

RANGITĪKEI DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY HOUSING POLICY

Date of adoption: **August 2024**

Resolution number: 24/RDC/243

Date review due: **August 2026**

Relevant legislation: Residential Tenancies Act 1986
Healthy Homes Act 2017

Statutory/Policy: Operational

Included in the LTP: No

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out the Council's practice in regard to the provision, management and tenancy of community housing within the Rangitikei District.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

- To provide guidelines for the level of rental, with the intention of the facilities being self-funding and yet affordable for the tenants.
- To provide clear guidelines on tenant eligibility for Council-owned community housing.
- To ensure Council meets its statutory obligations with respect to tenancies under the Residential Tenancy Act 1986.
- To confirm Council's commitment to the provision of housing for those aged 65 or over with low or moderate financial means, who are able to live independently.

3. PRINCIPLES

- There is a genuine need for long-term accommodation for the community in the Rangitikei District with Council presently having a role in meeting this need.
- Council's investment in community housing is intended to be self-funding.
- Community housing is operated by the Council for the purpose of providing affordable housing for those over 65 with low asset base and low incomes in the District.

4. BACKGROUND

The purpose of community housing is to provide safe accommodation for residents over 65 with limited incomes and assets.

This policy is based on a review and update of the 2018 Community Housing Policy. Council owns 72 community housing units across the district, located in:

- **Marton:** 50 units split between three complexes
- **Taihape:** 12 units split between two complexes
- **Bulls:** 6 units at one complex
- **Rātana:** 4 units at one complex

There has been an increase in the demand for these units over the last 5-6 years. The waiting list for potential tenants usually ranges between 5 to 10 people.

The units are self-contained (attached and detached) and are surrounded by other units in the various complexes. They provide for privacy and independence, while also providing a community atmosphere. A standard unit is furnished with vinyl and carpet floor coverings throughout, a freestanding stovetop oven, full bathroom facilities including a shower, a heat pump, thermal curtains, a functioning smoke detector and a shared clothes-line. All units are weather tight and meet insulation compliance. Six monthly tenancy inspections are conducted by the Property Team staff to determine if any repairs or maintenance is required. All necessary upgrades are carried out in accordance with Council's planned maintenance and improvement schedule. Tenants are advised to notify Council of any repairs or maintenance issues as soon as possible, and this generally works very well.

Types of Accommodation

One Bedroom units:

All 72 of the community houses are one bedroom units – consisting of 1 bedroom, a separate lounge, kitchen and bathroom.

The units are presently being maintained and refurbished to a level that will meet the standards set under the Residential Tenancies (Healthy Homes Standards) Regulations 2017.

Council manages and maintains the grounds, footpath and driveways (where present) for the units. Tenants are encouraged to monitor and maintain their own garden.

There are some sheds or other external storage facilities available for tenants.

Tenant Profile

The community housing tenants are predominantly over 65 years of age with limited incomes and minimal assets. All tenancies are for one person only unless specified, with none being suitable to house children.

5. RESPONSIBILITY

The Manager-Community Property has responsibility for the implementation of this policy. The Policy & Planning team has responsibility for the review of this policy with final approval by Council.

6. ABILITY FOR PARTNERSHIP

Rangitikei District Council currently has informal working relationships with the Police, the Whanganui District Health Board and the Ministry of Social Development.

Ministry of Social Development (MSD) - over 90% of the Council's tenants receive benefits from the Government. The Council will work with MSD to ensure tenants receive their full and correct entitlement to benefits and supplementary assistance that they may be entitled to.

Council will also communicate and consult directly with Community Housing Tenants on matters that are relevant to them.

7. POLICY STATEMENT

7.1. Eligibility Criteria

The Manager- Community Property ascertains eligibility in accordance with the following criteria:

Age

Applicants will only be considered for a community housing unit if they are at least 65 years old at the date of application.

Citizenship/Residency

Applicants must be a New Zealand Citizen or have Permanent Residency. If an applicant was born overseas they will need to provide proof of Permanent Residency status or Citizenship.

Asset Limits

The value of an applicant's assets will affect the priority the application receives. The asset limit is set by Council and may be adjusted from time to time.

Their total assets, including cash, investments, house and other property (but not including a car, furniture and personal effects) do not exceed \$8,100 for a single person and \$16,200 (for a couple). This is in line with the Accommodation Supplement cash asset limits eligibility criteria.

Income limits

The income limit for single people and couples is currently GRI (the gross New Zealand Superannuation rate) plus 33%.

Independence

Applicants must have a genuine housing need and be able to live and care for themselves independently.

Good Character

Council must be satisfied that the applicant will be a good tenant and able to live co-operatively with others onsite. When applying for community housing the applicant may be asked to supply two character references and will also have an informal interview with a member of Councils Property team.

Where an applicant does not meet the above criteria, special dispensation may be granted at the discretion of the Manager – Community Property

The Rātana Communal Board of Trustees determines the eligibility of tenants for the community housing units at Rātana Pā.

7.2. Priority

Demand for community housing is often in excess of the number of units available, therefore priority will be given to applicants who are categorised within the definition of this policy as elderly, and meet one or more of the following:

- They already live within the Rangitikei District; and
- Who have close relatives in the area; or
- They are independent but have been referred by the Ministry of Social Development.

7.3. Rent Levies

Rent reviews will be initiated as part of Councils annual setting of fees and charges, and will take effect from 1 October annually with an advisory note to Council before any communication with tenants. Rent will not be increased in the first twelve months of a tenancy, but it will be reviewed annually thereafter.

7.4. Rent Limit Provision

Council recognises that affordable rents are a critical feature of community housing. As a safety net, the Council will use the following mechanism to ensure rents remain affordable:

- Affordable rent limit – the weekly rental limit for all individual tenants will not exceed that of 33% of the gross National Superannuation and Veterans Pension. At the time of policy implementation, the weekly rental could not exceed \$200.20.

7.5. Location Options

An applicant's preference for any particular location will be taken into account and accommodated where possible. Tenants can transfer to another Council unit or complex in extenuating circumstances such as a doctor's recommendation, or at the discretion of the Manager – Community Property

7.6. Changes in Circumstances

Where it is suspected that there are existing or impending eligibility issues for medical, physical or mental health reasons; the Council will seek to facilitate the provision of the appropriate social service support.

If an existing tenant develops complex medical needs they are encouraged to inform Council staff so that these needs can be accommodated where reasonable. Where an existing tenant is no longer able to live independently without risk of harm to themselves or causing serious damage to the rental unit, Council staff will work with the tenant and their next of kin (where appropriate) to help them find more suitable accommodation.

7.7. Smoking

Council encourages a healthy community and clean air environment with a view to improving the health and wellbeing of its tenants. Smoking and vaping are not allowed inside any housing unit by any person. All new tenancy agreements from the effective date of this policy will include a clause stating that smoking and vaping is banned.

7.8. Animals

Following an application to Council for the keeping of pets such as a bird or cat, the Manager – Community Property will consider the request. Approval will be conditional on any such animal being well behaved, and properly cared for so they do not pose a nuisance to other tenants, or neighbours. If a pet is found to be causing a nuisance, Council may require the tenant to rehome it. Dogs will not be permitted under any circumstances.

7.9. Parking

Limited car parking is available for tenant use only. Car parks are generally not allocated to particular tenants or community housing units (except in specific circumstances), so courtesy and co-operation over car parking is necessary.

Visitors to tenants (including service agents) may use the car parks briefly, for instance when collecting and dropping off tenants for shopping or appointments, but are asked not to use the for extended periods of time.

7.10. Level of Service

Council is committed to providing a high Level of Service (LOS) for Community Housing; and this is outlined further in Council's Long Term Plan and formally reported each year.

7.11. Marketing and Occupancy

Council will maintain a waiting list of prospective tenants which will be regularly reviewed and updated. If a waiting list does not exist, the Council will market and promote its community housing when needed to ensure maximum occupancy.

7.12. Welfare

The Council acknowledges its role as landlord, and as such, will be accessible and diligent towards the general welfare of its tenants.

This will not extend to the provision of social services (other than that to which Council has agreed to) to tenants, as these services are better provided by other professional service providers.

Council will provide its tenants with the relevant contact information for professional services and service providers.

7.13. Management of Community Units

Council currently administers and manages the community housing portfolio in-house and is committed to maintaining this level of service.

7.14. Dispute Resolution

In the event that a breach of tenancy occurs, matters will be addressed in accordance with the Residential Tenancy Act (1986). In the first instance a 14 day notice will be issued to the tenant requesting that the breach of tenancy be resolved. If the breach of tenancy is not rectified within the 14 day period, an application will be lodged with the Tenancy Tribunal to resolve the issue through mediation. Failing a successful outcome through mediation, the matter will be referred to an adjudicator for resolution.

If the breach is not resolved, the tenant may be evicted from the unit or issued with a 90 day notice to vacate the property in accordance with the Residential Tenancy Act (1986).

7.15. References and Relevant Legislation

Council administers its community housing portfolio in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act 1986 and the Residential Tenancies (Healthy Homes Standards) Regulations 2019

7.16. 7.16 Application Form

Application forms are available online or at Council offices and libraries in Taihape, Bulls and Marton.

8. DATE OF REVIEW

Council will review this policy every 6 years, or earlier if considered necessary, with the next review being in 2030. Any review will take into consideration, amongst other things, the current housing needs of the district, criteria for eligibility, rent levels, demographics and current waiting lists.