

STRATEGY AND POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE
7 JULY 2008

POLICY AND PLANNING

A12 **HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY**
2008 - 2013 - DRAFT PLAN

LOCATION/ADDRESS:

RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: **GEOFF OULTON, EXECUTIVE**
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FILE NO.: **80/01/39**

ATTACHMENTS: **(1) DRAFT HOMELESSNESS ACTION**
STRATEGY 2008-2013

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report introduces the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy 2008-2013
- 1.2. The Draft Homelessness Action Strategy outlines 5 key objectives, associated strategies and actions as an over-arching policy response to homelessness.
- 1.3. The Draft Homelessness Action Strategy in setting out an integrated framework promotes a clearer direction in going forward together by:
 - 1.3.1. identifying potential opportunities for Council services in responding to the factors contributing to homelessness in partnership with individuals, community organisations ,businesses and other levels of government;
 - 1.3.2. clearly outlining how as a community we can better support people currently experiencing homelessness and those at risk of becoming homeless to more fully participate with services and their community.
 - 1.3.3. This report recommends that Council endorse the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy for the purpose of public consultation and comment in preparation for a report for the September 2008 Council cycle.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1. *City of Port Phillip Housing Strategy 2007-2018* Objective 8 recommended Council developing a co-coordinated response that addresses the needs of people experiencing homelessness. A more comprehensive local policy response was identified as being needed as well as investigation of wider regional initiatives.
- 2.2. The need for a broader, over-arching policy was identified during an evaluation of Council's Homelessness Protocol in 2006. In 2001 the Homelessness Protocol had been developed to respond to individuals with complex needs in genuine need of accommodation falling within Council's

Local Laws-currently *Community Amenity-Local Laws No. 3, 2005, 44a "Camping on Council Land"*. The evaluation in 2006 found that it placed Council's response to homelessness primarily within an enforcement and place management framework and was not fully integrated with Council's advocacy, social, health and community planning and development programs.

- 2.3. In September 2007 the drafting of a 5 year Homelessness Action Strategy commenced with reference to research findings, evaluations of programs, review of legislation and homelessness policies locally, state-wide, nationally and internationally; local demographic trends and data. Consultations with a range of stakeholders, including people who have experienced homelessness were also held.
- 2.4. Four consultation forums were held in September/October 2007 with service providers, including one session with Chief Executive Officers, from the main Homelessness, Housing and Health services seeking comment in relation to the role of Council regarding homelessness. There were also a number of interviews held with people who have experienced homelessness and with a range of Council officers.
- 2.5. The *Responses to Homelessness: Preliminary Issues Discussion Paper* was developed and presented to a Councillor Briefing in November 2007.
- 2.6. Current Council and State Strategies that have been considered include
 - Community Plan 2007-2017
 - Housing Strategy 2007-2017
 - Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2007-2011
 - Ageing Well Strategy 2007-2016
 - Drugs Strategy 2006
 - Social and Cultural Policy and Planning Framework 2003-2006
 - Creating a Child Friendly Port Phillip 2005-2009
 - Youth Development Framework 2004
 - Community Amenity-Local Laws No. 3 2005
 - Sudden Rooming House Closure Protocol 2005
 - Fitzroy Street Precinct Action Strategy 2007
 - Victorian Protocol for Responding to Homelessness in Public Places 2006
 - Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2001
- 2.7 Rents have increased rapidly in the municipality over the past 10 years and currently Port Phillip and many other areas of Melbourne have record low vacancy rates in the private rental market. Consequentially there are lengthy

waiting lists for affordable rental alternatives within the social housing market (public and community). As an example, at June 2008, one community managed rooming house with self-contained rooms has over 100 people on their waiting list.

- 2.8 The current housing crisis impacts on the demand and availability of crisis accommodation; in 2007 90% of single adults seeking crisis accommodation daily at a local crisis accommodation facility were unable to be accommodated.
- 2.9 This has led to a large number of people experiencing homelessness, or being at risk of homelessness. Private rooming houses and Supported Residential Services have continued to close. Those remaining and some community rooming houses are currently utilized as an integral part of the emergency housing response due to a lack of either crisis or transitional accommodation. This development is having increasingly negative impacts for the house residents and neighbouring properties due to the 'churning' of crisis situations and frequent changing of tenants.
- 2.10 2001 Census data showed 29 people in Port Phillip as staying in hostels for the homeless, refuges or night shelters, and a total of 59 people were counted in either improvised homes, tents or were sleeping outdoors. 2006 Homelessness Census data will not be available until September 2008.
- 2.11 People living in rooming houses, private hotels and transitional accommodation are classified by the ABS as tertiary level homelessness due to having insecure tenure, shared kitchen and bathrooms. In July 2006, Port Phillip had 67 rooming houses and private hotels with 1,209 beds, comprising 23 private rooming houses/hotels (417 rooms) and 44 public/community rooming houses (792 rooms). A majority of rooming houses (36) were located in St Kilda, with 12 located in South Melbourne, three located in Port Melbourne, one in Melbourne and three in Elwood. At February 2008 there were approximately 60 transitional housing properties many of which may be shared by 2 tenants, with a total of 108 rooms available on any given night.
- 2.1.2 Over a 12 month period (April 2007-2008) more than 150 older, long term Port Phillip residents presented to Council's Housing Information & Support service. 60% were facing extreme financial stress due to rent increases (over 50% of their income spent on rent) and over 50% were at imminent risk of homelessness following a 60 day notice-to-vacate due to the sale of the rental property.
- 2.1.3 Research has shown that homelessness is a critical health and well-being issue with the majority of people developing a substance abuse problem and/or a mental illness after they became homeless.

3. RECOMMENDED OPTION

- 3.1. It is recommended that Council endorse the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy and the 5 key objectives and actions outlined for public comment, these include to:
 - 3.1.1. Enhance community awareness and understanding of homelessness through developing community information initiatives;

- 3.1.2. Advocate to improve the capacity of crisis, transitional and permanent social housing as well as rooming house standards;
- 3.1.3. Facilitate integrated planning in the provision of supportive housing models;
- 3.1.4. Coordinate planning and facilitate research across the community mainstream, housing and homelessness services as well as business and philanthropic sectors;
- 3.1.5. Promote a co-ordinated response across Council to people experiencing homelessness.

4. SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

- 4.1. By endorsing the Draft Homelessness Strategy, Council will be strengthening its strategic response to homelessness and improving health and well being for residents experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Social Pillar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council has acknowledged that there is a shared responsibility to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or cultural or socio-economic background, so that they can access services that meet their needs and participate in community life. • Council has well-established links with a range of local homelessness services, health and community organisations and housing providers within the Port Phillip region. • By building upon these links Council is committed to expanding the opportunities for people to access housing and support services. • Opportunities will be identified for broader community, business and philanthropic organisations to become involved.
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Economic Pillar	Local businesses and services such as those in the Hospitality and Tourist sectors, Council’s own Child Care, Home and Community Care and local Aged and Disability services providers are aware of the difficulty recruiting and retaining staff. Expanding affordable housing can sustain local economic requirements and encourage new opportunities whilst linking local people receiving low incomes to training and employment participation can also assist to sustain housing outcomes.
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Environmental Pillar	This Strategy considers Council’s role in managing the impact of people experiencing homelessness who may be sleeping in open and green spaces and who have limited options of storing their belongings. Their rights as members of the public to be in public spaces are considered alongside the rights and needs of other members of the public sharing public space.
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Cultural Pillar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Draft Homelessness Action strategy is strongly founded on the basis of supporting community diversity-across ethnic, age and income groups and life-style choices. • The community information initiatives included in the Action Plan foster conditions that allow communities within Port Phillip to express experience and enjoy diversity of values, beliefs and aspirations. • Community diversity is recognized as crucial to the cultural vitality of the municipality. • All stakeholders will continue to be actively involved in the planning and delivery of actions, particularly people who are or have experienced homelessness.
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4.2. **Policy and legislative implications**

3.3.1 Relevant State legislative requirements include

- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* requirements of Councils as public Authorities from January 2008 to ensure their decision making-policies and procedures comply with the rights outlined in the Charter.
- *Victorian Building Act 1993:Building Regulations 2006: Regulations 709 and 710* that require Class I B (under 300 square metres/not more than 12 people) and Class 3 buildings (more than 300 square metres/ more than 12 people) to install hard wired smoke detectors and sprinklers-the prohibitive costs of sprinkler installation may lead to further closures of private rooming houses. This compliance is regulated by Council.
- Proposed alignment of the definition of rooming houses within the *Victorian Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Act 2001* is expected to bring more of these houses under the Health legislation requiring registration with Council.

3.3.2 Relevant Council policies that are related to the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy specifically include:

- Community Plan 2007-2017 (strategic objectives 2.1; 2.3 & 2.4): refers “to support those who are disadvantaged, disabled and low income to remain in the city and support affordable housing, even as the city grows more affluent”.
- Council Plan 2007-08 (strategic objective 4.1.8): “continuing partnerships that promote opportunities for more affordable housing”.
- Housing Strategy 2007-2018 (recommendation 8.1): “develop an approach to the planning for and response to homelessness”.

- Health and Wellbeing Plan 2007-2011 (Strategy 92) “*develop a CoPP strategy on homelessness that integrates initiatives addressing social isolation and health inequities amongst residents living in rooming houses, sleeping rough or temporarily in crisis accommodation*”.

3.3.3 Relevant Commonwealth policy developments include:

- Australian Government *Which Way Home: A New Approach to Homelessness* May 2008 release of a Green Paper seeking public discussion about homelessness and ways to reduce homelessness in the future. A White paper/National Plan is due to be released in September 2008 which may present emerging policy opportunities for Council.

4.3. Risk implications

- 4.3.1. It is expected that the adoption and implementation of this plan will mitigate risks. The strategy will address the need for Council to ensure officers’ responses to homelessness across CoPP services have regarded compatibility with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities as well as Equal Opportunity requirements in Council’s role as a Public Authority.

4.4. Resource implications

- 4.4.1. It is not expected that all of the actions listed in the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy will require new resources as many will be achievable from developing more effective communication and coordination across Council and within existing networks in the community.
- 4.4.2. Funds have been budgeted in the 2008/09 financial year to enable further consultations, publication of the Homelessness Action Strategy and information booklets detailing local services and assistance.
- 4.4.3. During the development phase of the draft strategy, there has been considerable interest in developing new partnerships both within Council and across the community.
- 4.4.4. Some of the larger projects will require sourcing funds from emerging National and State Social inclusion and Community development initiatives, for example National Homelessness Strategy development.
- 4.4.5. We have a joint submission with the Department of Human Services to develop a *State Government/ Council/Community Partnership: Participation and Social Inclusion Project* in the St Kilda/East St Kilda area that particularly focuses upon issues for people in transient and unstable accommodation.

5. PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

5.1. Internal

- Ageing ,Diversity, Policy & Partnerships
- Community and Health Development
- Community Development Policy and Planning
- Social Policy and Planning
- ISIEPCH Inner South East Partnerships in Community and Health
- Family and Children’s Services
- Youth Services
- Strategic Planning
- Economic Development
- Environmental Health
- Building Services
- Local Laws

As the strategy is aiming to promote an integrated and over-arching approach to homelessness across Council, the internal consultation has been taken across a broad range of Council areas throughout the past 8 months. Officers have had direct input into the objectives and actions listed in the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy and support these being presented in the final draft to go to public consultation.

5.2. External

5.2.1. The external people and/or organisations who have been engaged with in relation to this issue are:

- Major homelessness, and crisis support and accommodation services
- Local Housing providers within the Public Housing and Community Housing sectors
- Regional Health organisations-community and mental health services
- Victoria Police
- Community organisations, including faith group organisations

- Community members who have experienced homelessness
- 5.2.2. Engagement took place within 4 forums as well as individual interviews
- 5.2.3. Service providers and members of the community have been initially targeted to seek feedback as to what Council's role should be in regards to homelessness.
- 5.2.4. The Feedback from the consultation to date outlined that Council can and should play a role in
- Coordinating responses with other local Councils across the inner region of Melbourne to people experiencing homelessness;
 - Advocating for improved rooming house standards and regulations and State Government to provide a mix of housing;
 - Continued support of Community and Public housing;
 - Taking a lead role in promoting community education and information about homelessness;
 - Developing web-based and hard copy information fact sheets and booklets regarding services and assistance;
 - Monitoring local trends and demographics, facilitating research and development of data: eg. numbers of people experiencing homelessness, capacity of crisis and transitional accommodation, demand on services

All these points have been addressed in the Action Plan.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1. Once Council has resolved to proceed with public consultation of the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy, work will begin on facilitating the consultation process including:
- Advertisements for the Draft Strategy in local papers
 - A copy posted on the Internet page- Homelessness including a downloadable copy of the document
 - A short fact sheet summarizing the Draft Strategy
 - Copies of the Draft Strategy available for viewing at Council service centres and libraries
 - A direct letter to key stakeholders for 2 targeted forums, one of which will be with people who are homeless or who have experienced homelessness
- 6.2. Should Council's Strategy and Policy Review Committee of 7th July 2008 recommend endorsement of the Draft Strategy, the consultation process will commence for a period of time to allow for comprehensive consultation and

preparation of a comprehensive final report for the September 2008 Council cycle.

7. COMMUNICATION

- 7.1. The Key messages of the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy for the purpose of consultation are
- Council believes that a safe and secure home is essential to facilitating sustainable social connections for all and building a fully inclusive and diverse Port Phillip community.
 - Housing is internationally recognised as a basic human right.
 - Homelessness refers to the experience of not being able to access safe, secure and affordable housing and anyone can become homeless.
 - Homelessness is a critical health and well being issue with many people developing substance issues and a mental illness after they become homeless.
 - We need a range of support services and housing to prevent someone becoming homeless.
 - We need to work together to help people move out of homelessness, sustain housing outcomes and increase their connections to their neighbourhood.
 - By 2013, City of Port Phillip aims to reduce the risks of people becoming homeless.

8. RECOMMENDATION

That the Strategy and Policy Review Committee recommend that Council resolve to

- 8.1. Endorse the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy for the purpose of Community Consultation (Attachment 1).
- 8.2. Place the Draft Homelessness Action Strategy on formal public exhibition for public comments for a period of time following the Strategy and Policy Review Committee of 7th July 2008 to allow for comprehensive consultation and preparation of a comprehensive final report for the September 2008 Council cycle.