

Completing the joint action plan

When the Department of Housing responds to a Department of Child Safety referral by providing a housing solution, this often results in a person receiving a social housing property over and above other people in the wait list. The Department of Housing needs to be accountable for this decision, and the joint action plan is a mechanism by which informed decision-making can be made and justified by both departments.

Referrals from the Department of Child Safety need to be made on the grounds that a child is in need of protection and housing is a significant factor in addressing a protection issue.

Process for CSSC staff

Why complete a joint action plan?

The purpose of the joint action plan is twofold:

- it provides a verification source for housing applications
- the housing needs of a child can be shared between departments in a collaborative, useful way.

The joint action plan should be used as a way to have a comprehensive discussion about the housing needs of a child (and their carer or parent) or young person. The discussion should occur between agency representatives and can involve the client/tenant, depending on the situation.

Some questions in the joint action plan may not be relevant or may have been answered previously – the important thing is that key issues of timeframes, type of housing solution and the benefits of receiving housing assistance are discussed.

The joint action plan will assist to:

- ensure a timely response is provided to help achieve the best outcome for the child or young person
- share clear and realistic information - for example, if a social housing solution is not possible because of housing eligibility restrictions. This may assist with future case planning. Similarly, if there is limited housing stock, the possibility of not having the ideal housing solution can be discussed and other alternatives explored.

Who should be involved in the joint planning process?

At a minimum, the joint action plan should be developed with input from the Child Safety Officer and a Department of Housing client service manager. Other people who may be involved are a Team Leader (Child Safety) and Senior Client Service Manager (Housing).

The issue of whether a client should be involved should be agreed between both agencies – best practice suggests that they are involved in as many stages of the process so as to have ownership and an understanding of their obligations. However, if the agency representatives do not have experience with the joint planning process, it may be beneficial to have an initial meeting prior to including the client.

Review

The joint action plan should be recognised as being a 'point in time' document. Allocation of social housing should only occur after a basic review of the joint action plan to ensure there are no changes in the child or caregiver's circumstances that would impact on the proposed housing solution. This review can be triggered by:

- the Department of Housing when a property has become available that suits the applicant's or tenant's situation
- the Department of Child Safety if issues other than accessing housing and have been resolved – for example, a parent completing an anger management course, six months of successful contact visits, approval of a carer.

Overview of joint action plan

The table below lists the questions contained in the joint action plan and reasons why these questions are asked. If both agency representatives agree that certain questions do not need to be answered then they can be left blank.

1. Housing needs section

Action plan question	Things to consider
How does housing relate to the child's protection or care needs?	<p>A housing solution may be needed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assist with reunification of a child with their parents • facilitate a placement with a foster or kinship carer • prevent the removal of a child from their parents • Support a young person's transition from care.
What are the existing housing circumstances of the family, carer or child?	<p>The existing housing situation can guide decisions like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timeframes • housing solutions that may be more successful than others • the type of support that the person may require (for example, a young person transitioning from care may benefit from the youth worker model of support funded through the Department of Child Safety, particularly if they have been living in youth shelters or in 'self placement' situations).
Why do these circumstances not address the child's protective or care needs?	<p>It is assumed the existing housing situation is inappropriate – workers need to be clear why that is the case. For example, is the household overcrowded because a short term placement has been extended for long term? Is a kinship carer living in a housing situation that is inappropriate for children? Is a parent living in temporary or inappropriate accommodation and there is a risk their</p>

Action plan question	Things to consider
	<p>children will be removed because of this?</p> <p>If there is no impact on the child or young person should housing not be provided then consideration should be given as to the appropriateness of the referral.</p>
<p>In what time frame is a housing solution needed in order to address the child's protection or care needs?</p>	<p>Timeframes can range from as soon as possible to two years time, depending on the circumstances.</p> <p>Young people transitioning from care may be referred from 15 years old and above – the earlier transition planning occurs the better, even if a social housing property is not always required or only needs to be allocated in a year or two.</p> <p>In other situations a quick response may be required, for example a sibling group is removed from a parent and a kinship carer has been located but the children can't be placed until suitable accommodation is found.</p>
<p>Are there any factors from the Department of Housing's perspective that will impact on meeting the nominated timeframe?</p>	<p>Factors could include stock availability, entering into debt management agreements.</p> <p>Not all referrals for housing will result in social housing – a bond loan or other referral may be more appropriate.</p>
<p>What impact will there be on the child if a housing solution is not available in the nominated timeframe?</p>	<p>Impacts could include homelessness, a child being removed from their parent, a carer being unable to accept the placement of children, children continuing to living in an unsafe situation.</p>
<p>Does the child or any relevant household member have a disability, demonstrate particularly challenging behaviours or have cultural needs that impact on the type of housing required?</p>	<p>This question is to assist Housing area offices with deciding on the most appropriate housing solution. Some of this information is included in a separate application form but the question has been included as a trigger for discussion between agencies.</p>
<p>How long is it anticipated that accommodation will be required given the current case plan and any potential changes?</p>	<p>If it is likely that housing is only required for a time limited period – for example, the foster care placement is only short term, then further discussion should occur regarding the most appropriate response and whether solutions other than long term social housing are more appropriate.</p> <p>It is important that housing is noted in the child's case plan –</p>

Action plan question	Things to consider
	if it isn't then it may not be a protective issue.
Are there any location requirements, for example a need to be close to schools, relatives, supports etc?	Children in contact with the child protection system could have increased locational requirements. Given the disruption they have already experienced in their lives, it is important to provide as much stability as possible.
What other types of assistance does the client need to maintain the tenancy and what is the plan for providing that assistance (for example, budgeting, anger management).	This may be important if tenancy management issues occur. For example, a young person living independently for the first time is likely to require more support than a long term foster carer.

2. Decision and delivery section

This section is designed to provide clear information about the type of housing assistance to be provided, and list any barriers or conditions relevant to the housing solution.

Action plan question	Things to consider
Type of housing assistance being provided	There are three options, short, medium and long term. Timeframes should be relevant to the Department of Housing – that is, short term for the Department of Child Safety may mean two years, but for Housing it could mean two months.
Barriers to providing assistance.	<p>Barriers may already have been noted in the previous section on housing needs but can be mentioned again in this section to ensure all parties acknowledge the issue. Barriers can include lack of suitable or available stock, restricted access to particular locations (for example, the Department of Child Safety has requested a particular area to maintain supports etc), or the 'readiness' of a client to move into stable accommodation.</p> <p>Barriers do not necessarily prevent a housing solution being provided – solutions to some barriers can be addressed in the following section.</p>
Agreed supports/referral to support tenancy	There are some circumstances where the success of a tenancy is made more likely when the tenant is supported in their tenancy. For example, allocating a social housing property to a 17 year old who has not had the opportunity to

Action plan question	Things to consider
	<p>develop life skills can place that young person at high risk of their tenancy failing without supports being provided.</p> <p>The same circumstances can apply to a parent whose children are returning home – learning to parent can be an all consuming process and the stress of maintaining a tenancy (for example, keeping the yard tidy, lawns mown etc) can be reduced with some tenancy support.</p> <p>It is expected that the Department of Child Safety will provide information on their commitment to support the client – this commitment to support should be reviewed prior to allocation where relevant.</p>