

Welfare Checking Policy

Version date: July 2019
Review date: July 2022
Policy owner: Director Housing and Homelessness

Purpose

To provide guidance to Unison staff when concerns have been raised about the welfare of a tenant, including when a tenant has breached a mental health community treatment order, specifically in relation to enabling access to the tenant's room/unit/house, for the purpose of checking on or apprehending them; and the appropriate initial procedures if a tenant is found deceased.

Scope

This policy applies to all tenants, Unison staff, contractors and any parties requesting or requiring Unison to provide access to tenanted properties, such as Police or support workers.

Principles

- Welfare checks are only initiated on reasonable concerns for the welfare of a tenant, where other methods to verify the welfare of a tenant have been unsuccessful
- When welfare checks are conducted care must be taken to avoid any damage or disturb the tenant's belongings
- Anyone conducting welfare checks must not remain on the property for longer than required
- All welfare checks will be documented

Application

Concerns may be raised about the welfare of a tenant by a neighbour, friend, family member, support worker or the Police. The process followed will depend on who has initiated the welfare check (Police or other) and what evidence there is that the tenant is at risk. The decision regarding the appropriate process to be followed should be made by a Team Leader or Manager, Place Management.

Request from Police

If Police request access for the purposes of a welfare check or to apprehend a person who is in breach of mental health community treatment order a Unison staff member will meet the Officer at the property and provide them with a key or fob to access the room/unit/house.

Unison staff must not enter a room/unit/house or respond to a Police request to identify the person if there is a deceased person inside. It is the responsibility of the Police to contact the tenant's next-of-kin in the event to undertake identification. Unison staff are authorised to provide next-of-kin details to the Police.

Access for the purposes of a welfare check may be requested after hours; it is the responsibility of the on-call Facilities Advisor to coordinate access, except at 660 Elizabeth Street where the Launch concierge is authorised to provide access to emergency services.

Request from other party

If concerns about the welfare of a tenant are made directly to Unison by someone other than the Police, Unison will respond appropriately according to the information provided. In all cases Unison will attempt to contact the tenant by phone or via a next of kin or support worker before visiting, accessing or providing access to the tenant's room/unit/house. A SALTO audit should also be initiated in properties that have this facility.

If there are clear indicators that the person may be deceased or injured, Unison will encourage the person making the report to contact emergency services immediately. If they are unwilling to do this, Unison will contact Police to request that they undertake a welfare check.

Where the concerns are not serious and it is suspected that the tenant has abandoned the property, it may be more appropriate that Unison conduct a home visit. Refer to the [Abandoned Property Policy](#) and [Abandoned Property Procedure](#)

Where access to a room/unit/house is requested regarding a concern about a tenant breaching a community treatment order, Unison will refer the person requesting access to Victoria Police.

Unison will ensure that all parties accessing a tenanted room/unit/house do so in a manner that is, as far as possible, respectful of the tenant and their possessions and privacy.

Rights of Entry

The circumstance in which Unison has a right to enter a room/unit/house is outlined in the [Right of Entry Policy](#).

Where it is necessary for Police or other emergency services to gain immediate access to a tenanted room/unit/house and it is not possible to gain consent from the tenant, the following principles should be applied:

- Entry should only be facilitated because an emergency exists, or access is essential for safety or related reasons, including a welfare check
- Prior to any visit, a Team Leader or Manager, Place Management, has made an assessment of the need for the entry to occur and any risks to staff that need to be managed
- If the tenant is not present at the property, appropriate notification is left at the property to inform the tenant of the circumstances regarding entry
- All properties are secured once the purpose for gaining entry has been completed
- The tenant's privacy is respected as much as is possible in the circumstances. This includes taking care to avoid damage to the tenant's belongings or disturbing them, and not remaining on the premises longer than is necessary
- In all cases comprehensive notes must be recorded on Greentree on the reasons for the property visit/welfare check and the outcomes

Review of policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years as delegated by the responsible Director.