

QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF

Department of Housing and Public Works witness Deidre Mulkerin

I, Deidre Mulkerin, of Level 13, 61 Mary Street, Brisbane 4001 in the State of Queensland, Executive Director, Service Delivery and Community Housing Development Services, Department of Housing and Public Works, solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare:

1. I make this statement pursuant to a request to provide information to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, which commenced on 1 July 2012. I am authorised to make this statement on behalf of the Department of Housing and Public Works.
2. I currently hold the position of Executive Director with the Department of Housing and Public Works (the Department) and have held this position since April 2012.
3. I commenced working for the Department of Children's Safety (as the Department of Child Safety was then named) in 1985 and have approximately 27 years' experience in this field.
4. In my early career I managed local Departmental offices including Roma, Woodridge, Regional Manager for Brisbane South and Regional Director for Wide Bay Burnett.
5. I have been involved with several reform initiatives, including:
 - a) representing the Department of Families to the "Consultancy Bureau on the Blueprint" in response to the Crime and Misconduct Commission report on the Abuse of Children in Foster Care; and

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Date: 21.8.2012

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- b) my role as Implementation Leader, Child Safety Implementation Unit, Department of Child Safety for major reform of the child protection sector in 2004.
- 6. I have held senior management positions including most recently, the positions of:
 - a) Assistant Director General, Service Delivery Improvement and Support, Department of Communities;
 - b) General Manager, Department of Housing; and
 - c) Executive Director, Child Safety Services Division, Department of Child Safety.
- 7. My qualifications include Graduate Certificate of Management, Queensland University of Technology (2001), Bachelor of Social Work, University of Queensland (1984), Speech and Drama Diploma AMEB (1981) and Music Diploma AMEB (1981).

Background

- 8. This statement provides advice on the role, policies and procedures in the provision of housing services for those in contact with the child protection system. This also extends to the Department's response to child protection concerns in social housing.
- 9. I note the terms of reference for the Inquiry include, but are not limited to reviewing the effectiveness of Queensland's current child protection system in the following areas:
 - a) whether the current use of available resources across the child protection system is adequate and whether resources could be used more efficiently;
 - b) the current Queensland government response to children and families in the child protection system including the appropriateness of the level of, and support for, front line staffing;

- c) tertiary child protection interventions, case management, service standards, decision making frameworks and child protection court and tribunal processes; and
- d) the transition of children through, and exiting the child protection system.

Overview of Housing's Strategic Commitments to Child Protection

10. To understand the Department's interface with the child protection system, some background information is outlined in this section to provide an overview of the Department's strategic commitments to child protection.
11. Following the CMC Inquiry and in response to the Blueprint for implementing the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) report 'Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care', the Department recognised that whilst housing is not often a significant factor in a child being harmed or put at risk of harm, housing can contribute to improving safety for children. In 2004, the former Department of Housing (also referred to as Housing) made a commitment to work with other key agencies to provide services to children in need of protection and to report concerns regarding children at risk of harm to the former Department of Child Safety.
12. A chronology of Housing's key strategic commitments is provided in the diagram named "Chronology of Housing Services' Strategic Commitment to Child Protection" in Attachment One.

Appointment of Housing's Child Safety Director

13. A Network of Child Safety Directors was established across the Queensland Government agencies which had been identified as having a role in the promotion of child protection, resulting from the implementation of recommendation 4.3 in the CMC report. Although the former Department of Housing had not been specifically identified as one of these agencies, the then Director-General decided

to internally fund and create a new position of Child Safety Director on 1 July 2004 to oversee the Department's strategic commitment to child protection.

14. Housing's Child Safety Director commenced in the role in November 2004 and participated in the Child Safety Directors' Network from 2005 to 2009. Initially the Director was based in the Department's Strategic Policy area (then known as Housing, Policy and Research). On 7 July 2005, the Child Safety Director was transferred within the Department to the then Client Services area (now known as Housing Practice Improvement). As a result of transferring the role and the functions of the Child Safety Director, the Child Safety and Disability Services Unit (CSDSU) was established within Housing Practice Improvement.

Child Protection Strategic Direction Statement

15. The Director was responsible for developing an Interim policy framework titled 'Department of Housing Child Protection Strategic Direction Statement' which was released in July 2005. A main driver for the Department's direction was the legislative changes in the Child Protection Act 1999 enacted on the 30 April 2005, and the Department's requirements under the Act as a prescribed entity. In particular, sections 159H and 159F provide:

- a) Section 159H - "Chief Executive may ask particular prescribed entities to provide a service." The prescribed entity must, "take reasonable steps to comply with the request so far as the request is consistent with the entity's functions; and does not unreasonably affect the discharge of the entity's functions in relation to other persons or matters."
- b) Section 159F -, "Service providers must take reasonable steps to coordinate decision making and delivery of services to children and caregivers, in order to appropriately and effectively meet the protection and care needs of children."

16. Two key points from this revision are that working together is required under law, and that the focus of this partnership is the child or children.

17. The Child Protection Strategic Direction Statement set a vision for the Department that: "No child in contact with the child protection system is harmed or placed at risk of harm because of a housing-related factor."

The Child Safety and Disability Services Unit (CSDSU)

18. In moving towards the vision in the Strategic Direction Statement, the Department undertook work in a number of areas such as:

- a) Being responsive to requests for assistance from the then Department of Child Safety;
- b) Having the right housing products and services;
- c) Reliably reporting child protection concerns to the Department of Child Safety;
- d) Monitoring performance and improving systems as needed; and
- e) Having suitable staff delivering services to children through screening arrangements.

19. The role of CSDSU was to support the housing service delivery network in providing housing services to clients in contact with the child protection system in accordance with the new Strategic Direction Statement as well as in relation to clients with a disability and/or mental illness.

20. CSDSU's staff profile included a Principal Advisor (Child Safety) who directly provided information, training, advice and assistance in relation to complex client matters where child safety issues were evident. This advisor supported service delivery staff to escalate matters with other agencies where appropriate. CSDSU also employed a Principal Advisor (Policy) who also worked directly with service delivery staff to identify policy, practice or procedural issues. This Advisor's role was to then improve service delivery outcomes by influencing the strategic policy and program areas within the Department to review and amend policy and processes associated with clients affected by child safety issues.

Memorandum of Understanding

21. This strategic direction was refined further when a Memorandum of Understanding between Housing Services and Child Safety was endorsed by the Directors-General of the Departments of Housing and Child Safety in May 2007. The MOU replaced the Department's Child Protection Strategic Directions Statement. The MOU contained three Schedules on: Reporting child protection concerns; Providing priority assistance; and Responding to requests to share information with Child Safety.

22. To implement the MOU and its schedules, a number of key policy decisions were made as a result of this framework, which are reflected in current Housing Services policies, such as:

- a) Contribute to the Department's commitment to child protection by providing a policy framework for responding to requests for housing assistance.
- b) Improve the Department's response to requests for housing assistance so applications relating to any children in need of protection who are in contact with the child protection system are considered.
- c) Provide provision for cases to be considered under an interagency priority in specific circumstances
- d) Provide a decision-making and notification framework for service delivery staff when responding to child protection related concerns and requests for assistance.
- e) Remove an age restriction (i.e. 18 years) from the social housing criteria and replace it with a requirement of an independent income.

Engagement with the Commission of Children, Young People and Child Guardian

23. In 2007, the Department also formalised its Administrative Agreement with the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian into a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies. The purpose of the

MOU was to assist the Department in complying with the Commission's requests for information in its role in reviewing and investigating the deaths of children who were in the care of Child Safety and residing in public housing. Following the outcome and recommendations of the Commission's child death reviews, the Department works collaboratively with the Commission and Child Safety to implement any recommendations relevant to the provision of social housing.

Impact of Machinery of Government changes

24. With the Machinery of Government (MOG) changes in 2009, the MOU between Housing and Child Safety was dissolved in the context of both agencies then sitting within the one Department - Department of Communities. Housing retained all of the policies, procedures and practices which had been embedded in its service delivery practice as part of implementing the MOU Schedules.
25. The MOU between Housing and the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian was also dissolved and a new MOU was negotiated and endorsed with the newly amalgamated Department of Communities.
26. Furthermore, in 2009 an internal restructure led to the Child Safety Director role being absorbed within the Director role for the former Housing and Homelessness Practice Improvement. The Child Safety and Disability Services Unit maintained its focus on providing information, advice and assistance in relation to improving practices for clients in contact with the child protection system or with child safety issues. The focus on needing to escalate issues significantly reduced given the devolution of responsibilities for both housing and child safety service delivery to the regional network within the one Department.
27. A review of the Communities' representatives on the Child Safety Director Network post the 2009 MOG resulted in Housing no longer being represented as internal mechanisms were considered to be in place to facilitate the necessary co-ordination and communication within the Department of Communities.
28. The MOG changes in 2012 have necessitated a review of the previous arrangements and representations. The Executive Director, Policy and

Performance, Housing Services within HPW will represent the Department on the Child Safety Directors' Network going forward.

Housing Services for Clients in Contact with the Child Protection System

29. The Department has always provided housing assistance to clients in contact with the child protection system. Various literature supports that inadequate, poorly maintained infrastructure, limited access to essential services and/or employment can lead to social disadvantage. Housing Services recognise the correlation between poverty and disadvantage and that there are increasing numbers of children and families coming into contact with the child protection system, and in particular that there is an over representation of indigenous children and young people in the system.

30. The Department interfaces with the child protection system in a number of ways:

- a) through the provision of housing products (social and private) to young people, families, foster carers or kinship carers who are in contact with the child protection system
- b) through the identification of potential harm to children who are accessing housing services and referral to the Queensland Police Service and Child Safety Services.
- c) through local collaboration and initiatives to respond to the emerging community issues where housing and child protection are key issues.
- d) through the development and implementation of interagency programs responding to housing issues for child protection clients.

31. The Department commits to various initiatives to assist young people with stable accommodation or to maintain vulnerable tenancies. This may involve providing the capital assistance for joint initiatives (some focusing on employment and education), priority access to social housing or referrals to support services to assist families, individuals and young people in contact with the child protection system.

32. The Department also acknowledges that young people leaving care and transitioning to independent living have experienced significant life issues and are a vulnerable and disadvantaged social group who require good levels of interagency planning and support to enable them to successfully transition out of care. With the provision of accommodation by Child Safety ceasing once a young person turns 18 year old, significant collaborative case planning is required between Departments whilst a young person is still in care. A key area of focus for the Department of Housing and Public Works in this transition from care planning is young people with disabilities.

33. Due to an increase in Queensland's population and the loss of affordable housing options in the private rental market during the 1990s, demand for housing assistance grew. From 2000-2005, the number of people on the public housing waitlist increased by 47% and the number of new households assisted through public rental housing decreased by 56%. During the same period, the Department assisted over 240,000 households per year across all of its housing assistance programs. In response to the demand for housing assistance, the Department undertook a major overhaul of the housing assistance system in 2005. These changes led to the gradual introduction of the One Social Housing System from 1 January 2006 to provide a fairer and easier way to ensure that housing assistance is available to the people who need it most – for the duration of their need.

One Social Housing System

34. The One Social Housing System aims to create a more efficient and responsive social housing system and to support integrated provision of a broad range of housing assistance for low income Queenslanders. The One Social Housing System includes all products, services and programs provided, funded and subsidised by the Department. This ranges from high subsidy assistance such as public housing for those on low incomes in greatest need to other products and services such as private rental assistance through the provision of bond loans, Rent Connect services or registration for the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS).

35. Through the One Social Housing System, the Department has one point of access for all forms of housing assistance. Clients contacting a Housing Service Centre (HSC) are provided with information and advice by HSC staff in order to direct the client to the most appropriate housing option. Clients whose needs can be met through private rental are directed to these options through Rentconnect and services for practical assistance such as bond loans. The percentage of clients still requiring social housing, either public or community managed, could then be appropriately assessed using a consistent application and assessment process based on an individual's need rather than solely on wait-turn.
36. The Department's One Social Housing System uses a needs-based Client Intake and Assessment Process to assess applicants' eligibility and housing needs in relation to social housing. Eligible applicants are placed on the Housing Register according to their assessed level of housing need.
37. Foster families, kinship carers, families with child protection issues and young people in contact with the child protection system are asked a series of questions which aims to identify housing need and other information relevant to the Department being able to assist a person to sustain a social housing tenancy.

Eligibility

38. All applications for housing assistance must firstly be assessed against the social housing eligibility criteria of Australian citizenship or permanent residency, Queensland residency, Independent income, Household Income limits and the Assets Test (liquid assets limits and property ownership components).

Housing Needs Assessment and the Register of Need

39. A Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) is completed for all eligible applicants as part of the Client Intake and Assessment Process. The intent of the HNA is to identify applicants/households whose current housing is inappropriate to their identified housing need and where their personal circumstances indicate they

would have difficulty accessing and/or sustaining a tenancy in the private market. The HNA comprises of two criteria for assessing an applicant's housing need:

- a) Appropriateness - identify households whose current housing situation is inappropriate to their identified housing needs.
- b) Access & sustainability - identify if applicants experience barriers preventing them from finding or sustaining their own housing.

40. When an applicant's need has been assessed, the applicant is placed on the Housing Register. The Housing Register has four segments - very high, high, medium or low. An applicant is then offered assistance that best responds to their need, for the duration of their need. Private rental products and other services are offered to those in the lowest need or to those who need assistance whilst they wait for social housing to become available. Linkages to appropriate support services including crisis accommodation are also provided when needed (see housing products and services).

Interagency Priority Groups

41. Under Housing Services' Client Intake and Assessment Process, client groups that are subject of interdepartmental agreements, intergovernmental agreements or State Government designation for priority housing assistance are known as Interagency Priority Groups and are provided with housing assistance in accordance with the agreements that are in place. Identifying these clients upfront enables the Department to direct housing assistance to those most in need of the assistance as determined through these agreements and to work effectively with other government agencies to provide a coordinated service to clients to meet their needs. All Interagency Priority Groups must still be eligible for housing assistance. Being identified as an Interagency Priority Group relates to the applicant's placement on the Housing Register.

42. Once the assessment of an applicant's eligibility, housing need and whether they are an Interagency Priority group is completed, a Client Priority Assessment is

completed so the applicant can be placed onto the Housing Register in the segment that best matches their level of housing need.

43. There are a range of housing and support initiatives/priorities in place which aim to coordinate meeting the housing needs of children in need of urgent protection and young people exiting care following Child Safety Services advice. For example:
44. Clients referred from Child Safety – these applicants may be a parent or couple with a child or children in need of child protection services (including a foster/kinship carer) and who is or are also eligible for housing assistance. In these cases, a Joint Action Plan is developed between Housing Services and Child Safety Services to determine if social housing assistance is the best solution and the urgency of the response. If it is agreed that social housing is the best solution, the applicant receives priority housing and is automatically streamed into the very high needs segment on the Housing Register.
45. Applicants who are aged 17 and under the custody or guardianship of Child Safety, who need to transition out of care to independent living - for these applicants, a Joint Action Plan will be developed between Housing Services and Child Safety Services to determine if social housing assistance is required and the urgency of this response. If it is agreed that social housing is the best solution, the applicant receives priority housing and is automatically streamed into the very high needs segment on the Housing Register.
46. Families eligible under the A Place to Call Home (APTCH) - referred by the Child Safety Services Family Intervention Services (FIS) program, the Department of Communities Referral for Active Intervention (RAI) program, Helping out Families (HOF) or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Services (ATSIFSS) specifically for the APTCH initiative. After these referrals are endorsed, these applicants are also automatically streamed into the very high needs segment on the Housing Register.

47. All other applicants who are in contact with Child Safety Services but who have not been specifically referred by Child Safety Services are assessed under standard eligibility and housing need criteria and are placed into the segments consistent with the scoring and streaming processes of the Housing Need Assessment.

Housing products and services

48. The housing products and services available to an applicant depends on which segment they are placed in on the Housing Register following the client intake and assessment process. Below is a selection of some of the products and services offered to clients in contact with the child protection system.

Public and community-managed housing

49. The Department aims to provide public and community managed housing that meets the needs of households, for example an appropriate number of bedrooms, the type of housing and a suitable location.
50. The Department's bedroom entitlement is based on the household size, age and gender of the children. Generally, no more than two children of the same sex should share a bedroom. If there is an age difference of at least seven years between children of the same sex, each child is entitled to a separate bedroom. Young people over 18 years of age are entitled to a separate bedroom.
51. Foster parents or kinship carers who care for children on a regular or long-term basis are entitled to bedroom entitlements as per the entitlements policy regarding children.
52. Listing for fewer bedrooms than entitlement must satisfy that serious overcrowding will not be the result. In these cases children's ages and sexes must be considered and no more than three children of the same sex may occupy the same bedroom.

RentConnect services

53. RentConnect helps Queenslanders to find and secure a tenancy in the private rental market. HSC RentConnect officers work with people to identify what type of assistance they may need. They can:

- a) advise how to find a rental home
- b) help people to understand the rental application process
- c) help prepare a rental application.

54. RentConnect officers may also put people in contact with local real estate agents and providers of community services.

Bond loans

55. The Department provides bond loans to help people secure housing in the private rental market. A bond loan is an interest free loan to help people pay the full rental bond. There is no limit to the number of bond loans a person may apply for and there is no waiting time between repaying one loan and applying for another loan. Applicants are however ineligible for a bond loan if they have not repaid all previous assistance from the Department.

56. The Department does not normally provide Bond Loans to minors (those under the age of 18 years). The reason for this restriction is that a contract (eg a Bond Loan) may not be enforceable in law unless it can be established that the services or products provided are for what are determined 'necessaries of life'.

57. Before providing Bond Loans to minors, they must demonstrate that they are not adequately housed, or cannot remain in their present accommodation. Supporting evidence can include the following:

- a) proof of receipt of an allowance from Centrelink or Department of Families; or
- b) letter from parents or guardians; or
- c) signed statement from the applicant.

Rental Grants

58. Rental grants are limited to households in crisis. Young people transitioning from care are a specific target group for this service which provides a grant of two weeks rent to help with the costs of moving into a rental property. These clients would also usually obtain a Bond Loan as well as the grant.

National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)

59. The Department assesses applicants for NRAS based on its eligibility criteria for housing assistance as explained above. Eligible NRAS applicants can apply to rent a private property under the Scheme through NRAS tenancy managers in the private market. Applicants who are already approved for the Department's housing register do not need to apply again to be considered for rental accommodation through NRAS.

Service Delivery and Tenancy Management

60. As a social housing provider, the Department is committed to assisting tenants to sustain their tenancies. The Department does this through balancing support for tenants who are at risk of tenancy failure with its responsibilities to neighbours and the surrounding community and within the statutory requirements under tenancy legislation.

61. Housing Service Centres (HSCs) take a proactive approach to assisting clients who are either in contact with the child protection system or who may require support or intervention services. This approach includes HSC staff working with their local Child Safety Service Centres (CSSCs) and other support agencies to:

- a) Respond to referrals for assistance from Child Safety Officers;
- b) Develop Joint Action Plans to confirm housing need and urgency of providing housing;
- c) Prioritising approved applicants as an Inter-Agency Priority Group – Child in Need of Protection; and

- d) Making reports of any child safety concerns identified in undertaking tenancy management or property inspections;
- e) Actively managing rental arrears matters where children are in the household, to minimise the likelihood of future eviction.

Tenancy management arrangements

62. The Department acknowledges the various literature available regarding prevention and early intervention to support the stability of families. As a social housing provider, the Department supports tenants in improving their capacity to independently manage their tenancies through appropriate assistance and/or referrals to support services.

63. The Department further recognises that issues that may constitute a breach of a tenancy may also be an indication of vulnerabilities of the household such as unkempt premises and instances of domestic and family violence where children are present.

64. There may be instances when a tenancy complainant is referred to other organisations or the HSC takes joint action with these organisations to resolve a tenancy issue (e.g. Police, Child Safety, Mental Health services, Family Support Services etc).

65. Tenancy management actions must be supported by privacy principles and appropriate sharing of information; however housing staff have a role in reporting concerns about the safety of a child or children. This also involves engaging with statutory bodies and non-government providers who are providing support services to a family or young person.

Prevention and early intervention strategies

66. One program promoting prevention and early intervention is the A Place to Call Home program. The Department recently conducted a Post-Implementation Practice Review of the (APTCH) Program to assess the practice arrangements and

outcomes achieved for the families referred to the program between 2008-09 and 2010-11. Key findings revealed that a very high proportion of tenants successfully sustained their tenancy (96% of total families housed) as a result of the coordinated housing and support and a high proportion of Indigenous families occupied dwellings through the program (35% of total families housed). One key area to be addressed relates to improved coordinated linkages to re-engage support services for families who are struggling to sustain their tenancy when support services have ended.

67. HSCs also take a proactive role in managing arrears given that this is often cause for eviction or financial difficulty. Whilst tenants have the option to enter an auto-payment for their rent from Centrelink, the Department does not have mandatory deduction methods for payment of rental arrears. In two trial sites, Logan and Rockhampton, social housing tenants may request the Australian Government's Department of Human Services to voluntarily manage their welfare payments through income management. Income management also occurs through the Family Responsibilities Commission in the four Welfare Reform Communities in Cape York. Income management directed through this Commission is not voluntary.

Local arrangements

68. In some local areas the HSC and CSSC have either a formal or informal local partnership arrangement for coordinating responses and working collaboratively in relation to mutual clients. These arrangements usually involve meeting regularly such as monthly to discuss local current and emerging issues and client cases.
69. In locations where the local partnership meetings are regular and there is active engagement, the HSCs have found that these arrangement assists in improving staff's knowledge, skills and relationships to better coordinate services. They also streamline processes where a joint Departmental response is required for a family or young person.

70. More collaborative working relationships and coordination of services have also assisted in identifying barriers and gaps for clients in accessing housing services. For example, under previous policies prior to the introduction of the One Social Housing System, a young person needed to be 18 years old and earning an independent income to apply for social housing. This was a barrier and deterrent to planning a transition for young people exiting from care. In response to this barrier in service delivery practices, the policies impacting on young people's access to social housing were amended to remove the requirement to be 18 years of age or older. Having an assessment based on an applicant's independent income allowed for young people under 18 years of age to apply for housing assistance (see paragraph 45 for current policy).

Support and resources for Housing Service Centre staff

71. For new and existing Housing service delivery staff, training is provided and other procedural and practice resources are available on:

- a) Identifying children at risk of harm
- b) Making a notification and the steps to follow
- c) Sharing information with Child Safety
- d) How to prioritise clients with children in need of protection referred from Child Safety or when assessing a client's eligibility and housing need
- e) Providing culturally appropriate support for tenants who are vulnerable, such as those in contact with the child protection system.

72. The Practice Development and Support Unit (formerly CSDSU) provides mentoring, advice and support for HSC staff who engage with clients where there are complex social issues including child protection, disability and mental health issues. This Unit is responsible for developing practice resources and tools to assist service delivery staff in understanding the child protection system and in building their capacity to work with client in contact with the child protection system. By supporting HSC staff in responding to clients and through having

direct involvement with Child Safety Services, the Unit also is able to identify areas to improve integrated service delivery.

73. Staff are encouraged to contact Child Safety Services to report concerns about the safety of a child or children if a staff member suspects that:

- a) a child has been, is being or is at risk of being harmed, or an unborn child is going to be harmed after birth and there is not a parent or carer who is willing and able to protect the child from harm; or
- b) an eviction occurs and there are concerns that a child within the household or a young person being evicted will be at risk as a result of the eviction; or
- c) the eviction is occurring because of a significant underlying problem that may place a child at risk.

74. Making a child protection report is not mandatory for all evictions but, as a matter of policy, should occur if there are concerns about the safety of a child.

Transition from Care Planning

75. Many young people transitioning from care are identified as vulnerable. Some may still be developing the living skills necessary to function independently e.g. obtain work; continue study; manage income, secure and maintain a tenancy. They may also continue to experience behavioural and social issues associated with any abuse, neglect and trauma they may have experienced. Some young people may also have a disability which requires them to have ongoing support services. These significant factors coupled with the limited availability of social housing highlight the need for alternative accommodation options for young people transitioning out of care.

76. An area for development involves further educating Child Safety staff in relation to other housing services (e.g. NRAS, RentConnect) and that where appropriate these services may be able to assist a young person meet their housing needs.

77. The successful transition of a young person from care requires collaborative planning between Department of Housing and Public Works and Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. There are ongoing challenges for HSC staff in some regions in relation to Transition from Care (TFC) planning. Some of these key challenges are:
78. Providing notice for HSC staff from Child Safety Service Centre staff that a young person is due to turn 18 years old and will require social housing. This can affect HSCs capacity to plan for and respond to these needs.
79. Different expectations regarding Housing's role in providing accommodation – the role of Housing staff is primarily focused on tenancy management and not case management or direct support to tenants.
80. Different levels of support are provided by Child Safety and Disability Services which can impact on clients transitioning to adulthood e.g. decrease in support services once a young person leaves care.

Remote Indigenous communities

81. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) is a ten-year agreement between the Commonwealth and the Queensland Government (to 2018) involving intense project work and resources so governments and non-government agencies can coordinate services and initiatives with Councils on individual remote Indigenous communities. The primary purpose of the NPARIH is the provision of housing for Indigenous people in 12 of the 14 remote Indigenous council areas and to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities.

Overcrowding

82. Under NPARIH, the Department is committed to reducing significant overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities. This is being achieved through the implementation of tenancy management in line with One Social Housing

standards, which has allowed the Department to accurately identify household composition and address overcrowding through the application of social housing policies such as transfers and succession of tenancy. Overcrowding is also being addressed through the construction of 1141 new houses by 2018, funded under NPARIH.

83. Households can list for a transfer to alternative social housing accommodation as a result of overcrowding, however a significant barrier to an allocation of larger accommodation can be a lack of or limited properties in a specific location. The Department has considered demountable accommodation in certain locations where no other suitable accommodation can be found for significant overcrowding.

84. The Department is reviewing housing design principles for remote Indigenous communities with a view to ensuring that housing design is reflective of the needs of people living in remote Indigenous communities. Some of the current initiatives being considered are whether housing design can assist in preventing child sexual abuse, for example, not having external doors which are located close to bedrooms and out of sight of the living areas.

Tenancy management plans

85. When engaging with Indigenous clients, HSC staff are proactive in working collaboratively with relevant stakeholders such as recognised entities from the commencement of and for the duration of the tenancy.

86. In planning housing services to Queensland's Indigenous remote communities, the Department is developing a range of prevention and early interventions strategies for tenancy management on these communities. The tenancy management plans for these communities take into consideration the principles of participation; ownership/self-determination; infrastructure (i.e. life skills training and education about tenancy management and maintenance) and support services to support child protection activities.

87. Based on the recent history of child protection in Queensland and Australia, it is evident that statutory intervention requires wider family support as well as a preventative service network to result in positive outcomes for children, families, communities and good governance. It is important that best practice suggestions in the literature on preventing child abuse and crisis intervention inform the Queensland Government's provision of services in remote communities. In developing the Remote Indigenous Communities Practice Manual, particular focus is being given to ensure the locally-based service delivery and supportive tenancy management services for the 32 individual remote Indigenous communities are coordinated with other agencies' prevention and early intervention support services.

Remote Indigenous Communities Practice Manual

88. For staff working on the remote Indigenous communities, a separate practice manual has been developed to support staff in understanding and responding to a range of housing and related social issues that tenants may face. These include child safety, referral and access to support, life skills, education and employment, health, violence, incarceration, alcohol and substance abuse, mental health and disability.

89. Some key challenges for service provision for housing and child safety staff in remote Indigenous communities are the limited availability of support services to provide wrap-around support to families to promote successful tenancies; limited access to suitable kinship care arrangements; high turnover of child safety staff impacting on relationship building, information sharing and capacity to implement prevention and early intervention strategies to support families before situations become critical; and a lack of suitable housing. Many of the existing houses are in need of major repairs or even demolition.

90. In many situations, issues of child abuse and neglect in families stem from a lack of parenting knowledge and limited access to good levels of support through family, friends and support services to promote the development of good parenting skills. Some Indigenous people also retain the fear that their children

will be removed by government authorities, as a legacy of the forced removal of children from their family groups under past government programs.

91. Housing Services is aware through working with Child Safety that a practice issue in remote Indigenous communities is the limited availability of kinship carer placements within the community for children who are subject to statutory child protection interventions. Because of this, many Indigenous children are removed from their community and placed with carers in another community or town.
92. The Remote Indigenous Communities Procedures Manual provides priority allocation for transfers for existing tenants with children in contact with the child protection system. Managers also have discretion to promote an applicant to a higher segment on the Housing Register if the applicant has verified that they are escaping domestic violence or have child safety issues.
93. In areas such as Rockhampton, the HSC engaged with the Woorabinda Remote Community to support the prioritisation of allocations for children placed with kinship carers. However, this is subject to considerations such as overcrowding issues and potential family/community conflict.
94. This practice is in line with the Public Housing Practice Manual which gives priority allocation to families who are referred under the joint action plan negotiated between Child Safety and Housing Services.

Other Initiatives

95. In addition to the housing assistance programs and services offered to clients in contact with the child protection system, the Department has implemented a range of other initiatives over recent years. Some of the key initiatives are outlined below.
96. The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, expiring 2013, supported various initiatives such as Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YAHRS), with capital assistance provided by Housing Services. Under this support

initiative, accommodation included supervised supported accommodation, Community Managed Studio Units and the Department trialled Community Managed Youth Studios to reduce the risk of homelessness of young people.

Youth Studio Initiative

97. The Youth Studio Initiative is a joint initiative between Housing Services, Office of Youth and Child Safety which aims to reduce the risk of homelessness for young people by providing temporary relocatable accommodation to assist in stabilising a young person's familial accommodation arrangement. The initiative is delivered through a registered housing provider and provides a combination of support and temporary transitional accommodation. The initiative offers two types of relocatable one bedroom units with a kitchen and separate bathroom. To be eligible, the young person must be receiving support through the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service or an approved support provider; have the support of a carer for a minimum of 12 months while they are occupying the unit; be aged between 15 and 24 years at the time of the referral; be transitioning from the child protection system or a youth detention centre; and have been homeless or living in unstable, temporary or inadequate housing.

A Place to Call Home Initiative

98. Another key initiative is the A Place to Call Home program (APTCH). APTCH is a combined Federal and State Government initiative which provides \$150 million over five years to states and territories to create 600 new homes for homeless individuals and families across Australia. The agreed program target for Queensland from 2008-09 to 2012-13 is 143 new properties for families referred through the program.

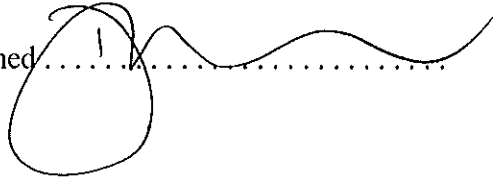
99. Attachment Two provides further details of the Department's programs and initiatives for clients in contact with the child protection system. Some programs and initiatives focus on young people under the custody/guardianship of Child Safety who need to transition out of care to independent living. The Department also provides housing assistance to families who are in contact with the child

protection system including foster and kinship carers and to families who require intensive support.

Further Work

100. Although significant advancements have been made within Housing Services over past years, there are a few areas for improvement including:
101. The Department's strategic relationship with the Child Protection System to be formalised and reflective of the recent machinery of government changes.
102. Funding for a number of joint initiatives that focus on employment, education and stable accommodation for young people exiting care to be explored.
103. Local arrangements are a critical component of assisting vulnerable families and children at risk.
104. Opportunities for Housing Service Delivery staff to access child safety notification decision making tools made available to police, health and education Departments.
105. Co-ordination of services for young people exiting State care, as part of a transition plan, requires a referral to the Department as early as possible. This is particularly relevant if the young person is transitioning to adult disability services and has complex support needs or disabilities.
106. Ensuring appropriate sharing of information, particularly with the growth of the role of the not for profit sector in providing both housing services and support services.

I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the provisions of the *Oaths Act 1867*.

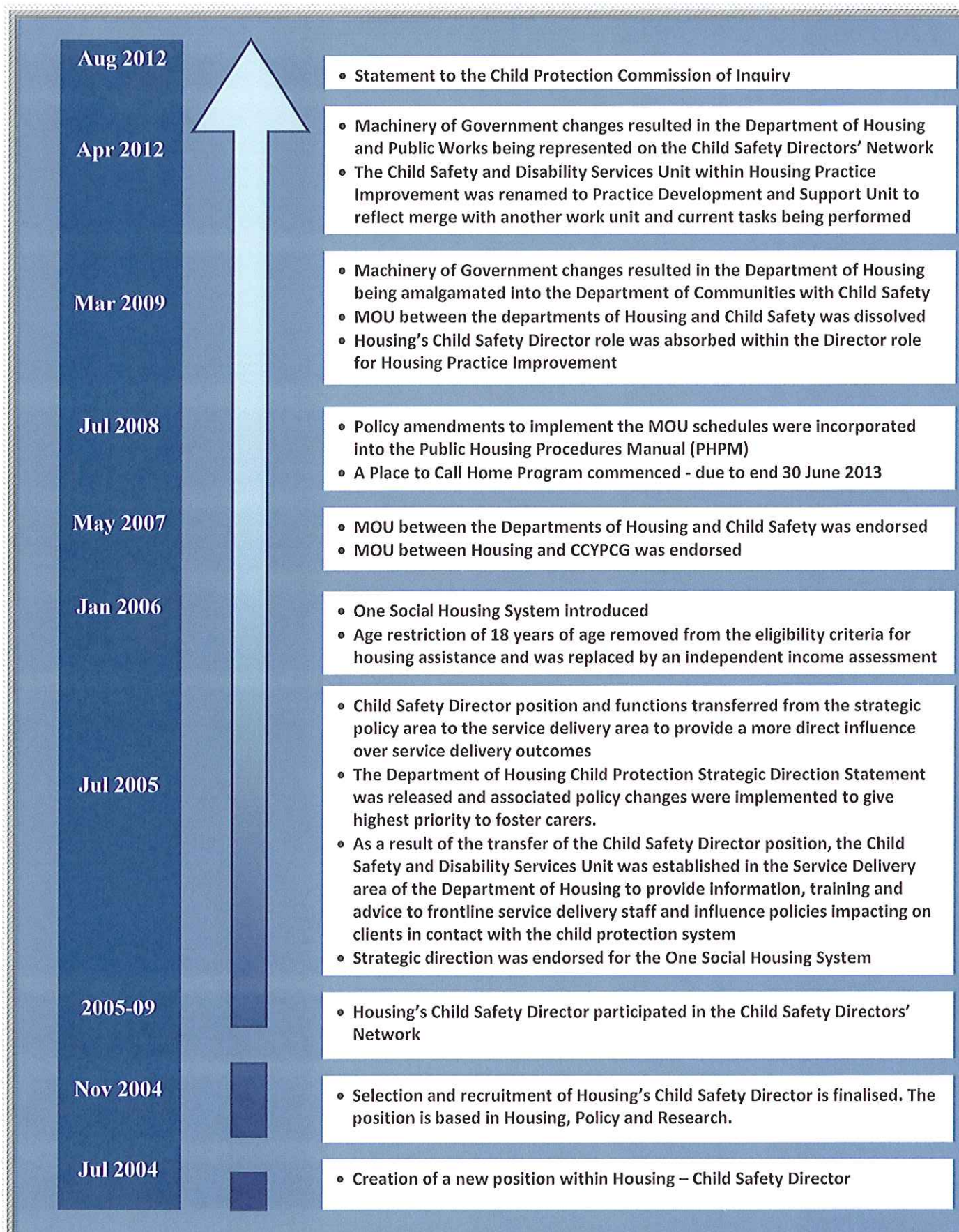
Signed.....

Taken and declared before me, at Brisbane this 10th day of August 2012

Witness, 
William Beryl Badchose

Solicitor/Barrister/Justice of the
Peace/Commission for Declarations

Attachment 1 - Chronology of Housing Services' Strategic Commitment to Child Protection



Attachment 2 - Programs and Initiatives

The Department of Housing and Public Works has a range of programs and initiatives to support clients who are either in contact with the child protection system or who are at risk of being in contact.

These programs and initiatives include:

Target Group	Policy Framework	Program/Initiative
Families in contact with the child protection system (also including foster and kinship carers)	One Social Housing System Social housing policies and procedures (resulting from former MOU and three schedules)	Inter-Agency Priority Group – Child in Need of Protection – provision of priority social housing Reporting child safety concerns Sharing information with Child Safety Local partnerships between HSCs and CSSCs Bond Loan and Rental Grant programs
	National Homelessness Agreement (note: Qld decided to focus on homeless families in need of coordinated housing and support)	Inter-Agency Priority Group - A Place to Call Home – provision of priority social housing

Target Group	Policy Framework	Program/Initiative
Young people in contact with the child protection system exiting care	One Social Housing System Social housing policies and procedures (resulting from former MOU and three schedules) Transition from care National Homelessness Agreement Transitional Housing	Inter-Agency Priority Group – Child in Need of Protection – provision of priority social housing Reporting child safety concerns Sharing information with Child Safety Local partnerships between HSCs and CSSCs Bond Loan and Rental Grant programs Youth Studio Initiative Community Housing
Families who require intensive support	One Social Housing System Social housing policies and procedures Supportive tenancy management	Inter-Agency Priority Group - A Place to Call Home – provision of priority social housing Link to support service or child safety through tenancy management