

Implementation Update – Transfer of Public Housing Rental Subsidy

Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide an update to Members and the general public on our decision to return responsibility for public housing rent assessments to the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, my first priority after I was appointed as Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation, was to examine the issue of the Public Housing Rental Subsidy and explore ways to find resolutions to the challenges that the program's administration was causing for public housing tenants and frontline staff. On January 28, 2010, following a review of the issues and an examination of the possible solutions, Minister Miltenberger announced in the Budget Address that the responsibility for assessing public housing rent would be returning to the Local Housing Organizations during the coming fiscal year. This decision was made with a view towards providing quality client service in a fair and equitable manner for all tenants, while also improving the financial stability of LHOs. Client service is a primary concern for myself and the Housing Corporation.

I am pleased to say that we are well underway with the implementation of this change. As of June 1st, Mr. Speaker – Local Housing Organizations will take over responsibility for assessing public housing rent. As of that date, residents will only have to visit their Local Housing Organization in order to be assessed and to make their rent payments. Local Housing Organizations are being asked to ensure that all rent assessments are completed within the first week of every month, so it is important that tenants visit within that first week to be properly assessed and to avoid falling into arrears.

In preparation for June 1st, we have undertaken communications and implementation plans to support a smooth transition for tenants and staff alike. In April, both the NWTCH and ECE began implementing communications activities to inform residents of the coming changes. We have informed tenants, LHO board chairs staff and Standing Committee directly. An advertising campaign to remind tenants of the changes coming in June is also underway and will be enhanced later this month.

In order to prepare LHO and ECE staff to deal with tenants during the transition, we have provided training and information to frontline staff of both the LHO's and the Housing Corporation that will help them answer tenant questions and ensure that they provide a high level of customer service and have full awareness of how the subsidy process works.

NWTCH and ECE are also collaborating through an implementation plan covering the period from now until April 1, 2011. This plan will guide activities related both to the change in responsibilities for assessments, as well as other improvements being made to the public housing program in 2010/11. These improvements will include a review of LHO operating budgets, revisions to the public housing policy and procedures manual, as well as information management systems development. We will also complete a review of the existing rent scale, which will involve public consultation.

Mr. Speaker, our public housing program is a key component of our Government's efforts to deal with the high cost of living in our communities. I feel strongly that the return of assessments to the LHOs, along with the other improvements we will make this fiscal year, will help to contribute to our overall goal to improve client service and provide a public housing program that meets the needs of those that it serves.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.