

Oversight and Management of Government Owned Public Housing

Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Overall Conclusions

- Public housing assets are underutilized during a time when waitlists are significant.
- Government does not have an effective governance structure in place for public housing and is failing to provide adequate oversight of the regional housing authorities.
- Inconsistencies in the tenant application and placement processes require improvement to ensure fairness.

Why We Did This Audit

- It is important that eligible Nova Scotians are provided access to public housing in a fair, consistent and timely manner that ensures existing public housing units are used to their maximum potential.
- As of December 31, 2021:
 - 5,950 public housing applicants on the waitlist
 - Average wait time exceeds two years
- 11,202 public housing units throughout Nova Scotia
- 1,254 tenant placements during 2021

Governance and Oversight Severely Lacking in the Delivery of Public Housing

- There has been constant restructuring and change in senior leadership over the past three years.
- The need for a new governance structure is a known issue that requires Government to act.
- The current operating structure has little accountability due to outdated management agreements.
- There are no business plans or reporting requirements at the regional housing authority level.
- The Department does not use available data to evaluate regional housing authority performance.
- The regional housing authority boards have a limited role in oversight and current practices do not support good governance.

Public Housing Application Process Lacks Consistency and Needs Improvement

- Both regular and priority public housing application approvals were missing eligibility and supporting documentation along with reasoning for prioritization decisions.
- Housing authority staff identified weaknesses in application approvals during their annual quality review process. However, no action was taken as a result.
- Applicant placement decisions lack monitoring and review process.
- Housing authorities averaged more than double the 60-day target for placing a new tenant into vacated units.

Housing Authorities Not Adequately Managing Existing Tenants to Maximize Potential Use of Public Housing Units

- The regional housing authorities are not following policies to assess continued eligibility for public housing. This has resulted in tenants living in units that exceed their size requirements, while families remain on the waitlist with average wait times exceeding two years.
- Management estimates over 1,500 units are underutilized.
- Inconsistent tracking and documenting of at least 1,700 tenant related complaints.
- Tenant engagement sessions not completed at the required frequency even before the pandemic forced cancellations, and there is often no evidence of resolution of issues raised by tenants.

Questions Nova Scotians May Want to Ask

1. When does the Department intend to address the need for a new governance structure for housing in NS?
2. Will the Department take action to address over-housing and help to accommodate the many families waiting for access to suitable housing?
3. How does the Department intend to improve accountability from the Housing Authorities?
4. How will the Department ensure a consistent approach to administering public housing across the province including the situations and support required for priority access approval?
5. When will the Department establish processes to document and address tenant issues and complaints?