus group meetings with a cross-section of tenants (one per state)

- 30 semi-structured interviews with senior and housing management staff (ten per state)

- 15 interviews with community representatives and peak-body organisations (five per state)

The data that will be produced from these investigations will supplement the information collected in this Positioning Paper. In particular, the interviews and focus group discussions will provide a richness and depth of understanding about the practical and strategic issues involved in the development and implementation of TIS.

## 5.5 Data Analysis

The table below (Table 7) sets out the conceptual themes that will be used to organise the data, alongside the questions and methods of research. It is envisaged the final report will be structured around the three thematic areas of TIS potential, model development and evaluation.

The validity of the data will be enhanced through a range of steps. These include: the creation of supportive environments for the focus groups; accurate capture of data through tape-recording and transcription; grounding the interview and focus group questions through the literature review and review of current practice; conducting case studies across three jurisdictions (New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania); and triangulation through use of multiple researchers.

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[5] A survey was considered but it was decided that because of the exploratory nature of the research a survey would be an inappropriate data collection technique.

**Table 8: Case Study Questions, Methods and Thematic Areas for Analysis**

| Case study questions | Methods of research | Themes areas | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | TIS potential | Model development | Evaluation concerns |
| What can be learnt from international best practice in the development of TIS? | International literature review | √ | √ | √ |
| What practices are or have been deployed by SHAs to encourage tenants to take a greater stake in their neighbourhood? | Literature review | √ | √ | |
| What are the benefits of deploying TIS in terms of a) service delivery b) tenant satisfaction c) community well being and d) organisational culture? | Interviews, focus groups, literature review | √ | | |
| What problems might arise in adopting TIS? | Interviews, literature review | √ | | |
| What are the likely cost implications of deploying TIS? | Interviews, literature review | | √ | |
| What organisational steps are required to develop an effective TIS? | Interviews with SHA officers, literature review | | √ | √ |
| What institutional capacity is required to implement a TIS? | Interviews | | √ | |
| How can residents be effectively involved in the deployment of a TIS? | Literature review, interviews and focus groups | | √ | |
| How can TIS be evaluated, what performance indicators are required to assess TIS utility? | Focus groups with tenants, interviews with SHA officers | | | √ |

# 6  CONCLUSION

This Positioning Paper has provided a preliminary investigation of Tenant Incentive Schemes (TIS). It has surveyed the international literature and audited current Australian policies with regard to implementation of TIS, and has considered methods to evaluate their suitability for use by Australian SHAs.

TIS were initially used by UK housing associations. The original Gold Star model designed and operated by IVHA remains the dominant prototype. TIS reward social housing tenants who fulfil their tenancy obligations by offering an additional tier of benefits from those normally supplied by the landlord. In principle, they can be used to influence tenant behaviour, address problems relating to community disengagement and enhance the morale of front-line housing staff. TIS can be 'tailored' to match the circumstances of specific areas, landlords or tenant groups. The underlying concern, as articulated in the UK, is that 'many housing management practice activities are too focused on problem tenants' and not on the majority of tenants who adhere to the conditions of their tenancy (ODPM 2003).

TIS have been credited with reduced rent arrears, smaller numbers of empty properties; significant improvements in tenanted neighbourhoods and higher staff morale, although caution is required as there is not sufficient evidence to verify the claims made by those promoting TIS. Gold Star has been hailed as a successful housing management innovation by the UK government and has been adapted for use by UK housing associations and municipal authorities. Housing organisations in the USA and the Netherlands are currently considering similar schemes. However, the point has been made by authors of a UK government report  (ODPM 2003) that the introduction of TIS may not, by itself, lead to significant improvements across all areas of service delivery. Incentives are 'unlikely to have more than a marginal effect' unless they are 'accompanied by wider changes in the culture and service delivery of the landlord'. The introduction of Gold Star itself resulted in the replacement of generic positions with specialist teams to work in the areas of community housing management, legal services, marketing and lettings, repairs and maintenance, and supported housing. To sustain the benefits of a tenant incentive scheme 'it is essential to 'bed' the service into the culture of the organisation' (ODPM 2003).

From a review of the limited international literature available, this Positioning Paper identifies three major risks – potential cost of the scheme; impact on the governance of housing organisations; and the consequences for third parties notably children – as well as the benefits attributed to TIS.

A survey of practice across SHAs shows that none has yet introduced a Gold Star-style scheme. However, a range of management practices is being used that underline the importance of tenancy obligations. Some are presented as rewards, such as garden subsidy schemes for complying tenants, although as highlighted in the Positioning Paper, these should not be viewed as  explicit incentive schemes (there is no penalty for not participating, and little individual tenancy-related benefit in doing so. Other practices are more clearly deterrent or punitive, such as 'renewable tenancies', the introduction of rental bonds for new public tenancies, and strong policies towards evictions, 'anti-social behaviour', and debt recovery or prior-debt policies. The fundamental question of the research project remains: how far are TIS transferable to Australian public housing?

A TIS, as developed by IVHA, represents a significant innovation in housing management practices. First, it is premised on an assumption that an enhanced contract arrangement with tenants can provide the incentive for tenants to regulate their behaviour in terms of maintaining their property and environment, paying their rent and acting as responsible neighbours. Second, it adopts market principles that are usually associated with the private sector in order to publicise success and 'rebrand'

the image of the housing organisation. Third, as Flint (2004) has pointed out, the most controversial aspect of fully-fledged TIS is the explicit differentiation of service provision that is based on an assessment of individual tenant conduct. In practice, tenants who opt to join TIS expect benefits that are not available to non-members. In addition, those who break the conditions of their membership agreement (for example, fall behind with their rent or engage in anti-social behaviour practices) are excluded from the incentive scheme. A consequence for housing organisations that seek to establish a differentiation of service provision is that, in all likelihood, the groups who are excluded will be the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged. For this reason, TIS may actually reinforce social divisions within housing localities and further alienate tenants.

Tenant Incentives Schemes as promoted by IVHA entail a major overhaul of the organisational structure and not just a 'bolt on' of an additional suite of services. In practice, it would be difficult to envisage how SHAs could take such a radical step without considerable disruption and extra costs, given the complexity of their services and strategic objectives. However, it should be possible to explore whether or not those incentives that are supported by tenants can be operationalised by Australian SHAs. These issues will be addressed in the Final Report.

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