



**SUBMISSION
TO THE CITY OF
ROCKINGHAM:
DRAFT COMMUNITY
SERVICES SUPPORT
STRATEGY 2017-2022**

MARCH 2017



Executive Summary

Shelter WA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the City of Rockingham's *Draft Community Support Services Strategy 2017-2022*. Shelter WA is an independent, community based peak body committed to accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing for low income and otherwise disadvantaged persons, including those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in Western Australia.

Shelter WA is supportive of the *Community Support Services Strategy 2017-2022* objectives of meeting the needs of vulnerable population within the City of Rockingham. Shelter WA believes that while some of the commitments and recommendations put forward in the Strategy will work towards improving the lives of vulnerable groups, wording within the Strategy can be reframed to reduce stereotyping, particularly of people experiencing homelessness.

To improve the current Strategy, Shelter WA recommends the City of Rockingham:

1. Change wording from 'low income families' to 'poverty' in the Executive Summary and Section 4.1 'Survey Results'.
2. Improve Section 3 'Background' to be more sensitive to vulnerable persons.
3. Improve wording within Section 3.3 to reduce negative stereotyping, particularly of people experiencing homelessness.
4. Engage community in surveys, but ensure an effective Communications Strategy is in place prior to project commencement.
5. Improve understanding of Strategy through improved language use.
6. Undertake a comprehensive affordable housing and homelessness needs analysis to support the Strategy.
7. Confirm the need for homelessness service provision in the City of Rockingham.
8. Reframe current situation wording in Section 5.2 to be more empathetic to those experiencing homelessness.
9. Clarify the City's role in responding to homelessness, maximising and co-ordinating the opportunities local governments have through its town planning, public health, community safety and community services functions in developing a holistic response to social issues.
10. Commit to developing and implementing a protocol for staff when encountering street present people experiencing homelessness.
11. Commit to continued participation in the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group meeting.

Introduction

Shelter WA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the City of Rockingham's (the City) *Draft Community Support Services Strategy 2017-2022*. Shelter WA is an independent, community based peak body committed to accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing for low income and otherwise disadvantaged persons, including those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in Western Australia.

Shelter WA is supportive of the *Community Support Services Strategy 2017-2022* objectives of meeting the needs of vulnerable population within the City of Rockingham. Shelter WA believes that while some of the commitments and recommendations put forward in the Strategy will work towards improving the lives of vulnerable groups, wording within the Strategy can be reframed to reduce stereotyping, particularly of people experiencing homelessness.

Shelter WA's response to the Draft Strategy

Positives within the Strategy

It is encouraging that the City has as part of the Draft Strategy:

- Undertaken consultations with local support service providers;
- Focused on improving collaboration and local service integration;
- Committed to advocate for more funding and better funding models
- Committed to raising awareness about the issues affecting vulnerable persons in the City.

Shelter WA supports the City's committing to as part of the Draft Strategy:

- Community services, programs and infrastructure that effectively cater for all residents including seniors, youth and vulnerable populations;
- A community that feels safe and secure in home, work and leisure environments, and has access to a range of effective support services and partnerships when encountering challenging or difficult times.

Shelter WA supports the reports recommendation that the City assist other service providers, including not-for-profit providers by:

- Advocating at State and Federal level for a more even distribution of services and Infrastructure for these groups.
- Advocating for more sustainable funding for local established NFPs to stabilise and strengthen the sector.
- Building collaborative effort among the support services sector providers locally to add to the ability of an area to advocate for more services, strengthened services and sustainable funding.

Shelter WA is also pleased to see that the City will commit to a lead role in promoting state and local campaigns in relation to major issues. This includes Homelessness Week, which is coordinated in by Shelter WA in Western Australia.

Shelter WA is also particularly supportive of the proposed actions identified in Section 11:

- Establish a Senior Strategic Leaders Group meeting quarterly locally; to focus on emerging issues and services gaps, identifying solutions and opportunities;
- Review mapping of sector service delivery in the City annually to provide accurate data for advocacy efforts;
- Advocate to relevant bodies for sustainable funding approaches on behalf of the NFP sector;
- Provide governance support and leadership to the sector for collaborative or joined up approaches;
- Advocate for more affordable and social housing within the City;
- Become a member of Shelter WA;
- Support the Rockingham Kwinana Homelessness Inter-Agency Group;
- Provide ongoing support to local faith based informal organisations providing support to rough sleepers and those on a low income;
- Support the FDV Working Group.

Suggestions for reframing the Draft Strategy

1. Change wording from 'low income families' to 'poverty' in the Executive Summary and Section 4.1 'Survey Results'.

The report seems to be identifying social issues in the Executive Summary and Section 4.1 'Survey Results'. Shelter WA believes that while 'low income families' is important consideration, it is not a social issue that should be mentioned alongside social exclusion, mental health, family and domestic violence in the Executive Summary. Using the word 'poverty' is a more appropriate wording.

2. Improve Section 3 'Background' to be more sensitive to vulnerable persons.

It is more appropriate to refer to 'people experiencing and at risk of homelessness' rather than 'the homeless'. This improved wording ensures these people are not labelled by their situation. This should also be used in referring to 'people living with a disability', rather than 'people with disability'.

3. Improve wording within Section 3.3 to reduce negative stereotyping, particularly of people experiencing homelessness.

The Strategy notes "Unsafe alcohol use particularly binge drinking however contributes significantly to physical and mental health issues, Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) and community level anti-social behaviour and violence. This is particularly true for young people including those from an ATSI or CaLD background, and those who are street present." (City of Rockingham, 2017, p. 10)

The statement indicates that people who are street present are likely to engage in substance misuse and family and domestic more than the general population. The relevant supporting information for these statements seems to be purely taken from the stakeholder interviews in Section 4.2. This City should be careful in making these statement, as while this may have been an identified issue in the stakeholder interviews, it stigmatises the whole street present population and it is questionable whether it improves the Strategy or not. Statements like these can alienate those from an ATSI, CaLD background, or those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

4. Engage community in surveys, but ensure an effective Communications Strategy is in place prior to project commencement.

The Strategy mentions "The consultation was targeted at service providers, and did not involve community members. As the City has not previously provided direct community support services delivery other than Youth Services and Community Transport, consulting with community could very well raise expectations of further service delivery from the community." (City of Rockingham, 2017, p. 10)

The stated role of the Local Government Act (1995) is to result in "greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of local governments". Shelter WA believes it is the role of local governments to engage with the local community in planning for its needs, especially as it is the closest level of government to residents. A clear communications strategy will ensure that all engagements activities have a clear goal that is articulated to the community before and after consultation.

5. Improve understanding of Strategy through improved language use.

Shelter WA believes that there is an opportunity to reduce the use of colloquial language in discussing strategic goals within the Draft Strategy. For example, Section 4.2 mentioned strategic issues include “current state and federal funding practices encourages competition while paying lip services to collaboration across sectors”. It would be better to reframe this as “a need to ensure state and federal funding ensures collaboration between services”. This is just one example, but there are numerous places within the document that this occurs. Improving the use of wording will ensure it is better understood within local government, cross-sectors, and in the community.

6. Undertake a comprehensive affordable housing and homelessness needs analysis to support the Strategy.

It is noted by service providers in Section 4.2 that there is a lack of support services in the Rockingham area, in general. This is acknowledged by the City further in Section 5.2 noting there are no specialist homelessness service providers in the Rockingham area. Service providers also identify a lack of social and affordable housing in Rockingham.

Shelter WA believe the City of Rockingham should undertake a comprehensive needs analysis for affordable housing and homelessness in Rockingham, based on statistics gathered from a range of sources, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘Census of Population and Housing’ and ‘Estimating Homelessness’ reports.

In 2012, Shelter WA developed a [Local Government Guide to Developing an Affordable Housing Strategy](#). This document was developed to assist local governments to encourage an adequate supply of social and affordable housing. It also briefly touches on the housing needs for those at risk of and experiencing homelessness (Shelter WA, 2012). There are opportunities through the City’s land use planning functions to facilitate the growth of affordable housing. These should be referenced in the Strategy.

7. Confirm the need for homelessness service provision in the City of Rockingham.

The report mentions that people experiencing homelessness should travel to Perth or Fremantle to access services. “These positive outcomes can and usually do require admission to supported crisis and transitional accommodation such as that offered by St Bartholomew’s House and the Salvation Army’s The Beacon in inner City Perth and St Patrick’s Community Support Centre in Fremantle.” (City of Rockingham, 2017, p. 17)

Shelter WA does not find the suggestion that people travel should travel from Rockingham to Perth or Fremantle to access services to be appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, crisis and transitional services across the metropolitan region are frequently at capacity. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that 69 people per day are being turned away from specialist homelessness services due to a lack of capacity (AIHW, 2017). 67% of people with a long-term housing need are unable to be assisted. Specialist homelessness services have only been able to provide around half of the people with medium-term/transitional housing needs a place to reside. This clearly demonstrates the system is at capacity.

Even if accommodation is available, having to commute up to 50km to access a place to sleep is not appropriate. Those experiencing homelessness are likely to be on low incomes and have few finances available to make large commutes. Additionally, often people experiencing homelessness present with more than one issue, and being disconnected from friends, family and the community in which they reside may be detrimental to supporting them out of this difficult situation.

8. Reframe current situation wording in Section 5.2 to be more empathetic to those experiencing homelessness.

The following wording referring to people experiencing homelessness should be removed from the Draft Strategy:

- “It is visible and distressing, and for that reason often seen as being more prevalent than the reality” (City of Rockingham, 2017, p. 17)
- “This makes this group difficult to engage and assist, as they can be resistant to changing the behaviours that have led to their rough sleeping.” (City of Rockingham, 2017, p. 17)
- “The overall picture of rough sleepers is further complicated by people who live a ‘hobo, camping style’ existence. These people often have available and realistic alternatives but have chosen this style of existence. They can inflate rough sleeper numbers artificially, attract attention to areas frequented by rough sleepers and confuse community perceptions. They can inflate rough sleeper numbers artificially, attract attention to areas frequented by rough sleepers and confuse community perceptions. This can and does occur along the City’s very accessible and attractive foreshore and beaches, particularly during spring and summer. There is also some expectation from informal advocacy groups within the Rockingham community that access to a ‘camping ground’ within one of the City’s owned or managed outdoor spaces should be provided for rough sleepers. There needs to be an understanding within the community and sector that the use of the City’s owned and managed outdoor spaces is governed by its local laws, and, that this will not occur.”

The last paragraph is particularly alienating for those at risk of and experiencing homelessness. To suggest that a majority of people experiencing homelessness is by choice, is an unfair and hurtful assumption. As mentioned previously, the current service system is not meeting the accommodation needs of those experiencing homelessness, and there is often no alternative accommodation option that these people can afford. By noting the City’s attractive foreshore and beaches implies these people experiencing homelessness are impeding on others experiences. Throughout the report there is a lack of consideration for those experiencing homelessness who are living their lives in the public realm. Shelter WA suggests removing this and other wording to ensure the Draft Strategy is a positive document, working towards the best outcomes for all vulnerable persons.

9. Clarify the City’s role in responding to homelessness, keeping in mind the role and responsibilities local governments have in responding to social issues.

“The City of Rockingham is not resourced to provide issue specific or generic support services and infrastructure for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups within the community. This is the responsibility of State and Federal government. This is a strongly held position statement within the City, which does currently, and will continue to, inform responses to NFPs and State and Federal agencies applying to the City for provision of support, infrastructure and financial assistance. Locally federal and state agencies and large and small NFPs need to take responsibility for infrastructure and service provision for identified vulnerable groups within the City.” (City of Rockingham, 2017, p. 21)

In the Executive Summary, it is mentioned “Its role (the City of Rockingham) is not to resource infrastructure and services for specific support issues such as homelessness and mental health. This has been and is the business of federal and state government funding bodies, as well as philanthropic contributions.”

The role of local government, as mentioned in the *Local Government Act 1995*, is to “meet the needs of current and future generations through an integration of environmental protection, social advancement and economic prosperity”. If issues, including those of mental health and homelessness are deemed to be significant issues in the City of Rockingham, it would be unwise to disregard a potential funding role for the City in resourcing any response because there are existing funding streams at State and Federal level. For example the City of Vincent, has recently sought expressions of interest for local service providers to make use of a \$85,000 community grant for homelessness service provision for collaborative projects that build capacity, deliver change and real outcomes and have the potential to continue after the funding period (City of Vincent, 2017). Local governments have the capacity to facilitate, to provide seed funding, or to co-fund with other spheres of government, the non-government and/or the private sector, for resources required to address local social issues.

Other local governments in WA have acted and provided a commitment to addressing homelessness within its jurisdiction. The City of Joondalup and Wanneroo are currently developing a Regional Homelessness Strategy. This action was taken after 71 people were noted to be sleeping rough in Joondalup and Wanneroo over a nine-month period (City of Wanneroo, 2017). Services in the northern suburbs had also noted a high and increased demand for supported accommodation.

10. Commit to developing and implementing a protocol for staff when encountering street present people experiencing homelessness.

Both the City of Joondalup and the City of Wanneroo have developed and implemented internal protocols to assist staff members who encounter street present people experiencing homelessness (City of Wanneroo, 2017). Shelter WA is current progressing a project, in partnership with the sector, to develop a model charter/protocol which could be utilised by the City of Rockingham to appropriately engage with these people.

11. Commit to continued participation in the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group meeting.

Shelter WA believes the City of Rockingham should continue to participate in the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group. The City has chaired this group previously, and the City should continue to actively participate, especially considering the role it has committed to through this Draft Strategy relating to advocacy, awareness raising and encouraging collaboration between service providers.

Other comments

Shelter WA acknowledges the wording throughout the document recommending action on family and domestic violence within the City of Rockingham. The City also identifies the impact family and domestic violence has in placing pressure on the service support system, including homelessness service. Shelter WA notes that in 2015-16, 42% of people accessing specialist homelessness services in WA was due to family and domestic violence (AIHW, 2017). This is a significant area of concern for Shelter WA, and a community issue that needs to be addressed at all levels of government, including local government.

Shelter WA also confirms that a “lack of affordable and social housing impacting those living in or near poverty”. This is mentioned in the stakeholder interviews in Section 4.2. This is a key pressure for

service providers across the metropolitan area. Without crisis and transitional accommodation exit points, people experiencing homelessness, especially those with complex needs, risk falling back into homelessness. This is damaging for individuals and places significant pressure on a homelessness system that is constantly stretched.

Conclusion

Shelter WA believes the City of Rockingham is well positioned to respond to vulnerable persons in the City, through an effective *Community Support Services Strategy*. Shelter WA confirms there are many positive commitments and recommendations made in this Strategy, but that there is also an opportunity to build on this by improving language use throughout the Strategy.

Shelter WA suggests there are some additional commitments that the City of Rockingham can make to improve the lives of vulnerable persons within the City. Shelter WA hope to continue to work in collaboration with the City in responding to the issues identified in the Draft document.

To discuss the issues raised in this submission in further detail, please don't hesitate to contact Shelter WA's Policy Officer, Robert Gough, on (08) 9325 6660 or policy@shelterwa.org.au.

References

- AIHW. (2017). *Specialist homelessness services 2015-16: Western Australia fact sheet*. Cat. no. HOU 287. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
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www.wanneroo.wa.gov.au/news/article/537/cities_tackling_regional_homelessness
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