



Summary of our report

Using information to improve social housing services



Having a safe and secure home in good condition is essential for people's well-being and quality of life. Providing houses for people who are struggling to secure appropriate accommodation is an important public service.

In New Zealand, social housing includes state houses owned by Housing New Zealand Corporation (Housing New Zealand), houses leased by Housing New Zealand, and housing provided by local authorities and non-governmental organisations. Most social housing is provided by Housing New Zealand.

People who need social housing can be some of the most vulnerable in our society. A significant proportion require social services, including for medical, mental health, and addiction conditions. It is important for Housing New Zealand to have a good understanding of tenants' needs and its role in supporting them.

We looked at how well Housing New Zealand uses information to:

- manage tenancies;
- maintain houses; and
- manage and invest in new and existing social housing.

Since 2014, there have been significant changes in the social housing sector. Previously, Housing New Zealand was solely responsible for allocating people to houses. Currently, the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) assesses people's eligibility for social housing and manages the social housing register (a record of people assessed as eligible for and awaiting social housing).

The new Government has indicated that the way social housing is delivered is likely to change further. This report was written before the detail of these changes was known.

Housing New Zealand has an important and challenging role. It uses a lot of information when placing people in houses and managing their tenancies. For many tenants, this information supports a successful tenancy. However, there are opportunities for Housing New Zealand to use information better to improve services for its tenants.

Vital statistics:

- 37 pages
- Presented to Parliament on 19 December 2017
- Download from www.oag.govt.nz
- Contact: reports@oag.govt.nz

Using information better would also allow Housing New Zealand to be more responsive to its tenants' needs. This includes informing them about the quality of housing they can expect, progress on maintenance jobs, and who to contact when issues arise. It needs to be easy for people to contact Housing New Zealand and to be informed about progress on any issues affecting their tenancy.

Housing New Zealand could improve its planning and management of house maintenance by having a more detailed understanding of the condition of its houses. Housing New Zealand could also further analyse existing information and use it to improve the co-ordination of maintenance work.

We also looked at information the Ministry provides to Housing New Zealand to help with decision-making. In our view, although Housing New Zealand and the Ministry have strengthened their approaches to sharing information in the last three years, they need to work more closely together.

For example, a person with mobility problems was offered a two-storey house because the Ministry and Housing New Zealand did not collect and share the right information. Such instances might be rare, but when they occur they are unnecessary and stressful for the tenant.

Stronger leadership on information sharing is needed from both organisations to allow Housing New Zealand to place people in the right homes and meet their needs during their tenancies more effectively.

Housing New Zealand's ability to prepare a longer-term investment plan is adversely affected by the absence of a coherent long-term social housing strategy. This social housing strategy should also include how future demand for social housing can be met.

A longer-term asset investment plan, which is currently under development, will help Housing New Zealand make investment decisions that strengthen the well-being of people in social housing and help to create well-functioning communities.

Regardless of what changes are made to the delivery of social housing, effective use of information is vital for the best delivery of services and meeting tenants' needs.

We have made six recommendations to improve the way Housing New Zealand uses information to deliver better services for its tenants.