

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 24 MAY 2011

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(BE11/0751) Program 5.1: AMEP / Settlement Services for Migrants and Refugees

Senator Cash asked:

In relation to settlement services, provide a copy of the accommodation standards that are included in the request for tender.

Answer:

The accommodation services section for the HSS Request for Tender is at **Attachment A**.

ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

- 5.1 Many Clients arrive in Australia after having lost their homes and lived in precarious and uncertain circumstances for extended periods. In order for Clients to regain a sense of security and safety from which they can begin to rebuild their lives in Australia, it is essential that they are able to establish themselves in accommodation which is stable, affordable, and appropriate to their needs.
- 5.2 As noted in clause 2.19, Tenderers may elect to tender for the delivery of Accommodation Services only. In this SOR, where the Accommodation Service Provider is required to liaise with the Service Provider of non-Accommodation Services, it is assumed the Service Providers are different. If the same Service Provider delivers all Services, those paragraphs should be construed as meaning that the Service Provider must coordinate the Services within its organisation to ensure the program outcomes are achieved.
- 5.3 As with all other Services, Accommodation Services will be coordinated by the Case Manager. Service Providers must work cooperatively, liaising closely to ensure the integrated delivery of Accommodation Services within the Case Management framework, and in accordance with Client needs and their best interests.
- 5.4 The Accommodation Service Provider must accept all Cases referred to it by the Case Manager (see paragraph 5.64).

Sourcing and securing suitable accommodation

- 5.5 The Service Provider will operate a flexible accommodation model to account for varying Client needs, family size and composition, and local housing differences.
- 5.6 Tenderers for Accommodation Services are encouraged to explore and adopt innovative approaches to delivering Accommodation Services. These could include community housing initiatives, or head-leasing arrangements where leases are transferred to Clients at a suitable time. DIAC encourages Alternative Tenders where innovative solutions will meet DIAC's objectives with best value for money.
- 5.7 The Service Provider must ensure that accommodation is available on arrival for all Clients referred to it by the Case Manager and provide accommodation support to Clients throughout their time in HSS.
- 5.8 The Service Provider must notify the Case Manager of the address of the on-arrival property, and provide them with keys and any essential information concerning the on-arrival property, including length of Clients' stay, no later than 24 hours prior to the Client's scheduled arrival.

- 5.9 The Service Provider will place Clients either directly into Long-Term Accommodation on arrival (particularly in regional areas) or after they have spent a brief period (typically up to 12 weeks) in Short-Term Accommodation in a group or individual setting.
- 5.10 The Service Provider must ensure all Clients are residing in Long-Term Accommodation within six months of arrival.
- 5.11 The Service Provider must ensure all rental properties it provides or arranges are affordable. That is, housing should be within Clients' financial means and not place them in an unsustainable position of housing stress. A common benchmark for 'housing stress' is expenditure of more than 30% of household income on housing.
- 5.12 The Service Provider may provide accommodation for Single Clients and Clients arriving as a couple in share house arrangements suitable to their needs. The Service Provider must work with the Case Manager to identify suitable Clients for shared arrangements, exercising careful judgment to be mindful of Clients' cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Clients arriving as a couple should only be placed in share house arrangements as a temporary solution until a suitable Long-Term Accommodation arrangement can be identified.
- 5.13 The Service Provider must pay the full accommodation costs (including utilities) of eligible Clients for the first four weeks after arrival. This Initial Rental Payment will ease the financial pressures Clients experience shortly after arrival. The Initial Rental Payment will be complemented by structured information on managing household budgets delivered through the Orientation Program.
- 5.14 All Clients are eligible for the Initial Rental Payment, except Clients residing with a Proposer, family or friends. The Initial Rental Payment applies only to the first four weeks after arrival and cannot be deferred until later in the settlement period. The Initial Rental Payment will cease to apply if the Client voluntarily relocates to another Contract Region within the first four weeks of arrival.
- 5.15 After the four week Initial Rental Payment period, the Service Provider must collect fair rental on the property for Clients in Short-Term Accommodation, or, for Clients in Long-Term Accommodation arrangements, ensure the Client understands that full market rent must be paid to the Service Provider, agent or landlord. Clients will also be responsible for the payment of utilities after week four (see paragraph 5.160).

Short-Term Accommodation

- 5.16 Clients may be accommodated in Short-Term Accommodation arrangements on arrival, whether in a group or individual setting. DIAC expects Clients will reside in Short-Term Accommodation for up to 12 weeks. At the end of the short-term period, the Service Provider must assist Clients into a lease (minimum six-month) on a property suitable to their needs and family composition.
- 5.17 The Service Provider should be mindful of the impact moving numerous times in the initial period has on building a stable living environment for Clients and should minimise the number of property moves prior to placement in Long-Term Accommodation.

- 5.18 DIAC favours the use of group housing arrangements on a short-term basis and encourages Tenderers in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth to put forward group housing solutions to meet the on-arrival accommodation needs of some Clients in those cities. Tenderers outside these cities are also invited to present group housing accommodation solutions. Group housing arrangements could comprise a block of apartments or flats, a cluster of closely located houses, or a boarding hostel.
- 5.19 Group housing arrangements could be effective for vulnerable or high needs Clients (such as Woman at Risk visa holders, and young people vulnerable to social isolation), or those for whom affordable housing can be difficult to find (such as Singles).
- 5.20 Group housing will allow Service Providers to deliver structured orientation and more intensive Case Management to Clients during the first few weeks after arrival. Group settings have the added potential benefit of providing a living environment where people in similar circumstances can share their early settlement experiences, connect and support each other.
- 5.21 DIAC acknowledges group housing arrangements will not suit all Clients and encourages Service Providers to place Clients without high needs directly into Long-Term Accommodation.
- 5.22 All accommodation provided or arranged by the Service Provider must comply with the standards set out in paragraph 5.161 and be suitable to the size and needs of the Case.
- 5.23 Where other accommodation arrangements (group or long-term) cannot be made, the Service Provider must accommodate Clients in temporary, short-term arrangements. Options could include leased properties (houses, apartments and flats), shared housing arrangements for Singles and couples, transitional accommodation provided by a state or territory housing authority or other third party, serviced apartments, holiday cabins, or hotel/motel accommodation (minimum two-and-a-half star rating).
- 5.24 The Service Provider is responsible for ownership or the management of leasing or rental arrangements on all Short-Term Accommodation. Hotel/motel accommodation must only be used as a last resort when no other appropriate accommodation is available and for periods of no longer than three weeks. Where hotel/motel or similar style accommodation is used, the Service Provider must ensure the needs of Clients are met.
- 5.25 The Service Provider is responsible for all costs associated with property ownership, and maintaining leases (as applicable) on Short-Term Accommodation and other accommodation arrangements.
- 5.26 The Service Provider must provide the Client with a verbal and written explanation of the conditions of their stay in the Short-Term Accommodation arrangement (in a language understood by the Client) and seek agreement from the Client to comply with those conditions. Where permitted or required by state or territory residential tenancy laws, the Service Provider must provide the Client with a standard tenancy agreement.

- 5.27 The Service Provider must assist all Clients to complete a property condition report (on entry and exit from the short-term property) and provide the Client with copies of the conditions of stay, tenancy agreement (where applicable) and condition report.
- 5.28 The Service Provider must ensure gas (where relevant), electricity and water utilities are connected in all Short-Term Accommodation when the Client arrives and cover all costs associated with connection. DIAC expects Clients will pay for utilities after the four week Initial Rental Payment period. To facilitate this, the Service Provider will either transfer the account/s into the Client's name (where possible), or include a fair utilities contribution in the collection of market rent.
- 5.29 All Short-Term Accommodation must meet the following standards and conditions (some exceptions may be permitted but must be Approved by DIAC prior to implementation):
- a. be safe and secure
 - b. be accessible by public transport to local shops
 - c. Single Clients, or Clients arriving as a couple, will have their own bedroom, and access to bathroom and cooking facilities
 - d. families will have private bathroom facilities, access to a kitchen, and separate bedrooms for every family member over 18 years or each couple (DIAC may make exceptions for larger families)
 - e. be fully furnished (suitable to the family size or the number of Clients living in the property) with all fittings and equipment functioning properly and contain the following items:
 - i) beds, including mattresses for each Client
 - ii) bedding (pillows, doonas or blankets) and linen (sheets, pillowcases and towels) for all Clients (these must be clean and in good condition)
 - iii) a wardrobe or set of drawers for each bedroom
 - iv) a dining table and adequate chairs for all occupants (accessible in a communal dining area for group housing arrangements)
 - v) lounge chairs or sofas (accessible in a communal living area for group housing arrangements)
 - vi) glassware, crockery, cutlery, and pots and pans, and cooking utensils (accessible in a communal kitchen area for group housing arrangements)
 - vii) clock
 - viii) a refrigerator (accessible in a communal kitchen area for group housing arrangements)
 - ix) a heater or fan (depending on local climate and season) (accessible in a communal living area for group housing arrangements)

- x) window coverings for all windows
- xi) cleaning equipment (including mop, broom, bucket, dustpan and broom, dish brush, tea towels and dish cloths) (accessible in a communal area for group housing arrangements)
- xii) access to a washing machine
- f. be thoroughly cleaned at the beginning and end of each Client's stay (if the Client does not enter into a long-term lease for the property)
- g. be pest-controlled (every twelve months), and
- h. comply with the relevant state or territory occupational health and safety standards and residential tenancy laws.

5.30 From time to time DIAC will inspect Short-Term Accommodation properties used by the Service Provider. Where, in DIAC's sole opinion, the Short-Term Accommodation does not sufficiently comply with the standards at paragraph 0, it may require the Service Provider to make amendments to the property to ensure compliance, or to source alternative suitable accommodation for the Client and instruct the Service Provider to discontinue use of the property or similar properties.

Long-Term Accommodation

- 5.31 The Service Provider must source and secure suitable Long-Term Accommodation consisting of a minimum six-month lease.
- 5.32 Long-Term Accommodation must meet the Client's specific needs, be affordable (see paragraph 5.143), be suitable to the family size and be accessible by public transport to local shops.
- 5.33 Where possible the Service Provider should facilitate Clients' attendance and participation in property inspections.
- 5.34 Clients are expected to accept suitable accommodation that has been sourced for them. If the Client does not find the property suitable or is not agreeable to leasing the property, the Service Provider must source an alternative property. If a Client rejects the alternative property without reasonable excuse, the Service Provider may decline to assist the Client to source further properties, subject to DIAC's Approval.
- 5.35 The Service Provider must assist and advise Clients in their negotiations with real estate or other agents, and help them complete all relevant tenancy documentation, including rental property applications, lease agreements and condition reports. The Service Provider must assist eligible Clients to obtain government rental and/or utilities bond assistance, and rent advance assistance, and make arrangements for payment of bonds.
- 5.36 The Service Provider must connect gas (where relevant), water and electricity utilities to the Long-Term Accommodation property and cover all costs associated with connection. Connection of utilities will be complemented by structured information on paying bills delivered through the Orientation Program.

- 5.37 Clients are responsible for the payment of utilities from the commencement of their tenure in Long-Term Accommodation, except for the first four weeks in instances where Clients are placed in Long-Term Accommodation from arrival (see paragraph 5.146).
- 5.38 For Clients moving from Short-Term Accommodation into Long-Term Accommodation, the Service Provider must provide removal of Clients' possessions to the new property (including providing boxes and packaging, loading, unloading, and removing any unwanted boxes and packaging). The Service Provider will repair or replace items that are lost or damaged during the removal process.
- 5.39 In some instances, including where Clients are required to vacate a property as a result of property sale, foreclosure on the mortgage, property redevelopment, or tenant's breach of lease, or where a Client is identified as being at risk of homelessness, the Service Provider must assist the Client into a further lease prior to exiting the Client from the HSS program. As noted in paragraphs 5.204 to 5.211, residence in Long-Term Accommodation is one of the requirements before a Client may be exited from the program.
- 5.40 From time to time DIAC will inspect Long-Term Accommodation properties used by the Service Provider. Where, in DIAC's sole opinion, the Long-Term Accommodation is of an insufficient standard, it will require the Service Provider to source alternative suitable accommodation for the Client and instruct the Service Provider to discontinue use of the property or similar properties.