



Property Inspections and Home Visits

Policy Category	1. Tenancy	Policy Number	1.6
Author	Gayle Clarke – Housing Services Manager	Board Approval Date	25 February 2022
Position Responsible	Housing Services Manager	Scheduled Review Date	February 2024

Purpose:

Regular routine property inspections are integral to our commitment to excellence in client service:

- as an essential requirement of our strategies to ensure our property assets are maintained and protected
- by assisting us to sustain those tenancies that are at risk
- by aiding compliance with legal, safety and general "duty of care" requirements
- by providing an opportunity for tenants to provide direct feedback about our services.

Policy:

HOW maintains a program of regular and routine home visits and inspections of all properties under management.

All property inspections are organised and conducted in accordance with relevant legislation.

All inspections are completed by staff in accordance with HOW's work health and safety standards and protocols.

Generally, inspections and home visits will be completed twice each year for each property. The frequency will be varied for some tenants according to agreed HOW protocols and procedures.

Where sub-standard property care has been assessed, an effective course of action (and monitoring) will be followed that:

- is in accordance with the rights and responsibilities of a community housing landlord prescribed by the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (the Act)
- ensures that the asset of the organisation is protected
- best ensures that the tenancy can be sustained.

Where a tenant refuses to allow access for routine property inspections, orders for remedy will be sought as allowable under the relevant legislation.

The outcome of each property inspection will be documented in a prescribed format and copies stored electronically.

Staff visiting properties will receive adequate training and support in relation to the technical and client relationship building competencies required to undertake property inspections and home visits.

Relevant Service Standards:	<p>National Community Housing Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 1.2: Establishing and maintaining tenancies • Standard 2.1: Asset management strategy • Standard 2.2: Responsive maintenance and repairs • Standard 3.1: Tenant rights • Standard 3.4: Access to services of the organisation • Standard 3.5 Confidentiality and privacy • Standard 6.1: Financial management and systems • Standard 7.4: Occupational health and safety <p>Legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Tenancies Act 2010 • Residential Tenancies Regulation 2019 • Building Code of Australia • Work Health and Safety <p>National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) Performance Outcome and Performance Requirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Outcome 1 – Tenant and Housing Services • Performance Outcome 2 - Housing Assets
Related HOW Policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WH & S
Related HOW Forms & Internal Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Visit risk Assessment • Pre-Inspection Checklist • Property Inspection Checklist/Report

Procedure and Guidelines:

Notification to tenant

The Act requires that tenants are provided with a minimum of 7 days notice of property inspections, plus postage delivery time (this is conventionally an additional 7 working days, however, allowances for delays in local postage times should be made). Landlords are restricted to no more than 4 property inspections per year.

Prior to setting the appointment, consider the following factors:

- Check for any visiting conditions, e.g. “2 person visits only”, that may impact on the visit arrangements. In cases of 2-person visits, ensure co-workers are aware of intended time and place of visit.
- Invite support workers to attend inspections where formal supported housing arrangements exist.
- Allow time in schedule for contingencies.
- If a planned maintenance inspection or technical audit is also required at the property, ensure availability of asset staff.
- Use the standard letter to advise the tenant of the appointment.

Risk Assessment

Prior to any home visit a Home Visit Risk Assessment must have been completed and saved within the previous 12 months or since any incident at the property has occurred. If the Home Visit Risk Assessment indicates a 2 person visit is necessary, 2 HOW staff must be present at all times.

Visit preparation

Clarify history of the household in relation to former and current issues and needs.
Check tenant rent statement in case of queries or issues arising from rent arrears or non-rent debts.

Check previous property inspection reports for unresolved breaches, damage or repair issues.

Where relevant, confirm details of intended visit with co-workers and/or support workers.

Understand all HOW home visiting protocols contained in this document in relation to the visit.

Prepare equipment, resources and/or documents required for the visit and contingencies:

- Complete pre-inspection checklist.
- All property inspections must be documented using the routine Property Inspection Checklist/Report.
- Ensure package of HOW forms, information sheets, documents, etc. are in vehicles.
- Print out client information as required, e.g. rent and non-rent statements, property maintenance records, etc.
- For visits to a tenancy where the CSO is unfamiliar with the tenant, assume a 2-person visit.

Tenant not home

If the tenant is not home, do not enter the property and reorganise the visit when you return to the office¹. This can be completed by telephone, however, the appointment will need to be reconfirmed in writing using the standard notification letter. Attach a copy of this letter to the original property inspection service request (S/R) in Greentree.

If the tenant has missed two consecutive property inspection appointments, without a valid reason being offered:

- Check tenant notes to ensure there is no record of the tenant's current unavailability, then seek an order to access the property from the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) under section 60 of the Act.
- Where orders are received, the tenant should be sent a copy of the NCAT orders, with a covering letter. This serves as notice of the ordered inspection.
- All visits conducted under NCAT orders will be 2-person visits.

Carry out home visit/inspection

Home visit:

- Communicate with the tenant to confirm the person's consent, clarify purpose of visit and provide pre-inspection letter.

¹ Unless the tenant has provided consent to enter the property using spare keys.

- Actively seek and record all tenant feedback on services provided by HOW, any issues or concerns in relation to the visit and/or associated service or tenancy matters.
- Engage appropriately (considering duty of care and code of conduct requirements) with the tenants and others in the home.
- Deal with difficult or challenging situations appropriately and in accordance with relevant HOW policies and procedures.
- Recheck tenant contact details and document these on the Property Inspection Checklist/Report.
- Identify any issues of concern that might place the tenant or others (or the tenancy) at risk.

Property inspection:

- The property is inspected according to HOW's organisational requirements.
- All relevant aspects of the property are sighted and noted (as per the Property Inspection Checklist).
- Inspections are controlled and documented using the organisation's Property Inspection Checklist. It is imperative that this checklist is used to guide every inspection.
- Pay attention to "early warning signs" of potentially serious issues, such as damp areas and evidence of leaks, termite activity (signs of wood dust or soft door frames), and significant wall cracks, etc.
- Situations requiring specialist advice need to be identified e.g. hoarding, suspicion of domestic and family violence, mandatory reporting obligations and other issues that may indicate risk to safety and/or tenancy. If any of these issues are present, report to line manager.

Critical points to remember when conducting property inspections:

- Do not be late for appointments. If you are running late, ensure that the tenant is notified as soon as practicable.
- Seek approval from the tenant to take photos identifying any damage for internal HOW use only (ie to inform asset staff if not present). If tenant refuses no photos can be taken.
- Full and unimpeded access is required at all visits to all rooms, walls and floors. Asking for animals to be away from the property, items to be picked up off the floor or items removed from walls are reasonable requests and the purpose of such requests should be explained to the tenant (i.e. removal of animals for safety reasons; items to be picked up off the floor or removed from walls to inspect any potential damage etc). Such requests should be made in a professionally appropriate (polite and courteous) manner.
- Do not engage in other unnecessarily intrusive behaviours, e.g. opening cupboards and drawers (unless there is a valid reason to do so). If such tasks are required, provide an explanation to the tenant as to why this is necessary. Do not make (or agree with others) uninvited comments or "value judgements" regarding tenants or the condition of the property.
- During property inspections, strictly follow all instructions and organisational work, health and safety procedures that are designed to keep you (and others) safe.

Assessment of property care

Where the property care by the tenant meets or exceeds standards, the tenant should be thanked in the form of an Excellent Property Care Letter and this should be recorded on their file.

If there are any concerns regarding property care, discuss this directly with the tenant. It is acknowledged that these conversations can be difficult and uncomfortable. However, it is important that the tenant understands that they should expect an inspection follow up and a Breach Letter which clearly describes the concerns and how they can be remedied. Ensure to explain to the tenant that the intent of this action is to assist the tenant to sustain their tenancy.

Where agreement can't be achieved at the inspection, the conversation needs to remain positive, polite and assertive. It is important that the tenant understands that the matter can be resolved by other means, either by signed agreement, or by having the matter heard by an impartial decision maker at NCAT.

Where there are items of tenant damage that will need to be fixed by HOW immediately, i.e. a smoke alarm disconnected by the tenant, the tenant needs to be informed that HOW will repair the item urgently at the tenant's cost.

HOW cannot charge the tenant for repairs unless the tenant has signed a consent form that acknowledges their responsibility for damage and permits HOW to charge the repair. Where consent is not recorded, damage is disputed or not remedied after an agreed time, the following options are available:

- HOW can arrange for the repair and charge the tenant and the tenant is able to appeal this decision within 21 days if they disagree with the charge

Where there is concern about the tenant's capacity to adequately care for the property in the longer term, discuss the matter with the Chief Customer Officer immediately following the inspection, in order to develop a response that fulfils the organisation's commitments to sustain tenancies at-risk and also to protect our assets. It might be appropriate in some circumstances, at the time of the visit or following the visit, to refer the tenant to local support services for further assistance.

Post-inspection follow-up

It is imperative that all post-inspection matters are actioned accordingly.

Issue/concern	Response
There are matters of concern about the welfare of children living at the property	Open a Service Request (S/R) and report these concerns immediately to the Chief Customer Officer. Make the mandatory notification to relevant authorities, in line with the organisation's Mandatory Reporting policy.
There are matters of concern about criminal behaviour at the property, i.e. evidence of drug making equipment or of the sale or supply of drugs	Open a S/R and report issues immediately to the Chief Customer Officer. Develop an appropriate response, which needs to consider duty of care responsibilities and the best interests of the broader community, but also needs to be balanced with the client privacy obligations of the organisation and the Act.
There are serious public health and safety concerns at the property	Open a S/R and report these issues immediately to the Asset Administrator. Develop and document an appropriate response and/or action plan.

There is evidence of unauthorised residents living at the property	Refer to the organisation's procedures in relation to non-disclosure of information by tenants.
Repairs are required at the property that are not to be charged to tenant	Create a S/R and direct to the contractor. Attach copies of inspection documentation as relevant to the request.
Further investigation is required of technical/structural issues at the property	Open a S/R and direct to the Asset Administrator. Attach copies of inspection documentation as relevant to the issue.
There are property care matters that the tenant needs to attend to	Send the tenant a breach letter documenting the breach and the remedy. Attach a copy of the letter to the open property inspection S/R.
There are concerns about the capacity of the tenant to sustain their tenancy or where it is clear that the tenant could benefit from more support	Open a S/R and report issues immediately to the Chief Customer Officer. Engage in discussion with the Chief Customer Officer regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals to support agencies; • More regular property inspection/home visits.

Documentation

All documentation relating to the property inspection will be attached to the open property inspection S/R.

It is **mandatory** that the following documentation is attached:

- A signed and dated copy of the Property Inspection Checklist/Report
- A copy of the inspection appointment advice to the tenant.

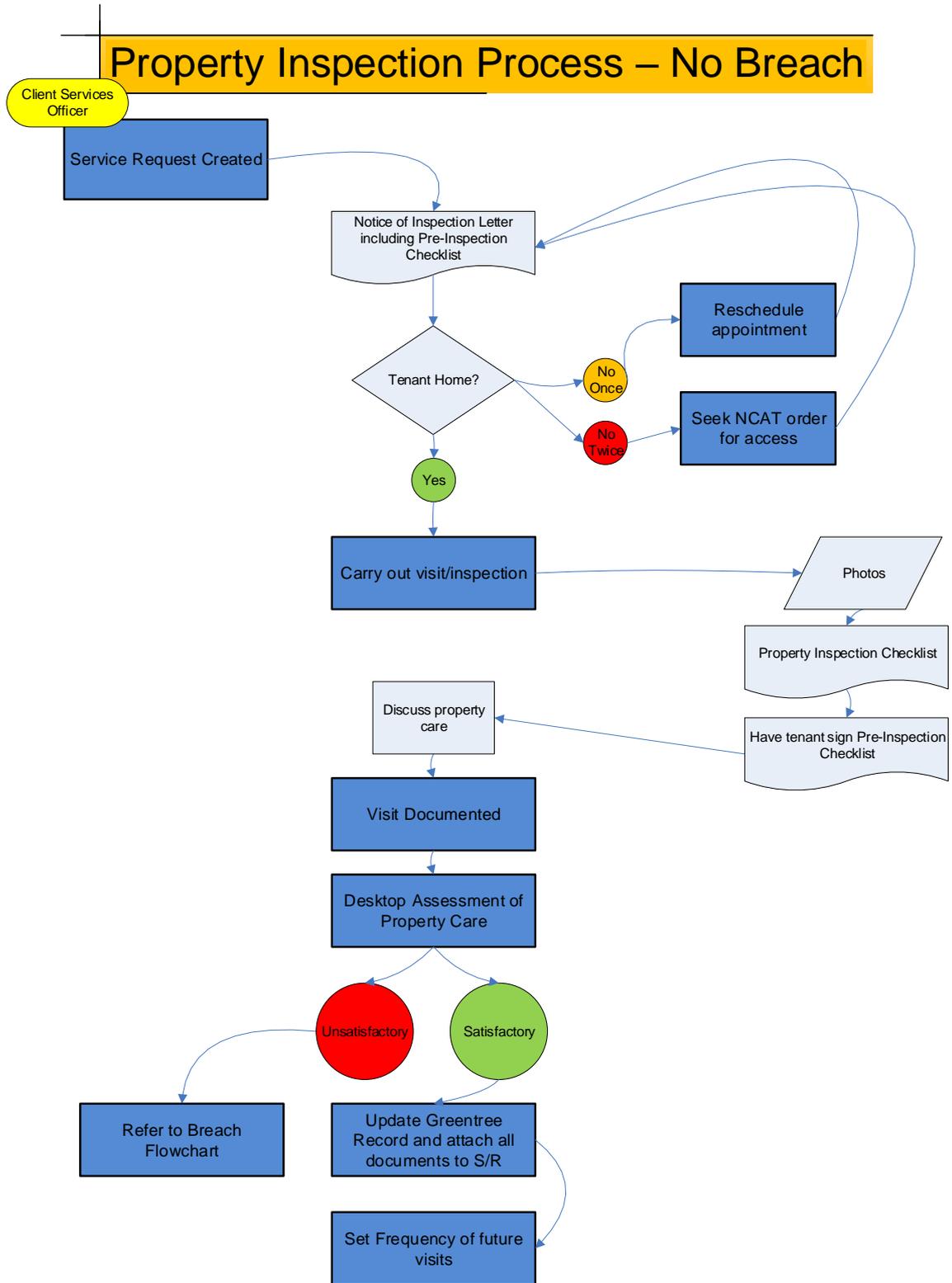
Other documentation that should be attached, if issued, includes:

- Pre-inspection checklist
- NCAT orders
- Post-inspection follow-up letters.

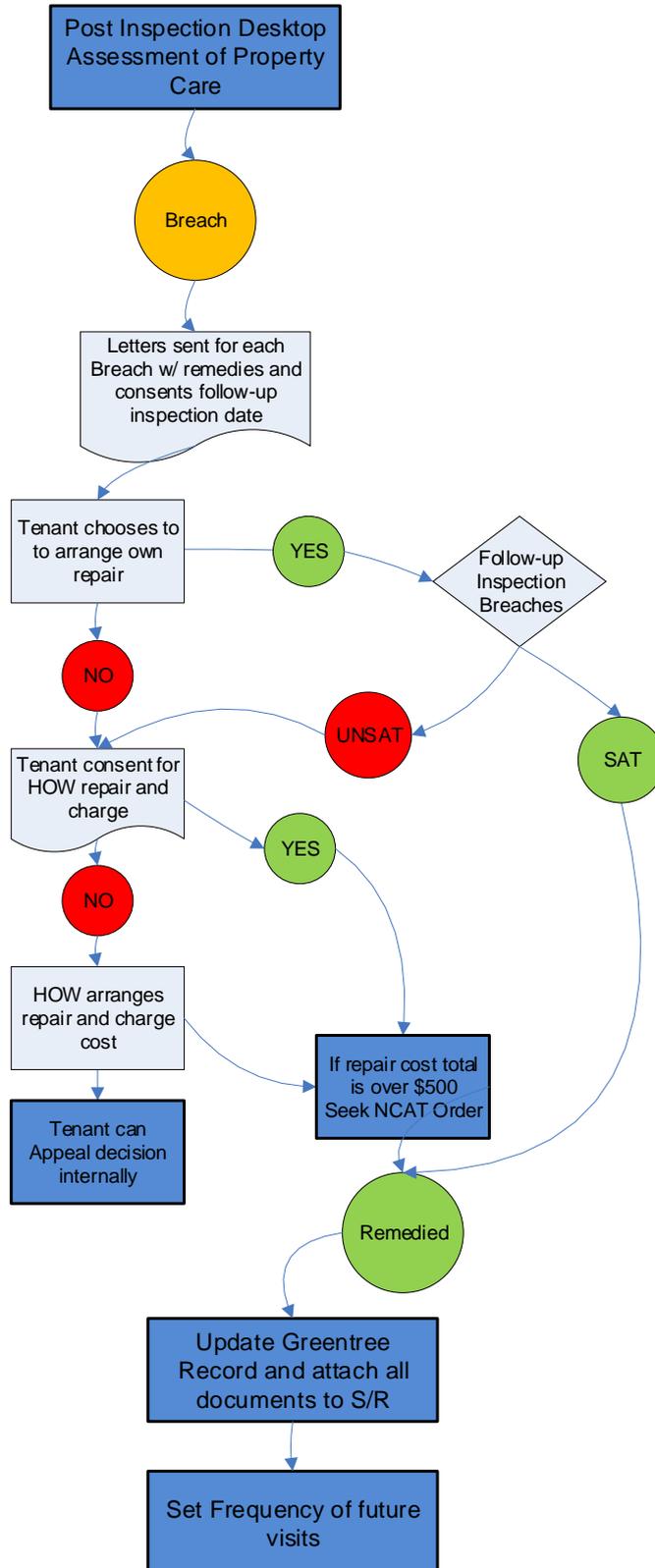
Set frequency of future home visits/inspections

The frequency of future home visits/inspections should be set according to the following guidelines.

Cycle	Criteria
Quarterly	The property is not being cared for to a satisfactory standard.
Six-monthly	All other HOW tenants (1 per year Asset Inspection for planned maintenance purposes, 1 per year CSO inspection)



Property Inspection Process – Breach



3.13 Inspection

i *CRM → Service & Support → Service Requests*

Summary = "Inspection"

Organisation = Tenant name

Physical Asset = property

Status = "m.inspection required"

Problem Description = notes following the exit inspection

Solution = notes following the exit inspection

! *Additional Tab*

Assigned User and Assigned Team = person creating Service Request

Service Group and Service Person = person actioning Service Request

Contact Method = "By Post"

Type = "Inspection"

! *Timeline Tab*

Scheduled Start Time and Finish Time = Entry Date/Time range to appear on Entry Notice

! *Print*

Select ellipses button "..."

Select Relevant Template(s)

3.6 Responsive Maintenance

i *Open Service Request from Workflow Desktop*

i *CRM → Service & Support → Service Requests*

Summary = description of works required

Organisation = Tenant at property

Physical Asset = property

Status = a status that starts with "m.maint"

Contact Notes = information about who contacted you

Problem Description = notes about what the issue is, what is required to be done and the tenant's availability. This information appears on the Purchase Order.

Solution = completed with what has taken place once work has been completed.

! *Additional Tab*
Assigned User and Assigned Team = person creating Service Request
Service Group and Service Person = person actioning Service Request
Contact Method = how tenant contacted you
Priority = relevant priority
Type = "Responsive Maintenance"

! *Time Line Tab*
Outsourced To = contractor Purchase Order is being raised to

AA *If tree "Leasehold Maintenance" on property is "Agent/Owner to approved value" or "Agent/Owner Managed" an instant alert will be displayed to the current user.*