

**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND WORKS**

**PAPER**

**ABSENTEE TENANT MINIMUM RENT POLICY**

**Important Note:**

**The attached Consultation Paper was prepared by the Department of Housing and Works. While it is published on Shelter WA's website for consultation purposes, this does not imply that Shelter WA endorses the proposal.**

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## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND WORKS

### PAPER

#### ABSENTEE TENANT MINIMUM RENT POLICY

##### **BACKGROUND:**

Rent to Income policy Section 12: Absentee Rent. This policy is where tenants enter supported accommodation for a period of three months will have their rent waived at the discretion of the Regional Manager

There has been concerns raised on the application of this current policy and in its existing form the policy has the potential to be misused and cause confusion in its application.

The Department has a protocol in place with the Drug Strategy Unit and Ruah Inreach on clients entering specific rehabilitation programs. The country regions apply this policy where tenants travel to Perth for medical treatment and are hospitalized and/or stay in hostel style accommodation for out-patient treatment. The policy is also applied to tenants with a mental disability where they are required to enter specialised programs for a period of time. Currently all rent is waived for the period tenants are in alternate accommodation.

Department of Housing in N.S.W. has a similar policy to this matter and it is as follows:

*N.S.W. Minimum Rent Policy (\$5.00):*

*The minimum rent policy will apply when a household consists of no additional household members and the tenant is waiting to become eligible for statutory benefits, or is in a nursing home, rehabilitation centre, in prison for period of three months or less or is in respite care.*

*If there are other household members the subsidy is reassessed on their income. No income details are entered for the tenant.*

*In cases where a household member enters a nursing home, rehabilitation centre, or prison they are to be removed from the household complement for the duration of their absence.*

*The circumstances of tenants paying the minimum rent will be reviewed after three months and the minimum rent can be cancelled at that time.*

## **CURRENT POLICY:**

Rent to Income

### ◆ *Absentee Rent*

*12: Tenants required to enter supported accommodation will have their rent waived by Homeswest for a period of three months, at the discretion of the Regional Manager.*

*12.1 This is applicable to all supported accommodation.*

*12.2 Public housing tenants are eligible for Centrelink rent assistance when in supported accommodation.*

*12.3 Tenant's file to be placed in "bring up" for review at the end of three months.*

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Department replaces the Absentee Rent policy and adopts the Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent policy similar to the NSW model with a minimum rent per week of \$10. The Department still has costs associated with managing the property such as local government rates, water services charges, insurance and administration costs therefore the charging off a minimal fee is not unrealistic or should be viewed as a burden to tenants. This would in fact secure the property for the tenant with minimum expense.

### **Rent to Income - Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent Policy**

12: Tenants required to enter into specific supported accommodation will have their rent reduced to the minimum rent of \$10.00 per week for a period of three months at the discretion of the Regional Manager

12.1 This is applicable to tenants who are entering into a specific rehabilitation program, respite care, outpatient treatment where they are required to pay rent or lodgings to another organisation.

12.2 Tenants who are escaping Domestic Violence and are residing in a Women's Refuge will have their application for Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent policy considered after a minimum of two weeks in a Women's Refuge. The tenant must provide documentation to verify that they are residing in a refuge and unable to return to their tenancy. Verification may include copy of current violent restraining orders, support letter from the Police Domestic Violence Resource and Referral Centre advising the reason why they are unable to return to their property. This will be at the Regional Managers discretion. (Refer to Family & Domestic Violence policy)

12.3 Public housing tenants are eligible for Centrelink rent assistance when in supported accommodation.

12.4 Tenant's file to be placed in "bring up" for review at the end of three months. Minimum rent can be cancelled at any time during the three-month period.

12.5 If there are other household members the subsidy is reassessed on their income only and no details are entered for the tenant.

12.6 Tenants are to provide supporting documentation verifying that they are entering into a specific program to be entitled to the Absentee Tenant Minimum Rent policy. Should they remain in a specific program or are absent from the property for a period that is less than three months Homeswest is to be advised immediately they return to the tenancy and a new subsidy form is to be completed and submitted to Homeswest.

12.7 Homeswest is to be advised of relevant contact address and telephone number/s and who will be taking care of the property for the duration of the absence.