

1. Policy intent

This policy establishes a formal process to ensure there is a consistent approach to managing the aged housing facilities of the Tablelands Regional Council.

2. Scope

This policy shall apply when considering all requests relating to the aged housing facilities of the Tablelands Regional Council.

3. Background/supporting information

3.1 Eligibility

3.1.1 Eligibility

The Aged Housing Policy adopts the eligibility process currently used by the Department of Communities which involves moving from a wait-turn system for social housing assistance to a need-based assessment. Introduced from 1 August 2007 for affordable housing providers, implementation of these criteria is a requirement of section 26B of the *Housing Regulation 2003* for all housing funded under capital funding by Queensland Government.

3.1.2 Common eligibility criteria

- a. The Common Eligibility Criteria as outlined under Section 26 of the *Housing Regulation 2003* requires all registered providers funded under the longer term and transitional housing programs (of which Tablelands Regional Council is aligned) to implement a common eligibility criteria. All applicants for social housing assistance must meet all of the common eligibility criteria to apply for housing assistance through the department's Housing Services offices.
- b. Applicants for social housing are assessed against all of the following common eligibility criteria:
 - i. Australian citizenship or permanent residency;
 - ii. Queensland residency;
 - iii. Assets test (property ownership and liquid assets);
 - iv. Independent income;
 - v. Household income limits; and
 - vi. Appropriateness of current housing.
- c. If an applicant referred to Tablelands Regional Council for housing assistance does not meet all eligibility criteria, the Department of Communities, Housing Service office should be contacted immediately (this is relevant only for Queensland Government funded housing).

3.1.3 The common eligibility criteria are also used in assessing client-initiated transfer applications residency

- a. Applicants must be a Queensland resident;
- b. Are an Australian citizen;

- c. Have been granted permanent residency status;
- d. Qualify for permanent residency status through agreements between Australia and another
- e. country; and
- f. Have resided in the Tablelands Regional Council area for five (5) years and over or have
- g. relatives living in the Tablelands Regional Council for ten (10) years and over will be given
- h. preference.

3.1.4 Liquid assets limit

- a. The applicant's household combined liquid assets limit must be within the current limit within the applicant's household size. The liquid assets of all household members are added together to make up the household liquid assets. The household combined liquid assets limits are assessed on an annual basis by the Department of Communities. The household combined liquid assets as shown within this policy is based on 2012/2013 financial year.
- b. Liquid assets include:
 - i. money in the bank;
 - ii. shares, fixed investments, managed funds;
 - iii. property trusts;
 - iv. superannuation payouts (if you have reached the preservation age); and
 - v. different liquid assets limits apply for single person households and households with two or more people;
 - vi. different liquid assets limits apply for single person households and households with two or more people. These liquid assets are reviewed on regular basis.

Single-person household	\$80,437.50
Two or more household members	\$100,000.00

3.1.5 Independent income

Applicants must have an independent income which is earned in Queensland; and at least one (1) applicant in the household must:

- a. receive an independent income amount of at least \$197.88 per week (independent income assessed on an annual basis by the Department of Communities and figures shows based on 2012/2013 financial year); and
- b. have received this income for at least four (4) weeks immediately prior to applying for housing assistance;
- c. hold a Temporary Protection Visa or reside in a correctional facility, and do not have an independent income, and, if eligible, be placed on the housing register;
- d. at least one (1) applicant must receive the minimum independent income stated above. Any other household member who has no income, a very low income or cannot identify or verify their income will be assessed as having an income based on the Equivalent Centrelink Payment;
- e. the Equivalent Centrelink Payment is the payment that most closely aligns with the applicants circumstances. The Equivalent Centrelink Payment depends on, but is not limited to, age, marital status, whether the applicant lives at or away from home, and if the applicant has children.

3.1.6 Household income

- a. Applicants require an independent income to be eligible for housing assistance. Also the applicant is required to provide the gross weekly assessable income of the household, which is the combined income of all household members. Some income, such as certain allowances paid by Centrelink, is not included as weekly assessable income.
- b. The household's combined gross weekly assessable income (income assessed on an annual basis by the Department of Communities) must be less than:

Income	Household type
\$609	Single person, no children
\$755	Single person, one child couple with no children, or two single people.

3.1.7 Property ownership

Under capital funded housing a household member must not own or part-own property within Australia and overseas including (if a household owns or part owns property, they can use this property to house themselves). Any elderly or disability applicant, 55 years and over on a disability and/or aged pension who has owned their own home and who has resided in the Tablelands regional area for five (5) years, or has relatives living on the Tablelands for ten (10) years or longer and find their present accommodation not suitable will be eligible to apply for Council owned housing.

3.2 Allocation

3.2.1 Allocation

- a. Tablelands Regional Council as a registered Long Term Community Housing and Affordable Housing provider with the Department of Communities is required to adhere to the Department of Communities Allocations Policy Long Term Community Housing Program and Affordable Housing Providers (Allocations Policy). The Allocation Policy guidelines are a requirement of section 26B of the *Housing Regulation 2003*.
- b. The Allocation Policy establishes processes for making allocations by the Queensland Government for the capital funded units controlled by the Tablelands Regional Council and is to cover client allocation processes associated with the operation of the housing register and referral processes whereby:
 - i. the relevant departmental Housing Service Centre assesses applicants' housing needs and maintains the housing register;
 - ii. the registered provider notifies the relevant departmental Housing Service Centre that it has a property available for tenancing;
 - iii. the relevant departmental Housing Service Centre identifies and advises the provider of eligible applicants who may match the available property;
 - iv. the relevant departmental Housing Service Centre provides a shortlist of applicants to the registered provider on a referral report or confirms the eligibility of nominated applicants;
 - v. the registered provider determines the final match of applicant to property;
 - vi. the registered provider makes an offer of accommodation to an applicant.

3.2.2 Transfers

Transfers within the Allocations Policy establishes arrangements for clients and registered providers to initiate transfers where a client's social housing property is no longer appropriate for their needs or available for their continued tenure.

Under the Allocations Policy, a client assessed as requiring a transfer may transfer to another property of the *same* registered provider, to a property of *another* registered provider, or may be assisted to lodge a transfer application with the relevant departmental Housing Service Centre. Tablelands Regional Council is required to assess transfer applications according to the transfer criteria published by the Department of Communities and the associated transfer procedure.

3.3 Community housing rent policy

3.3.1 Rent policy

Tablelands Regional Council, being a recognised Community Housing Provider adheres to the principles as outlined in the Community Housing Rent Policy. The Community Housing Rent Policy provides tenants with low to moderate incomes with affordable housing.

3.3.2 Rent assessment - how does the tablelands regional council calculate rent?

- a. The Tablelands Regional Council assesses the applicant's household assessable income to calculate the rent subsidy and the required rent payable.
- b. The payable rent is based on either:
 - i. 25% of the household's assessable income; or
 - ii. the market rent for the property in which the applicant currently lives, whichever is lowest.
- c. The rent assessment principles used by the Tablelands Regional Council ensures equity for tenants in long term community housing.

3.3.3 Maximum rent

Community Housing tenants are charged an affordable rent, with the maximum rent charged being the market rent for the dwelling. The market rent is assessed by an independent valuator nominated by Tablelands Regional Council or by the Residential Tenancy Authority (RTA) as required and not more than once in every twelve (12) months.

3.3.4 Rent arrears

- a. If the tenant is not able to pay their rent, they are required to contact the Tablelands Regional Council's Aged Housing Officer immediately to discuss. If the rent is not paid for two (2) weeks, the Aged Housing Officer will issue a *Notice to Remedy Breach* (RTA Form 11).
- b. The tenant will have ten (10) days to pay the outstanding rent. If payment is not received, a Notice to Leave (RTA Form 12) will be sent. This will give a further fourteen (14) days for the tenant to pay their rent. If the tenant does not pay the rent by the end of this fourteen (14) day period, the Tablelands Regional Council, in partnership with the Department of Communities may apply to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a termination order to end the tenancy.

- c. If the tenant does not leave the house or pay the arrears, Tablelands Regional Council, in partnership with the Department of Communities will lodge an application for a Termination Order with the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

3.3.5 Rent reviews

Tablelands Regional Council reviews rent on an annual basis.

3.3.6 Rent payment methods

There are different methods for payment of rent to suit the tenant's requirements. Tenants who have signed the Rental Tenancy Agreement must make sure that their rent is paid.

- a. Cash, Cheque or Money Order
Tenants are able to pay direct to Council over the counter at any Tablelands Regional Council Service centre.
- b. Centrepay deductions
Centrepay is a free direct bill paying service for tenants receiving Centrelink (Pension) payments. Rent can be deducted directly from Centrelink (Pension) payments and paid directly to the Tablelands Regional Council each fortnight.
- c. Electronic Direct Transfer
 - i. Tenants have the option to use the Electronic Direct Transfer whereby fortnightly rental payments are debited from the tenant's bank account and deposited to Tablelands Regional Council's National Australia Bank account.
 - ii. Rent can be also deducted directly for tenants receiving Department of Veteran Affairs payments and paid directly to Tablelands Regional Council each fortnight.

3.4 Capital works

3.4.1 Capital Works and improvements

The purpose of Capital Works and Improvements is to keep the units and cottages to high standard so as to ensure the assets of the Tablelands Regional Council are maintained in good and working condition and in doing so improves the living conditions of the tenants.

3.4.2 Capital Works

Capital works is carried out on existing units to improve the assets where required on an annual basis in accordance with Council's budget review. This capital works carried out can involve the following works:

- d. external painting;
- e. internal painting;
- f. installation of security screens;
- g. replace roof guttering and install gutter guard;
- h. installation of driveways and path ways;
- i. general regular upgrades of all units.

3.4.3 General Regular Maintenance of All Units and Improvements

All requests for improvements to an Aged Housing unit requires a formal request by the tenant through the completion of the Tablelands Regional Council Enhancement Form. This includes the following examples for approval by Tablelands Regional Council:

- a. requests, such as new floor coverings, a new sink, internal painting etc are assessed on an annual basis;
- b. units that are vacated, are assessed and renovated as Council's maintenance programme deems fit. The units are continually being improved and fitted out with the latest aged housing enhancements such as handrails and appropriate access to the units;
- c. improvements such as garden sheds, inbuilt cupboards, carports, air-conditioning etc may be added by the tenant subject to approval of Council, permits, plans and regulations where they apply. Tablelands Regional Council approval is required for all alterations and improvements through the completion of the council 'Tablelands Regional Council Enhancement Form' which is available on request by the tenant;
- d. on approval of a Tablelands Regional Council Enhancement Form the tenant may proceed with the alteration or improvement to be installed, all costs will be paid by the tenant and if the improvement is to remain property of council, council will be responsible for maintenance and repairs after installation;
- e. Tablelands Regional Council will not reimburse tenants for costs expended on improvements and alterations to their units when they vacate units;
- f. Tenants must avoid planting trees near sewerage and drainage pipes or within three meters of the house as this may cause structural problems to foundations, roof and guttering. The tenant will be requested to immediately remove any trees or shrubs that grow over 2 to 3 meters or higher, any clinging vines on units etc as they can cause damage to Council's units.

3.5 Maintenance

3.5.1 Maintenance Criteria and Principles

- a. A reliable maintenance service is provided to all Tablelands Regional Council aged housing as per policies laid down by Tablelands Regional Council. All maintenance issues or enquiries must be reported to one of Council's service centres or directly to the Aged Housing Officer before any maintenance or repairs are commenced.
- b. Tablelands Regional Council relies on its tenants to keep their homes in good condition. As the lessor, Tablelands Regional Council provides a maintenance service and will make arrangements for any necessary repairs that may be required within Tablelands Regional Council maintenance policies. This maintenance service operates during office hours, and an emergency out-of-hours service is also available. All maintenance required for the aged units is coordinated through the Council.
- c. Tablelands Regional Council does not expect tenants to place themselves in danger, however Tablelands Regional Council requests that they look after the designated property and keep units in a clean and satisfactory condition.
- d. When a tenant leaves, the tenant is expected to have maintained his or her home in the same condition as on commencement of the tenancy. Should the aged housing unit require cleaning to remove mould, repair damage, modifications not approved by council etc these costs will be charged to the tenant and Tablelands Regional Council will take action to recover costs.

3.6 Criteria for pets

3.6.1 Criteria for Pets

Tablelands Regional Council recognises that pets can provide companionship, security, and contribute to the health and well-being of our tenants. Tenants will be allowed to keep one (1) dog or (1) one cat where the pet and property complies with Tablelands Regional Council Pet Criteria, Local Laws, *Animal Management Act 2008* and Commonwealth and State Statutes.

3.6.2 Principles

- a. Pets can provide companionship, security, and contribute to the health and well being of people;
- b. pets will be assessed on pet type;
- c. pets will only be approved if the pet/property complies with existing laws;
- d. not all pets will be approved by Council;
- e. the pet is right for the lifestyle and environment of both the pet and applicant;
- f. tenants in the community have the right to live without interference from other tenant's pets.

3.6.3 One dog or one cat permitted per housing unit

- a. Dogs and cats are to be de-sexed, micro chipped and a Veterinarian Certificate attached to the Application;
- b. dogs must be registered as required by Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008;
- c. dogs are not to weigh more than 8 (eight) kilograms;
- d. registered service dogs (including all assistance e.g. Guide dog, hearing dog and assistance dog) greater than 8 (eight) kilograms will be permitted. Copy of certification as per Council's Local Law requirements of a guide dog or hearing dog or assistance dog to be supplied with application;
- e. appropriate fence/enclosure to be erected to approved Council standard, to contain animals to property at all times and the tenant is responsible for the cost associated with the installation and maintenance of the yard and fencing and cages of the animals;
- f. removal of all unwanted rubbish and pet faeces regularly;
- g. regular inspections outside of annual and safety inspections will be carried out as required.

3.6.4 Nuisance and complaints

If an approved pet causes a nuisance and if complaints are received that your pet is interfering with the reasonable peace, comfort and privacy of neighbours, Council will investigate. If you are in breach of your Rental Tenancy Agreement or of Local Government laws, Council will withdraw approval to keep a pet; the owner will be required to remove the pet permanently from the unit within a timeframe designated by Council.

3.7 Aged Housing complaints and appeal

3.7.1 Aged Housing complaints and appeals

Tablelands Regional Council is committed to improving its services to clients by resolving complaints and appeals quickly and effectively. If a tenant or applicant is dissatisfied with the service or actions of the Council or Council staff, the tenant or applicant can lodge a complaint or an appeal against that decision.

3.7.2 Neighbourhood disputes

Complaints about tenants will be accepted by Tablelands Regional Council however, it is not usual Tablelands Regional Council's policy to actively intervene in disputes between neighbours. However, the Tablelands Regional Council will intervene and provide solutions where it is required to do so under the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008*.

3.7.3 Dispute resolution centre

The Dispute Resolution Centre provides mediation services and can help by settling a dispute without legal action. The Dispute Resolution Centre is run by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and involves guiding discussions between the two parties involved to work out an agreement that suits them both. Mediators will not take sides and will not make judgements. The

service maintains your privacy, is usually free, helps you make your own decisions about the dispute and most importantly, will help to have the problem resolved.

3.7.4 Criminal offences

Council does not have authority to investigate criminal offences. For example if a neighbour is being either physically or verbally harassed by another neighbour, or illegal substances are being used on Tablelands Regional Council housing property, please contact the police.

All complaints and appeals will be handled in accordance with the confidentiality and privacy policy of the Tablelands Regional Council.

All complaints will be investigated in light of current legislation, by-laws and policies of the Tablelands Regional Council, which are relevant to the type of complaint or appeal.

Management will monitor complaints or appeals and ensure that practices causing concern are addressed in line with resolution of the Complaints and Appeals Principles.

Complaints or appeals will be dealt with as quickly as possible within the due process outlined and the complainant shall be kept informed of the relevant process and timeframes.

4. Policy statement

Tablelands Regional Council is committed to providing housing for the aged across the Tablelands.

5. Responsibility

Council is responsible for the adoption, amendment and repeal of the Policy and the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the development and amendment of any associated procedures and guidelines relevant to the Policy.

6. Review

It is the responsibility of the General Manager Organisational Services to monitor the adequacy of this policy and recommend appropriate changes. This policy will be formally reviewed every three years or as required by Council.

This Policy is to remain in force until otherwise amended/repealed by resolution of Council.

JUSTIN COMMONS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER