



RESEARCH REPORT:

**International Models of Robust Structures to meet Future
Community Housing Needs**

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International Models of Robust Structures to meet Future Community Housing Needs

1. Background

The change in Government in 2008 has brought about changes in the way community housing is viewed and how Government intends to support it. The main shift is away from funding capacity building of community housing providers towards funding of projects that provide additional housing on a cost-sharing partnership basis. Within this shift in emphasis is a desire by Government to see fewer larger community housing providers.

CHA is of the view that the sector can only grow by focusing resources on established groups that have a strong asset base, a good track record of development and service provision and a well developed business and commercial acumen.

Changes in government capital funding of the sector are likely to produce maybe ten to twelve significant players that will be spread throughout the country. These players could form the anchor for local and regional networks of community housing organisations. This interaction may be at an informal level of information exchange, a contractual level of service provision, or may ultimately result in formal group structures. These bodies will rapidly become sector leaders and will attract a high calibre of professionalism, becoming in effect community housing businesses with large asset bases, strong balance sheets and significant growth potential.¹

CHA sees real value in working toward some form of consolidation within the sector. This consolidation may not necessarily mean the amalgamation or takeover of small housing providers. Other forms of consolidation are possible, such as the establishment of a hierarchy of providers or operators within the sector which would allow greater specialisation of function and focus.

As part of a larger contract, Corydon Consultants was asked to investigate international models for groups cooperating on housing issues looking at the types of structures established, the functions undertaken by the various players and the benefits gained. CHA believes it has a significant role to play in leading the transition towards a stronger community housing sector, representing the best interests of the sector, helping organisations to grow, and assisting groups to identify synergies while achieving their individual objectives. The overseas models reviewed showed that within each of the consolidated structures of providers there is an organisation like CHA providing services and support to increase the effectiveness of the sector and representing the interests of the sector as a whole.

Under the contract objectives, Corydon Consultants was also asked to identify the best locations and catchments for “hubs” or “clusters” of organisations in New Zealand and develop a model for the establishment and management of these structures (including roles, systems and support requirements). Interviews with CHA members highlighted that such an approach was inappropriate at this stage and that a more “organic” approach emerging from the grass roots was likely to be more constructive and sustainable in the long term.

¹ CHA Strategic Plan 2009-12, p.3

Four examples of groups cooperating on housing issues in the form of a consolidated structure were investigated as case-studies which are contained in the appendix to this report. Three of these examples are from Australia and one from the United Kingdom. The Australian examples are considered more relevant to the New Zealand context as the legislative framework at the Australian State level is similar to New Zealand and community housing organisations in these states are more comparable (in terms of numbers of staff and housing stock) to organisations in this country.

2. Case study findings

The case study examples documented at the end of this report demonstrate, there are a variety of forms and functions consolidated community housing structures can take and there are significant advantages in these cluster arrangements, not just for the organisations concerned but also for the clients of community housing providers if the arrangements enable the organisations to deliver more houses and better services.

2.1 Structures and roles of the various components

The four examples each comprise a national support body, a lead agency and a cluster of members serviced by that agency. The roles undertaken by each of these components is summarised in this section.

National support and advocacy organisation

In both Australia and the United Kingdom there are organisations that fulfil the type of role that Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) has in New Zealand. These organisations undertake research, coordinate regional or special purpose forums, provide training and information to members and represent and advocate on behalf of the sector as a whole. All the Australian CHA equivalent organisations (excluding the UK Federation) are funded in part by central government.

Lead organisations

In both Australia and the United Kingdom there are agencies which fulfil the role of a lead-type agency within a hub or cluster of smaller member organisations. Two of the lead agency examples (CEHL in Victoria and CESA in South Australia) own the community housing stock and lease them out to member organisations. In all of the Australian case study examples the lead agency equivalent provides asset management services, negotiates loans, provides training and facilitates gatherings of members. These lead agencies are funded in part by central government with that income supplemented to a greater or lesser degree by funding from such sources as a portion of member rents, local government and non-government organisations.

The UK lead agency example (Norfolk RSL Alliance) the organisation has a wider role – part CHA, part lead agency. It provides information and advice aimed at reducing costs and improving standards e.g. by encouraging more effective use of available resources and promoting good house design and management practices. It also provides some specialist services to members (e.g. mediation). In addition, it represents the sector at a regional level on planning and policy matters and facilitates member forums and the sharing of information between members.

Cluster members

Organisations who become members of a cluster or hub typically undertake the day-to-day management of rental properties, minor maintenance, collection of rents,

selection of tenants and tenancy management. In the case of CEHL in Victoria and CESA in South Australia CCH Ltd in New South Wales, these lead organisations own the rental properties and are responsible for all asset management. In the UK example, the members of the Alliance own the properties and are responsible for all property management and maintenance.

2.2 Advantages experienced from a consolidated structure

The four case-studies confirm the advantages for community housing organisations in joining forces to form clusters with a lead agency (some refer to a “peak” agency) at the centre to coordinate activities and resources, and to provide specific services and training.

The outcomes achieved from the three case-study systems that have been in operation over a number of years² show that by forming clusters, the organisations gain a stronger more influential voice, attract more qualified and professional staff who, through a more secure funding base, gain greater job security. The cluster members also gain greater access to resources including land and funding because they are able to demonstrate more robust administrative systems and asset bases. In those clusters where one organisation takes responsibility for property ownership, administration and maintenance, duplication of services and administration systems is reduced.

By joining together in cluster-type arrangements, the individual members are able to maintain their independence rather than being merged into one organisation. The cluster arrangement does not preclude the forming of partnerships between specific members for greater gains.

Cluster arrangements allow for specialisation so that social support organisations are able to focus on their core business of ensuring their clients’ housing and welfare needs are being met rather than having to divert valuable staff and volunteer time to the task of property development, acquisition and management.

Cluster arrangements between organisations with a common cause facilitate the sharing of ideas and information, the provision of advice and assistance when needed and better coordination of services. Consolidated structures can be regional or national. Regional structures seek to ensure that a holistic service is provided to meet the needs of the wide range of community housing clients. National structures can be established to bring together specialist providers (such as home ownership through shared equity, or housing for a particular population group such as mental health patients or people with intellectual disabilities).

2.3 Application to New Zealand

Although it is clear that there are advantages in forming more consolidated structures and this has been recognised by Central Government and by the Community Housing Association, interviews with community housing providers across the country clearly indicate that there is a degree of wariness about pursuing such a course of action as a deliberate restructuring rather than an organic process. There is a strong level of interest in creating structures that will ease access to finance and housing but the organisations want to manage this at their own pace and to develop structures and systems that match the particular mix of organisations in each region.

² CESA in South Australia has only recently been established so is unable to demonstrate benefits at this early stage

Before agreeing to join together to form a consolidated structure with a lead agency, the smaller organisations will have to be assured that their particular client base will not be worse off, that the lead organisation will not seek to take them over or impose their particular style or philosophy onto the other members of the cluster, and that there are clear advantages for them in terms of improved access to finance, skills, knowledge, energy and assets.

The key ingredient for successful consolidation in such a relatively small sector as currently exists in New Zealand is trust. For this to be generated, the parties need to know each other, share similar values, have a common cause (i.e. meeting the needs of a particular geographical area or a particular group of people) and not be competitive but rather complimentary in their activities.

It is recommended therefore that CHA support the formation of community housing clusters by adopting a more long-term strategy rather than a quick fix approach. This can be achieved by fostering an environment that facilitates collaboration through strong, purpose-based networking forums and partnerships which enable organisations to grow their business and work to their strengths. These partnerships can later be expanded to include others.

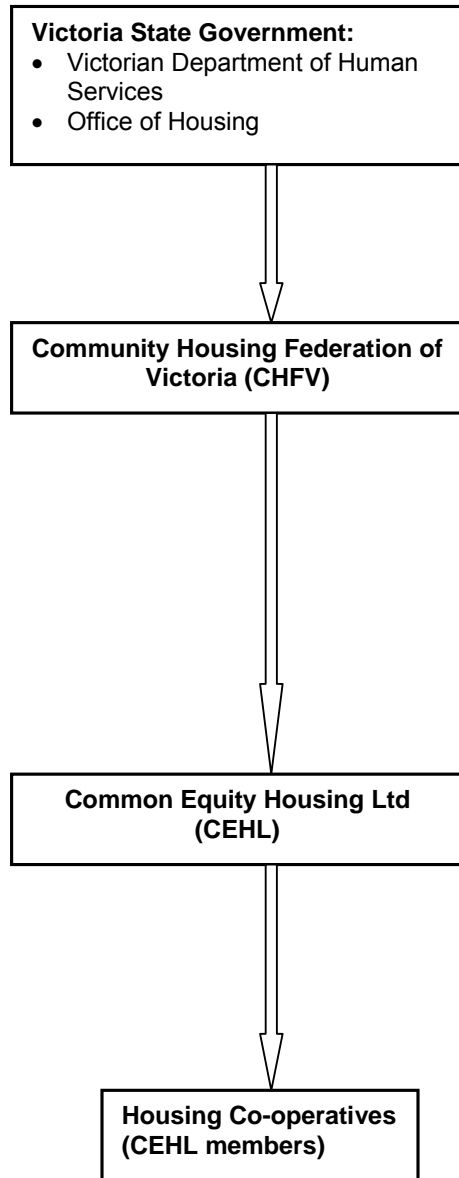
Through the forums and expansion of activities undertaken by members clear leaders or lead agencies will emerge and will be supported by others to take on that role. In some regions that may not happen for some time but in such cases if 2 or more organisations agree to come together to form a partnership, the nucleus of a cluster will begin to develop and the sector will be strengthened. Central Government's decisions on funding may speed up the development of community housing clusters with smaller organisations becoming increasingly reliant on the larger funded organisations for housing supply.

CHA can also assist in the development of a more structured and comprehensive approach to the supply of community housing by encouraging and supporting as necessary the development of regional and city-wide strategies aimed at freeing existing resources in local government, community groups and the private sector to achieve a better match between demand and supply.

CHA can provide a valuable support role for all these activities by making available templates, checklists, guidelines and research, encouraging stronger longer government involvement in the sector and brokering national agreements with suppliers of goods and services. Much of this work is already underway based on successful practices adopted overseas as well as in New Zealand.

Appendix 1: Overseas Case Studies

Case Study 1: Community Housing Structure - Victoria, Australia



- Relevant legislation: Housing Act; National Affordable Housing Agreement (whole of government approach to tackling housing affordability); and Federal Stimulus Package (allocates \$1.5 billion for social housing, of which approximately half is allocated to community housing sector)
- Provides 85% of CHFV's funding
- Provides capital funding to housing associations, especially to a few, larger associations

Equivalent of CHA

- Governed by a 12-person Board, elected annually
- 5 staff (4.2 FTE)
- Funded by Housing Office (State) and 5% from members
- Approximately 80 members
- Services provided to members (including CEHL):
 - community housing sector development and coordination
 - policy development and analysis - members can be involved in policy formulation and decision-making through Sector Groups. The three Sector Groups are Housing Co-operatives, Transitional Housing and Rooming Houses.
 - training and professional development

Equivalent of Lead Agency

- Not-for-profit housing association
- Owns properties and leases back to members
- Provides the following services to CEHL members:
 - asset management, including upgrades and new builds, property inspections
 - negotiates loans
 - provides training and advice to members
 - facilitates regional associations
- Reports to Government
- Funded from State Government and CEHL member rents.

Equivalent of cluster member

- Funded from rents
- Day-to-day management of houses, including minor maintenance
- Manage waiting lists and select tenants
- Collect rents

Common Equity Housing Ltd (CEHL)

Common Equity Housing Ltd (CEHL) is a registered housing association, which was established in 1997 to provide a means for lower income earners to access rental properties that they can manage and control on a co-operative and secure basis.

CEHL supports 105 small Housing Co-operatives (also referred to as CERCs), which covers approximately 1,800 properties. The Housing Co-operatives consist of 10 - 25 houses, which are managed by tenants.

CEHL's vision is *"to be regarded as a leading promoter and facilitator of co-operative housing, providing affordable accommodation to co-operative groups where there are real opportunities for tenant participation and self management and thereby adding to tenants' self worth and housing security."*³

Structure of CEHL

CEHL is managed by a Board that is responsible for the strategic management and financial performance of the organisation. The Board consists of eleven members. Five Directors are elected by members at the AGM. Five Technical Directors are appointed by the Board, based on expertise in law, finance, real estate, and social housing. The Managing Director of CEHL is also a Board member.

CEHL employs 40 staff across five divisions: financial services, human resources, co-op support and development, asset management and project development, and housing services.

Funding for CEHL

As a housing association, CEHL can access capital funding from the Victorian State Government. CEHL has purchased all the properties through a combination of government grants (65%) and commercial loans (35%).

CEHL members pay rent to CEHL for their property. CEHL uses this income for operational purposes and to undertake capital works that will add to the value of the properties, such as major structural works. CEHL also charges a fee to members for two optional services: monthly book keeping and rent calculation (an independent assessment of a tenant's income in order to calculate rent).

Role and functions of CEHL

Common Equity Housing Ltd:

- owns the properties
- negotiates and services loans
- provides professional assistance, including training and advice to CEHL members in their role as landlord and a social housing provider
- provides advice on legal responsibilities and good practice
- assists CEHL members if they have difficulties in maintaining the houses, managing rent collection etc
- facilitates three regional associations, which provide a forum for CEHL members in a geographic area to liaise on matters of common interest
- maintains a list of community housing contacts for CEHL members to access
- reports to the Government on the programme.

Role of CEHL members

Housing is managed by the co-operative and members of the co-operative are responsible for all tasks associated with running a housing co-operative, including:

- financial administration
- selecting new tenant members

³ www.cehl.co.au

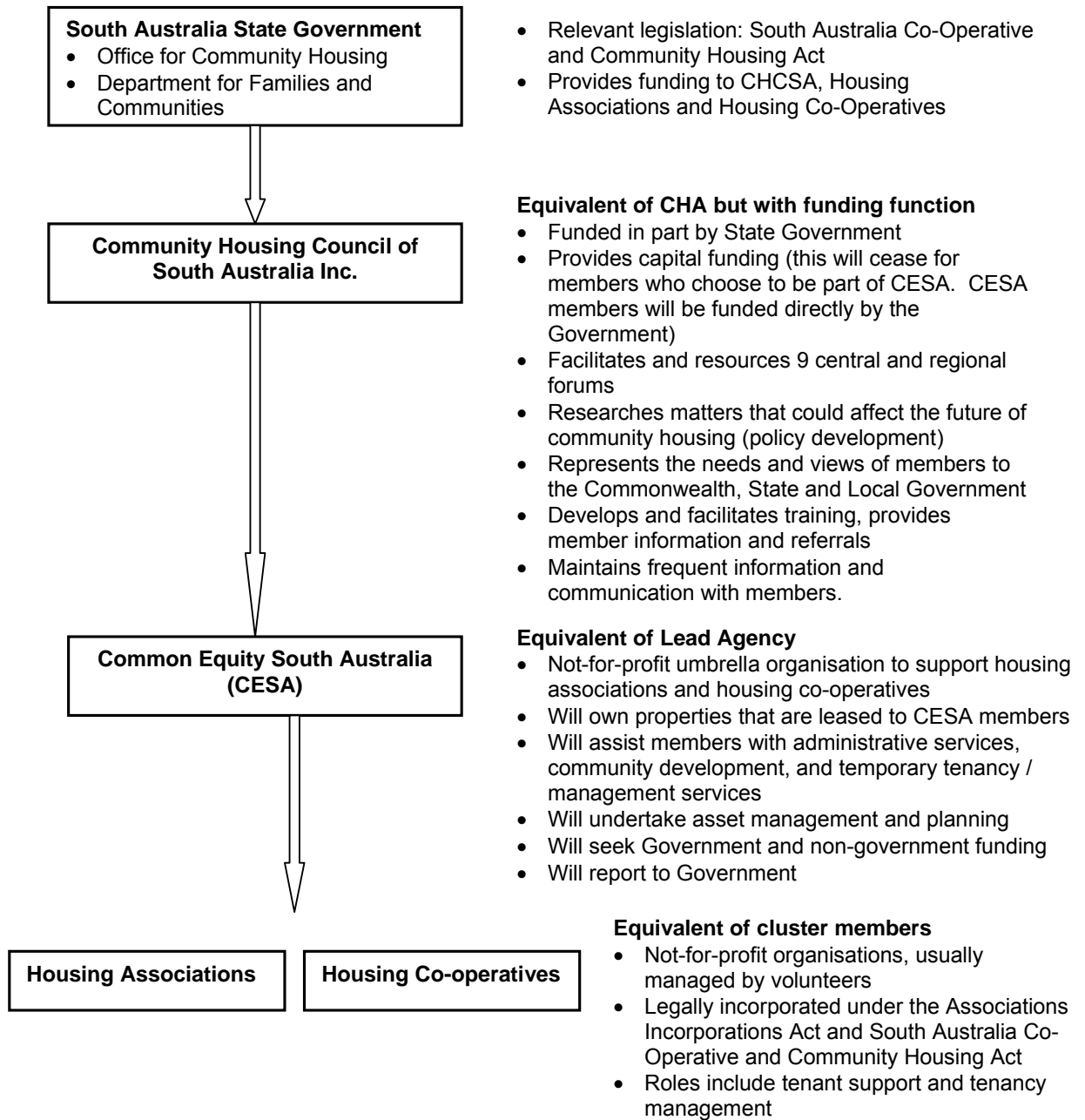
- collecting the rents
- arranging house maintenance
- maintaining a Board to run the co-operative, including reporting on their performance to CEHL and complying with relevant legislation and the Programme Directives.

Benefits from the management structure

Benefits of the structure for CEHL members include:

- developing tenants' skills through the training that CEHL provides. Training includes co-operative management, how to run meetings, decision making and financial management
- improved property management as a result of advice provided by CEHL, which includes professional property officers who provide an advisory service to each housing co-operative on matters such as fair pricing for maintenance works and an inspection of completed works. CEHL also undertakes three-yearly property inspections
- building communities by bringing people together who are based in a similar geographic location or are facing similar issues. This has created stability as a result of tenants staying in the area longer. CEHL indicated that it has most success working with single parents, elderly and new arrivals / refugees.

Case Study 2: Community Housing Structure - South Australia



Common Equity South Australia

The Community Housing Council of South Australia (CHCSA) is in the final stages of establishing Common Equity South Australia (CESA). CESA is based on the successful model in Victoria (refer to Case Study 1). CESA will be a non-profit, umbrella organisation to provide for the long-term future and operational viability of the small volunteer-run community housing sector consisting of Housing Associations and Housing Co-operatives in South Australia.⁴

CESA is a response to major changes in the community housing sector. The State Government supports the development of large 'preferred growth providers' and directs most resources to these groups. The number of smaller volunteer organisations has been rapidly declining as they struggle with management demands, increasing reporting requirements, and limited or no access to resources for growth or redevelopment. CHCSA has recognised that without change there will be a continuing loss of diversity in the sector.⁵

The State Government has set an initial target of 200 properties to make CESA viable.

Structure of CESA

CESA will be a limited company. CESA will be managed by a voluntary Board of Management and will have paid staff to manage the organisation and deliver services to its members. The Board will consist of independent, skill-based members elected by members at the AGM. Other forums will be established, such as a policy advisory committee, to enable members to communicate issues and ideas to the Board.

Funding for CESA

CESA will enter into a funding agreement with the Department for Families and Communities, and will raise additional capital as grants, loans or seek other funding and materials from government and non-government organisations.

Member organisations will pay a percentage of their rental income to CESA. The percentage has not yet been determined. This fee will provide an incentive for CESA to grow the capacity of its members, and to actively engage with and recruit potential members.

Role and functions of CESA

The role and functions of CESA will be to:

- assume ownership of properties on behalf of member organisations (Housing Associations and Housing Co-operatives)
- lease back properties to member organisations, who in turn sub-lease to their members / tenants
- conduct asset management (except for minor maintenance) and asset planning
- assist member organisations to manage their affairs, including administrative services and community development for the sector. They will also provide

⁴ CHCSA, March 2008, *Towards a Common Equity Housing Model for Volunteer-Run Housing Associations and Housing Co-Operatives in South Australia: roles and functions of the proposed body*

⁵ CHCSA, August 2009, *Common Equity South Australia Question and Answer Information Sheet: for Housing Associations-*

- temporary tenancy or organisation management services for member organisations dealing with internal conflict or loss of skills
- attract Government and non-government resources
- undertake regulatory reporting to the Government
- enable democratic participation of member organisations in CESA.

Role of member organisations

Member organisations will continue to operate as independent, democratic organisations under their own rules and by-laws, and will continue to manage functions such as:

- tenant selection
- tenancy management
- minor maintenance
- governance of the member organisation
- maintaining financial records, budgeting and auditing
- specific community development activities as decided by the organisation.

Anticipated benefits from the management structure

The major incentives and benefits for becoming a member of CESA are anticipated⁶ to be:

- stability and sustainability of the volunteer-managed sector over the long term
- maintaining their independent identity and operations, while being able to compete with the large organisations who are currently securing the majority of government funding for not-for-profit housing
- the availability of administrative support services and community development support without the need for imposing extra levies on tenants
- the availability of mediation services between tenants and CESA members, when necessary
- providing a stronger voice for members to the Government and reducing reporting requirements to the Government
- the prospect of growth and the availability of a community-based property developer
- better options for an ageing membership
- being part of a sector that has a future.

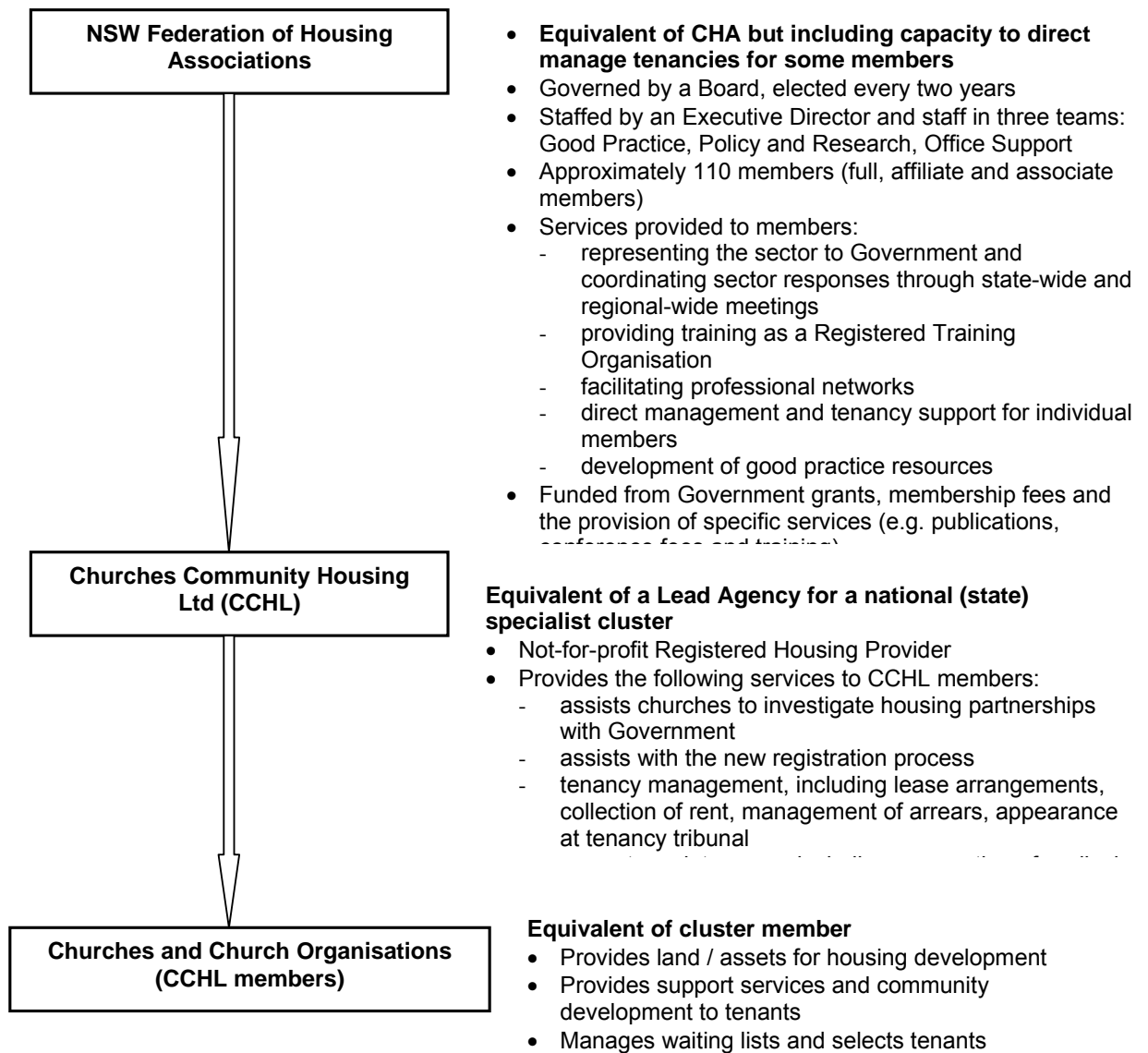
The major incentives and benefits for the State Government are anticipated⁷ to be:

- meeting the Government's aims for generating growth in the community housing sector
- providing greater confidence to the Government that smaller community housing organisations are viable, well supported, and able to meet community needs
- reducing demands on Government resources by creating one umbrella organisation that will be the focus of regulation, compliance and reporting, rather than the Government having to communicate with individual members.

⁶ Common Equity South Australia: question and answer information sheet (August 2009); Towards a Common Equity Housing Model for Volunteer-Run Housing Associations and Housing Co-Operatives in South Australia: roles and functions of the proposed body (March 2008)

⁷ Common Equity South Australia: question and answer information sheet (August 2009)

Case Study 3: Community Housing Structure – New South Wales, Australia



Churches Community Housing Limited

Churches Community Housing Limited (CCHL) is a registered housing provider (an "A" Grade registered organisation) with the Office of Community Housing, and is accredited under the National Community Housing Standards. As of June 2009, CCHL manages 211 properties.

The aim of CCHL is to facilitate government and churches to work together to achieve mutually satisfying housing management and partnership arrangements, which provide affordable social housing for people on a low income, especially for those requiring support services.

The mission of CCHL is *"to provide safe affordable housing for those in need, through:*

- *developing partnerships between churches and government*
- *partnering with those who provide support services*
- *providing professional housing management services to tenants in low rental accommodation*
- *seeking new opportunities to meet the needs of those in need.*⁸

Background to CCHL

CCHL has 26 support partnerships covering 22 programmes. These partners include Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Care, Catholic Care Alive Program, Uniting Care, The NSW Alcohol and Drug Foundation, The Haymarket Foundation, L'Arche Community, Rendu Youth Services, Vincentian Family Services, The Marian Centre, Gethsemane Community, Sudanese Settlement Services, The Assertive Outreach Team North Shore, the Office of the Protective Commissioner, The Samaritans Foundation, Little Company of Mary, Australian Red Cross and Mercy Community Services.

As significant landowners across NSW, churches have an important contribution to make to addressing affordable housing issues. This experience includes the provision of social services and developing, managing and maintaining property portfolios. Churches are using a range of approaches for addressing affordable housing, including:

- developing housing on vacant church land (or in place of old church buildings)
- replacing church buildings with multi-level apartments in suburban centres
- upgrading and converting aged care facilities into independent living units
- converting church manses, rectories and presbyteries into affordable housing
- developing partnerships with the private sector to build affordable housing.

Where churches decide to use their assets to provide affordable housing, they contribute land, buildings and / or cash, and the Government provides grants for infrastructure (such as the house itself or associated infrastructure). In these situations, the church and Government enter into a funding arrangement, in which the Government typically has a 30-40 year pro-rata interest arrangement which reflects their contribution. Since 2008, the Federal Government has established the

⁸ Churches Community Housing Limited Annual General Report for the Year Ended 30 June 2009

National Rental Affordability Scheme, which provides a grant over a 10-year period (outlined further below).

The Federal and State Governments have established a number of programmes to support community housing. CCHL has been, or is currently involved in these programmes.

- In 2000, the Office of Community Housing called for expressions of interest from not-for-profit organisations for the Partnerships in Community Housing Program. Organisations can apply for up to 80% of the total cost for the construction or acquisition of social housing. Organisations are required to contribute a minimum of 20% which can be land, cash, or in-kind services or a mix of any of these. The programme attracted strong interest, with the majority being received from churches and church-based organisations. The second strongest level of interest came from Local Government.
- The Crisis Accommodation Program, resulted in the growth of partnerships between churches and housing providers for the provision of support services and housing. Recent examples include a partnership between Marist Community Services and Wentworth Area Community Housing and a partnership between St Francis Welfare and Casa Venegas.
- The Community Housing Assistance Program has partnership projects involving churches in the provision of long term supported housing.
- In July 2008, the Federal government established the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) to provide financial subsidies to housing projects that offer discounted rental accommodation to low and moderate income earners. Churches that have vacant land are embracing this programme as it is possible to create new housing with little or no outlay of capital. The main restrictions of the Scheme are that the property must participate in the scheme for 10 years. The title in the land remains unchanged. In many cases the project will generate positive cash flow in the first or second year, over and above loan repayments.
- Other recent changes to the legislation in NSW include the Performance Based Registration System and Registration of the Housing Component of Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) and Crisis Accommodation Programme (CAP). As part of these changes, amendments have been made to the code of practice, which now requires housing providers to be registered. Those that are not, have to develop a partnership with a registered housing provider, or hand over their properties to a registered housing provider. These changes have also resulted in the Department of Housing entering into, and remaining in funding and head leasing arrangements, only with registered housing providers.

To achieve registration, housing providers have to achieve nine core outcomes and regularly report on these to the Office of Community Housing. Four classifications for housing providers have been established:

- Not-for-Profit Growth Provider - organisations that will or can manage 200 or more community housing properties and will develop large scale affordable housing projects
- Housing Provider – will or can manage 200 or more community housing properties

- Housing Manager – will or can manage between 1 – 199 community housing properties
- Small Housing Manager - will or can manage 1-30 community housing properties.

Role and functions of CCHL

CCHL helps churches or church-support organisations to investigate possible housing partnerships with Government, to meet the housing needs of those on low incomes or who are marginalised in some way in the community. The types of help offered by CCHL include:

- assisting with information on identified needs in the area, and providing contacts who can help target the housing project to those most in need
- negotiating with Government at a state and local level to develop the parameters of a project
- provision of information on best practice principles and methods
- links with other Churches, organisations or groups in the area to explore the possibilities of running a project
- provision of information on the funding opportunities available and assistance in preparing funding submissions
- provision of examples and advice about best utilising property or land
- provision of examples of what has worked in the past
- assistance in training and developing local management teams.

CCHL seeks to help the church sector to increase their housing stock by:

- facilitating partnerships with church agencies and government, referred to as a Public Church Partnership (PCP). A PCP is an arrangement between a government department or agency and a church or church agency, in which each contributes to the creation of a service which delivers community housing
- addressing barriers to the effective use of church land and buildings
- developing supported housing.

CCHL also provides all property and tenancy management functions to members, such as:

- preparation and sign-up of leases
- collection of rent and utilities charges
- monitoring tenant rental arrears
- tenant newsletter
- regular tenant satisfaction surveys, including a request for feedback when a property receives maintenance
- appearance at the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal when necessary
- entry and exit property condition reports
- cyclical maintenance reports
- maintenance management, including a 24 hour, 7 day week emergency line.

As a result of recent changes to legislation, CCHL also actively supports churches through the new registration process, changes to the code of practice, and registration of the housing component of SAAP/CAP programmes (referred to in section 4.1).

Benefits of Public Church partnerships for CCHL

CCHL has identified the following benefits of Public Church Partnerships in NSW as follows:

- churches have significant assets in high-needs areas
- the Government's capital investment is reduced by using church assets for community housing and it is a more secure and cost-effective investment than working with the "for profit" sector
- church-owned land can be available to deliver improved housing outcomes in areas that the Government would otherwise not have the budget to address
- When working with churches, the likelihood of extending the contract beyond the agreed period is much higher than with a private investor, who is likely to be looking to realise the capital gain on the asset as the contract expires
- The main beneficiaries (tenants) are people with high needs who would be unable to access any housing in their current community
- Integrated care management can be included in these projects
- Public agencies and churches are able to respond to locally identified needs to support sustainable communities
- There is a proven record of delivery housing options through this type of partnership.⁹

Benefits of Public Church partnerships for CCHL members

Mission Australia was one of the Working Group members established in 1997 to develop a housing management vehicle for the church and welfare sector. CCHL emerged as this vehicle.

Mission Australia became a CCHL partner as a result of the impending changes to legislation, which require houses formally managed on behalf of the Office of Community Housing to be owned by a registered housing provider, or a partnership formalised with a registered housing provider. The core business of Mission Australia is to support clients/tenants, and it had become a property manager by default. With the changes to the legislation, Mission Australia saw an opportunity to separate the tenancy, property and client/tenant support functions. Between July 2003 and 2006, the Mission transferred 63 properties to CCHL.

Mission Australia identified the following benefits of being a partner of CCHL:

- staff can focus on the core business of developing and providing support services to tenants, rather than property acquisition and management which CCHL addresses. This has meant that there has been a greater emphasis on developing tenants' life skills
- tenants have been able to develop a positive relationship with CCHL regarding tenancy matters, which in turn has increased tenants' sense of works, self-esteem and confidence

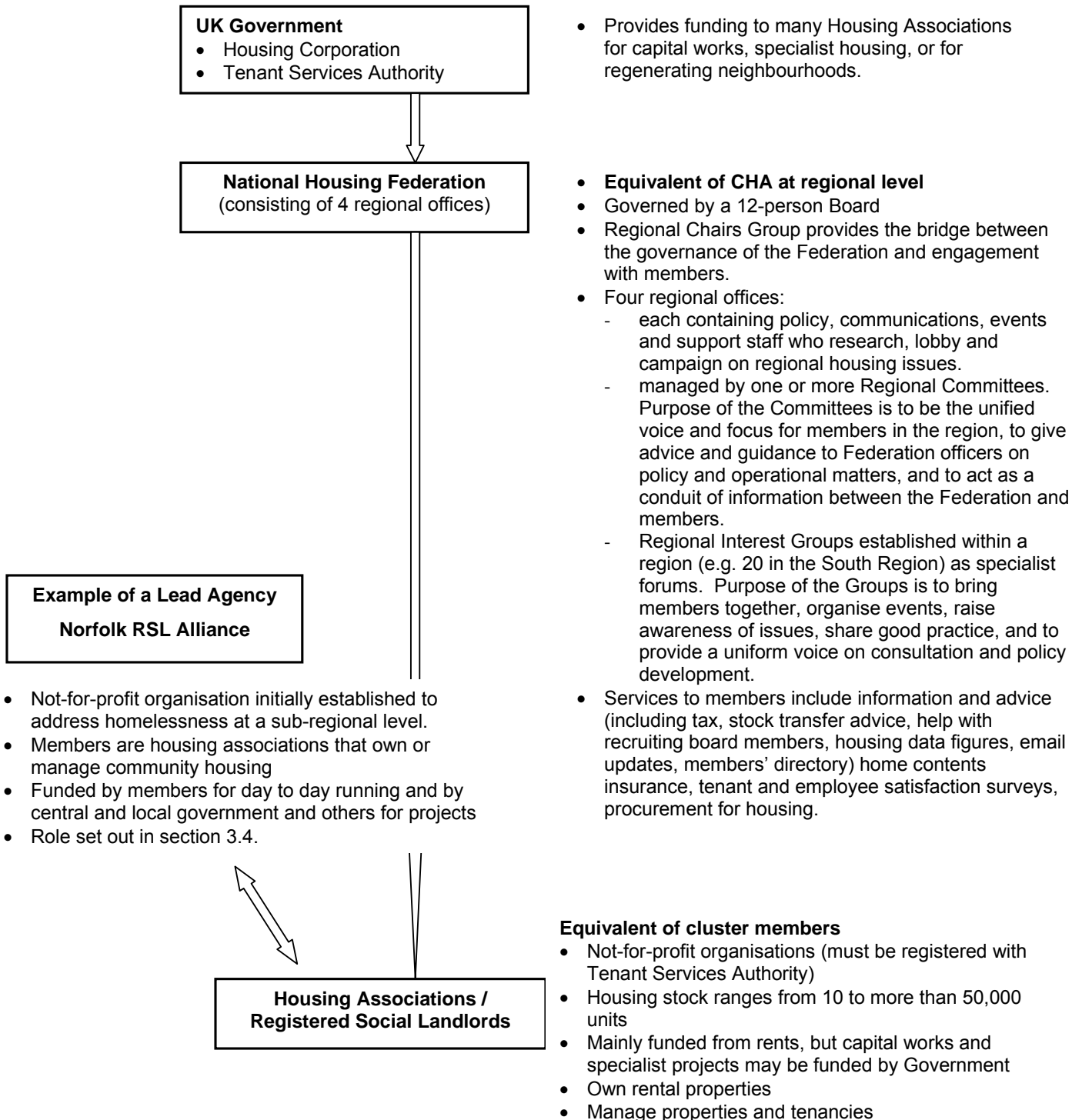
⁹ *Role of Community Housing in a Changing Environment: The Church Perspective*, Presentation by D Yule, CEO of CCHL, to Community Housing Conference (August 2006)

- the partnership has created greater expectations of successful tenancies as a result of the good communication between CCHL, its members and the members' tenants
- there is greater opportunity for increasing the affordable housing portfolio, and therefore supporting more people.

Mission Australia believes that the greatest tool to enable growth of CCHL is the relationship and service that it provides to its partners. As far as possible, the partnership should be inclusive and where possible, not exclusive – there is always room for another partner. Mission Australia also noted that the key to the successful partnership is communication between CCHL, its members and the members' tenants.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Managing Supported Housing in Partnership*, a presentation by CCHL and Mission Australia at the Community Housing Conference (August 2006)

Case Study 4: Community Housing Structure - United Kingdom



Norfolk RSL Alliance

In 2007, the Norfolk RSL Alliance was established as a model of joint working across a sub-region to promote, contribute to and influence the delivery of housing and sustainable communities in Norfolk. The catalyst for establishing the Alliance was to respond to the Housing Corporation's expectations for housing associations to contribute to the prevention and management of homelessness. Housing associations in Norfolk formed the Alliance to maximise their impact on homelessness through efficiency, innovation and joint working. Since its establishment, the Alliance has broadened its housing and community development focus beyond homelessness.

The Alliance found the use of an independent facilitator to be invaluable during negotiations on the role and scope of the Alliance, and to prepare a three-year strategy and action plan. This person is still employed, when necessary, to facilitate discussions on strategic planning matters for the Alliance. In the opinion of one of the members, the main lesson for the Alliance so far is that the facilitator should have been engaged earlier in the process.

Structure of Norfolk RSL Alliance

Membership of the Norfolk RSL Alliance is open to any housing associations that own or manage community housing in Norfolk. The Alliance brings together senior staff from the member associations. As of July 2009, the Alliance consists of 11 major housing associations who together own more than 38,000 homes.

Funding for Norfolk RSL Alliance

The Alliance is funded by members for day-to-day activities, including the part-time employment of a co-ordinator. One of the member organisations provides office accommodation for the co-ordinator.

For activities outside of house maintenance and management, funding is sought on a project-by-project basis from organisations that have community development funds, including central and local government and the Tenant Services Authority.

Role and functions of Norfolk RLS Alliance

The objectives of the Alliance are to:

- assist in the delivery of the sub-regional housing strategies.
- as part of working towards this objective, the Alliance designed and funded a mediation service that any housing association in the region can use. The service employs one part-time person and has been operating for two years. The service has reduced the average cost of mediation for housing associations from £500 to £300 per case.
- maximise the resources for community investment in the sub-region from central and regional government and other external sources
- The Alliance now has a seat on the Local Strategic Partnership, which was never available to the individual housing associations. As a result the Alliance is helping to align economic and children's issues with housing issues.
- encourage more effective use of available resources through increased efficiency, innovation and joint working
- promote continuous improvement in the quality of housing and delivery of sustainable communities in Norfolk by sharing expertise and best practice.

- The Alliance recently ran a pilot for estate management as a means of creating consistency and improvements in the way landlords manage tenancy matters.
- make the links in all policy work between housing and cross-cutting issues such as building communities, homelessness etc. A recent partnership that the Alliance has made, which has a community development focus rather than a purely housing focus, is with the Police in relation to anti-social behaviour.
- inform members of latest thinking on current issues, and to provide a consultative forum to consider and respond to issues. The Alliance recently hosted a conference on sector issues in the region.

Benefits and lessons from the partnership

The benefits of being a member of the Alliance, as noted by one of the members (Circle Anglia), include:

- a stronger voice to the local authority or government agencies on housing-related issues. For example, the local authority held a different view to the housing associations on how best to manage homelessness. However, by combining their experience the Alliance was able to influence the homeless strategy through the provision of a strong evidence base
- retaining independence by operating as a partnership between individual organisations (rather than merging into one organisation)
- an opportunity to share best practice and identify practical solutions with organisations with similar interests. For example, Circle Anglia had experienced difficulties in surveying its tenants, but with the experience of other Alliance members it adopted a methodology that increased the survey response rate from 60% to 92%
- a noticeable reduction in the costs that the organisation spends on mediation services
- other organisations only need to engage with one group (the Alliance), rather than a series of individual groups.