

Housing Maintenance Policy



Owner:	Adam Sandford
Version:	6
Endorsed by:	Operational Management Group
Issue date:	8 October 2024
Review date:	8 October 2026

1. Purpose

This policy provides a framework and set of procedures for the maintenance of all properties owned and/or managed by Women's Housing Ltd (WHL).

2. Objectives

The Housing Maintenance Policy objectives are to:

- Ensure the longevity of assets and ensure assets are appropriately maintained
- Ensure a safe environment for WHL renters, staff and contractors
- Ensure all housing stock is maintained in accordance with the RTA and all other relevant Australian standards
- Ensure that a proactive responsive and preventative maintenance program provides prompt attention to all maintenance requirements
- Ensure the WHL Community Housing is kept at the Level of Service standard endorsed by the board to ensure the asset value is not prematurely diminished.

WHL will consider any necessary capital improvements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of renters. Replacement of all capital items will be included in the Asset Plan.

Preventative maintenance will be performed on a cyclical basis to protect the asset.

2.1 Essential features of the Housing Maintenance Policy

- Maintenance standards are in accordance with the appropriate Australian Standards
- Systematic inspections are conducted to monitor property condition in accordance with RTA guidelines
- Timely responses are provided to clients and staff
- Follow up monitoring to guarantee satisfactory work completion
- Accurate recording of maintenance work and expenditure in a comprehensive Asset Database (Chintaro)
- Ensuring short- and long-term financial monitoring and economic management of maintenance expenditure
- All changes in the condition of the elements in the property will be adjusted in the Asset Register.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all existing WHL owned, managed and funded housing and all staff involved in the management of WHL housing.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Board

- To consider the strategic issues relating to the maintenance program; and
- To monitor and assess financial and strategic impacts of maintenance program.

4.2 CEO and CFO

- Assess and maintain financial viability in relation to maintenance program
- Provide strategic advice to Board on asset management and maintenance
- Approve required reports to external authorities; and
- Approve the Asset Management Plan.

4.3 Asset and Development Manager

- Oversee day to day operations of this policy
- Approve expenditure according to financial delegations
- Monitor maintenance expenditure and assess reports from Asset Officers
- Prepare required reports to external authorities
- Prepare required reports for internal and external authorities
- Monitor maintenance expenditure and provide reports and advice to the CEO
- Ensure that the Asset Management Strategy is current and reviewed annually; and
- Ensure that the Preventative Maintenance Budget is updated.

4.4 Asset Officers

- Oversee implementation of the WHL Housing Maintenance Policy
- Coordinate and apply policy according to financial delegations
- Monitor property condition and maintenance performance across the WHL portfolio
- Ensure that all properties provide a safe environment for their clients, staff and contractors when they go to the properties
- Manage all maintenance in a timely and financially responsible manner, and ensure that all contracts and contractors are aware of their Occupational Health and Safety responsibilities
- Ensure that only inducted contractors are utilised at WHL properties.

4.5 Tenancy Services Manager

The Tenancy Services Manager (TSM) manages the Tenancy Officers (TO) and is responsible to ensure they understand their responsibilities within Housing Maintenance.

4.6 Tenancy Officers

To conduct 6 monthly routine inspections or as required within relevant provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA). TO's will advise Asset Services of any maintenance issues.

5. Maintenance

5.1 Housing Programs

WHL has three different types of housing programs.

WHL will respond to maintenance requests in a timely manner. Repairs will be prioritised according to the urgency and type of maintenance as defined in the RTA.

There are five categories of maintenance:

- **Urgent Repairs** – to be attended to immediately. Urgent is defined as when the property becomes unsafe for the renter, electrical damage, cooking, heating/ cooling, water / fire, lack of security and pest infestation. For DFFH properties all urgent repairs are telephoned through to the DFFH call centre and the work order number is registered on Chintaro
- **Priority Repairs** – to be attended within 7 days
- **Non-urgent Repairs** (to be completed within 14 days)
- **Essential Safety Measures maintenance** - this includes lifts, fire services, mechanical services etc. these are carried out accordance with the requirements of the occupancy permit determination.
- **Preventative Maintenance** – Gutter cleaning, gardening, common area pest control are completed within a cycle, i.e. monthly, quarterly and annually.

5.1.1 Community Housing Properties

Community Housing Properties are owned and managed by WHL.

WHL maintains these properties with the following servicing maintenance:

- Any Essential Services
- Lift Maintenance
- Gutter cleaning
- Gardening
- Pest Control
- Cleaning of common areas.
- Salto door locks fitted with batteries.

5.1.2 Transitional Housing Properties

WHL manages approximately 100 Transitional Housing properties on behalf of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). Properties are either owned or leased by DFFH. The maintenance of these properties is completed by DFFH contractors and WHL advises DFFH of the required maintenance through a work order system.

Through regular inspections WHL monitors the properties to ensure maintenance is provided when required.

DFFH has the full responsibility for all the Essential Services at these properties.

WHL manages the gardening, gutter cleaning, pest control and locks (to ensure security of properties and management of bi-lock key system) for these properties.

5.1.3 Rooming Houses

WHL manages 5 rooming houses on behalf of DFFH. These properties are owned by DFFH.

DFFH has full responsibility for all Essential Safety Services.

WHL is responsible for common area cleaning, gardening, gutter cleaning, security (keys), pest control, repairs and minor replacement of capital items. Replacement of significant capital items remain the responsibility of DFFH.

5.2 Responsive maintenance (ad hoc) and repairs

Responsive maintenance consists of day-to-day maintenance and any repairs required to restore an asset to an acceptable safe working condition. These maintenance requests occur irregularly and without warning and generally the renter must be relied upon to notify WHL. On other occasions a TO and /or AO may notice unreported items that require repair during the course of an inspection.

Responsive maintenance should be dealt with as soon as the worker is advised and/or witnesses the problem at the property. This will ensure that WHL properties are maintained in a good condition.

AOs will undertake a monthly audit of the status of doors fitted with Salto locks with batteries and ensure that batteries are replaced at least once every 12 months.

5.3 After hours urgent repairs

WHL has an emergency maintenance commercial provider for their Community Housing and Rooming House properties. WHL provides an extensive after-hours maintenance service for Community Housing properties.

Renters in THM properties use the DFFH Housing Call Centre for after hour's emergencies.

At sign up renters are advised that the After-Hours Service should only be used for urgent repairs and that if it is not deemed an emergency by the After-Hours Service, the renter will be asked to call the maintenance through during business hours.

As WHL is a community housing organisation where a majority of renters are women on low incomes, WHL has requested that the After Hours Call Centre err on the side of caution and customer service and offer renters the benefit of the doubt about the urgency of the situation.

If at the time of the call, the situation is deemed by the After-Hours contractor to be of an urgent nature, the After-Hours service will arrange to have a contractor attend the property and either complete the required work or make the property safe and/or secure, and will return as soon as practicable to undertake further repairs. For example, a broken window would be usually boarded up and repaired the next day with replacement glass.

For THM properties DFFH After Hours Service will phone either the OM or CEO when a property is:

- Uninhabitable (E.g. storm damage, flooding or water damage) and the renters are unable to stay in the property.
- Any type of fire or where the fire brigade has attended; or
- Any situation where someone has died, been seriously injured or when an act of serious violence has occurred.

However, renters will be advised they will be expected to pay for the cost of repairs if the maintenance is deemed to be of a non-urgent nature after the event.

It is the responsibility of the WHL Reception to ensure that the WHL number is diverted and un-diverted for the purpose of the After-Hours system.

In the event of an urgent maintenance problem, the AO will email the order through to the contractor from Chintaro but also phone the contractor to arrange repairs or remedial action immediately. DFFH will advise the AO that the job has been raised. The AO will then advise the renter.

5.4 DFFH private rental providers

Properties owned by private rental providers will have all maintenance in the first instance referred to the DFFH Maintenance Call Centre. If the maintenance is considered to be the responsibility of the

owner, DFFH will negotiate and maintain close contact with the owner to ensure timely completion of the work.

5.5 Supply and management of furniture and appliances

For THM properties and Rooming House programs, prior to the commencement of each tenancy, WHL will furnish properties, in accordance with DFFH funding agreement guidelines.

An Inventory of household contents for each property will be prepared by the responsible AO, describing the general condition of the goods at the time.

Standard furniture and appliances will be provided for THM properties. Linen will only be provided if renter or support agency is unable to provide it. Fire retardant materials will be used for furniture.

For Rooming Houses standard furniture and appliances will be supplied. Linen will be only provided if renter does not have any. Only fire-retardant material will be used.

All white goods will have a WHL sticker applied to show they belong to WHL.

All renters will be advised that these items are to remain at the property of WHL.

All renters will be advised that they are responsible for the proper care of any WHL furniture and for promptly notifying WHL of any damage or breakdown.

Renters are advised that WHL may:

- Ask the renter to reimburse WHL should WHL find that any furniture is missing or damaged; and
- Make a report to the local police should any item of furniture be missing from the room/property.

At each periodic inspection, the TO and AO will monitor that the standard furniture and appliances are still in the property and that they are in a reasonable condition.

Items may be replaced during the course of the life of a property due to general wear and tear.

Malfunctioning larger appliances, such as refrigerators and washing machines, will be repaired.

WHL will maintain a small store of white goods and furniture to ensure that there are sufficient of each item stocked in storage. This store will ensure that there are no unnecessary delays in either replacing items or preparing properties for a new rental agreement.

5.6 Budgetary constraints: limits of authority

Any maintenance works required that may cost more than \$1,000 the contractor is to provide a quote.

All authorisation of maintenance expenditure must be within the WHL delegation of authority.

5.7 Information to renters regarding maintenance

The RTA obliges renters/members to give notice of the need for maintenance as soon as practicable and it obliges rental housing providers to undertake the repairs within 14 days (24 hours for urgent repairs).

At sign-up the renter will be provided with a Maintenance Information Sheet applicable to their property, advising them how to report maintenance problems, and what to do in case of an emergency that occurs outside business hours.

At sign up of the rental agreement, an agreed signed copy of the Condition Report and Inventory of Household Contents is provided to the new renter and a copy placed on the renter's file.

At sign up, the renter is also provided the following:

- Their legal responsibilities concerning property maintenance in Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) booklet "Renting a Home: A guide for renters" or "Rooming Houses: A guide for residents and operators".
- Notice if the property has any incidence of black mould and the date that the mould was removed and what measures were taken to avoid and further occurrence.
- The expected condition of the property at the time of vacating and information about vacating
- The WHL routine property inspection process
- How to report and arrange repairs on the property with WHL
- A Maintenance Request Form
- Emergency After Hours contact details and information
- A Complaint Form to be sent back to WHL if they have concerns or other feedback about a contractor or work completed at a property; and
- A client survey that invites renters to provide feedback about the service and condition of the property.

Additionally, useful household tips are supplied in the WHL quarterly newsletter to all renters.

5.7.1 Maintenance requests

All maintenance requests can be reported to WHL via:

- WHL website;
- Email to maintenance@womenshousing.com.au;
- Phone call to maintenance line on 9412 6868; and
- By post.

5.7.2 Renter responsibility for facilitating access

The following information relates to maintenance work authorised by WHL

Renter requested maintenance

Renters have the primary responsibility for communicating with tradespersons and facilitating access to their property. Asset Officers will provide tradespersons with renters' first names and contact numbers. All correspondence thereafter is between the tradesperson and the renter. Tradespersons will organise the time and date of visits with the renter. If the renter fails to facilitate access at the arranged time, they will be liable for any costs incurred by WHL as a result of this. Where renters are hospitalised, incarcerated or otherwise physically absent from the property, WHL may attend with permission to provide access.

WHL organised maintenance

Where maintenance requirements have been identified and arranged by WHL, renters' first names and contact numbers will be provided to tradespersons. To minimise delay, tradespersons and renters should attempt to arrange the time and date of the visit. If the renter is unable to be present, WHL may need to attend to provide access to the tradesperson. This should only occur in limited situations and renters are primarily responsible for providing access.

Communication between teams

Where it is necessary that a WHL representative attends a property to facilitate access and supervise tradespersons, communication between the Asset Officer and Tenancy Officer is vital. Where possible, staff should align this task with other reasons for access i.e., smoke detector testing or general inspections. Staff should consider timing, knowledge about the issue and geographical location when allocating this task. In special circumstances where there is a higher level of risk in attending the property, the Asset Officer and Tenancy Officer should attend together. Where possible, this should be delegated in a way that is balanced between teams.

5.8 Renter damage

See WHL's *Renter Damage Policy* for more information about how renter damage will be assessed and rectified.

5.9 Missing or stolen household contents

If any WHL inspection discloses that major household items listed in the inventory are missing, the TO will seek an explanation from the renter.

In the event that the renter, reports that the items have been stolen, the renter will report the theft to the police and obtain a police report and provide this to WHL.

Missing items will be referred to the Operations Manager and Asset and Development Manager to make a decision about further action in this matter. If the alleged theft is considered to be of significant value, the matter may be reported to the police.

All WHL cleaners have a copy of the Vacant Clean specifications which are to be followed for all vacant cleans.

5.10 Vacant maintenance

Vacant maintenance will be carried out in accordance with the vacant maintenance policy, generally such that when it is known that a renter will be vacating a property, the TO will notify the renter in advance the following:

- The property must be left in a clean and tidy state
- All furniture and appliances provided by WHL are to be left at property
- All renter belongings are to be removed from the property
- All rubbish is to be disposed of appropriately; and
- Rent will be charged until keys are returned.

The AO will inspect the property within 2 days following the vacating of the property and complete a vacant inspection checklist.

The AO will ensure that the property is secured, locking all doors and closing windows.

If all the keys are returned and the property is on a master key system, the keys can be reissued to the next renter. If the renter has been evicted, then the locks will be changed.

If property is severely damaged, maintenance needs will be assessed and again reassessed when cleaning is completed. As part of cleaning, any furniture that is no longer functional and cannot be repaired or is not fit for human use will be disposed of.

Carpets will not be steamed cleaned until all maintenance has been completed.

At each vacant maintenance the AO will also raise gas and electrical safety checks.

Once maintenance and cleaning is complete, all keys are returned and required replacement furniture and kitchen items are supplied to the property, the property will be re-inspected to ensure all that is required for the property is there and that the RTA standards are met.

The property will be established as Ready to Let (Vacant Tenantable)

5.11 Abandoned goods

See WHL's *Goods Left Behind Policy* for information about how abandoned goods will be managed and disposed of.

6. Property inspections

Property inspections are conducted yearly unless there is a reason that requires this to occur more often, such as property damage, necessary repairs, or a suspected breach of the rental agreement. Additional to these property inspections, on various types of community housing, WHL has fire equipment inspections.

Prior to all inspections, residents will be advised in writing of the purpose of the inspection and the proposed inspection time and date. All residents will be provided with a minimum of 7 days written notice as prescribed under the RTA. Residents can contact the TO to arrange an alternative time and where possible WHL will attempt to be flexible with the inspection times.

Support agencies will also be advised of forthcoming inspections to provide them the opportunity to attend and to assess any safety issues for the WHL worker when attending the property.

At all times, the TO will endeavour to ensure that the renter is available for all required inspections and the renter's rights are maintained at all times.

During all routine inspections, the TO with the AO will attend the property with both the renter and support worker if possible.

If maintenance repairs are required, the AO will arrange work according to procedures.

6.1 Smoke detectors

Smoke detectors will be checked each time the TO or AO attends the property, prior to a new rental agreement starting and on an annual basis.

6.2 End of tenancy inspection

End of tenancy inspections serve several purposes:

- To assess whether the renter has complied with their obligations
- To assess what maintenance measures, if any, are required to renew the property to a standard suitable for a future rental agreement; and
- To assess whether a renter's bond is to be returned or claimed

7. Monitoring and follow up

7.1 Maintenance audits

The Asset and Development Manager will randomly review at least 10% of all works completed by contractors.

Maintenance is checked by the AO who periodically checks that the maintenance requests are completed.

These audits are reported to the CEO monthly and discussed at the monthly Operational Management Group meeting where issues are reviewed, and consideration is given to possible improvements.

The AO will contact 10% of clients for whom maintenance orders have been raised every week to assess the renter level of satisfaction with work and the contractor.

The AO will assess whether:

- The contractor contacted renter to negotiate time of arrival
- The contractor treated renters with respect
- The work done was completed in a timely manner

The Asset and Development Manager also reports on contractors monthly at the Operational Management Group meeting.

7.2 Audit of responsive repairs

The Asset and Development Manager will monitor maintenance to ensure that all repairs are completed within required timelines. All contractors, by agreement with DFFH or WHL, will be required to notify WHL when work is completed or has not been done and must organise for the works to be completed.

If the contractor has been unable to gain access to the property, the TO will attempt to contact the renter and will forward the relevant access forms to the renter, taking into consideration the notification requirements of the RTA.

The AO will make an appointment to meet the contractor at the property to provide access ONLY if it is of an urgent repair.

The renter will be breached if she or he continues to prevent the contractor from accessing the property.

7.3 Unsatisfactory work

If an order has been attended to but the work is not considered satisfactory, the Asset and Development Manager will add a note to the original request on Chintaro stating that the works were not satisfactory and email to the Maintenance Call Centre or the approved contractor for discussion.

For THM, the Call Centre will be expected to contact the Contractor and raise a "Re-Call" and the contractor will be expected to return and make good all works. Where the work continues to be of an unsatisfactory standard, WHL will request the Call Centre to arrange an inspection and report on the works. The Call Centre may respond by conducting an inspection and report or re-calling the works.

The matter will be fully documented by the AO on Chintaro. The responsibility lies with the person undertaking the follow up action.

For Community Housing, the AO will contact the contractor to discuss and resolve the matter. WHL will follow the dispute resolution process as per agreement with contractors. If there is unresolved disagreement, the matter will be pursued in accord with the dispute resolution conditions in the contractor agreement

7.4 Invoices

For WHL owned dwellings, when maintenance related invoices are received by Finance, they will be referred to the AO who will enter the receipt of the invoice on Chintaro. The invoice will be signed off by the responsible TO to confirm that the work has been satisfactorily completed and that the invoice is approved for payment. The invoices will then be returned to Finance for payment.

7.5 Insurance coverage

WHL will establish and maintain adequate and value for money insurance coverage over its property portfolio. The CEO with advice from relevant managers will purchase insurance after receiving market quotes from various companies. In line with common practice, claims attract an excess deduction and claims below the excess will not be economical to pursue. The Asset and Development in conjunction with the CFO will ensure that all viable claims are pursued.

7.6 Planned cyclical maintenance and upgrade

DFFH has responsibility for the long term and cyclical maintenance of THM properties. WHL will liaise with DFFH when upgrade and cyclical maintenance occurs.

For WHL owned dwellings, WHL will throughout the lifecycle of the property ensure that sufficient funds are available for cyclical and programmed maintenance in line with Strategic Asset Management Plan.

The WHL Asset Strategy database will contain and monitor the essential asset plan for each of its owned properties which will include preventative maintenance issues.

WHL will record all cyclical maintenance services within Chintaro and our a spreadsheet for safety servicing record keeping.

7.7 Minor preventative maintenance works

In addition to responding to the above responsive repairs, for THM properties and Rooming House dwellings WHL will also carry out routine maintenance to ensure that the property is maintained in good order. These tasks will include:

- Extra summer garden maintenance including pruning of trees and mowing
- Rubbish removal
- Gutter cleaning
- Pest control outside standard contracts
- Replacement of light globes (THM only)
- Gardening

8. Performance targets

There are four categories of responsive maintenance timelines:

- Emergency – to be attended immediately to prevent further damage or injury
- Urgent Repairs – to be attended immediately
- Priority Repairs – to be attended within 7 days
- Non-urgent Repairs (to be completed within 14 days)

WHL performance standards in relation to repairs are as follows:

- 95% of renters report satisfaction with the condition of the property at sign-up;
- 80% of repairs are completed within the specified time-lines;
- 95% of vacant properties are turned around within 5 working days; and
- 90% of properties come under budget annually.

9. Relevant legislation

- Residential Tenancies Act (RTA 1997)
- Housing Act 1983
- Owners Corporations Act 2006
- Building Regulations (2018)
- OH&S Act 2007

10. Related documents

- National construction code of Australia, (NCCA)
- Housing Registrar Performance Standards
- Capital Development Guidelines – Series 7 (Fire Risk Management Policy & Procedures)
- Homelessness Services – Guidelines & Conditions of Funding May 2014
- DFFH – General Lease (Director of Housing and Women’s Housing Limited)
- OH&S Contractor Guide
- OH&S Agreement – Minor Works
- Contractor Induction Pack
- Notification of Breach Procedure