



WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE FORCE

OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER OF POLICE

POLICE HEADQUARTERS

6TH FLOOR

2 ADELAIDE TERRACE, EAST PERTH

WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6004

TELEPHONE: (08) 9222 1474

Your Ref: A930544
Our Ref: fA1992272
Inquiries:

Hon Peter Collier MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

BY EMAIL: Icefoc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Collier

INQUIRY INTO THE FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 December 2021, inviting the Western Australia Police Force to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations regarding the inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia.

The Perth Police District has the largest concentration of homeless and street present people in the State and, consequently, the greatest number of service providers to the homeless. The Department of Communities has responsibility for managing homelessness and, while the Western Australia Police Force does not have direct responsibility for the issue of homelessness, there are many related issues with touch points in the policing remit. The Perth Police District Management Team (Perth DMT) remains a closely interested party and participates in regular collaboration meetings with the Department of Communities and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

Prior to September 2020, though stakeholders were well-intended and made efforts at coordination, the experience of the Perth Police District was that outcomes were not being achieved for individuals experiencing homelessness due to a lack of optimal collaboration between service providers and government agencies.

In September 2020, a 'tent city' began to develop in East Perth. Due to persistence by the Perth Police District, the Department of Communities became more involved in coordinating responses and service providers. There continues to be daily contact between the Perth Police Station Officer in Charge and a dedicated Department of Communities Homelessness Coordinator.

This close involvement in the sector highlighted to the Perth DMT a critical shortfall in the coordination of services to the homeless is the absence of a single database to record those who are homeless and the services they have received to date. Without such a database, service provision can be ad-hoc and lead to less than optimal outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness.

The successful transition for an individual from homelessness to being housed requires the support of a number of providers. This process can take a number of years and individuals can 'fall out' of the process at any point and re-engage later. It may take many attempts to complete the transition and some may never complete it through an inability to meet the basic requirements or because they simply do not want to be housed.

Currently, each service provider maintains their own records and, for privacy reasons, generally do not share this information. RUAH Community Services manage what is known as the 'By Name List' (BNL), which is a list of all homeless people they engage by name. The BNL is kept as RUAH Community Services recognise the need to deliver better outcomes and limit duplication of services.

Other providers who are signatories to the "Advance to Zero" campaign have access to the BNL. The "Advance to Zero" campaign is a national initiative of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness, supporting local collaborative efforts to end rough sleeping. However, most NGO only have access to the information they enter into the system to protect the privacy of individuals.

Apart from the Department of Health, no other government agencies have access to the BNL. This is based on protocols developed to support vulnerable people's confidentiality. The focus of the BNL is around housing and support needs. It is the general view of the sector that giving access to organisations who are in an enforcement role would hinder people's consent to sign up to the BNL and, as a result, valuable information would be lost. The most common exclusion to consent on the BNL relates to government departments who have an element of enforcement as part of their role, particularly around child protection or criminal issues.

Proposed Database

As the demand for the BNL demonstrates, there is recognition from within the sector that a proper coordination of services requires some form of database that records and collates an individual's interaction with services. Due to the potential complexity of the individuals and of the process itself, there should be a centralised record of each individual who is engaged to allow them to be given assistance appropriate to their circumstances, guided by their previous engagements.

Accordingly, a database administered by the Department of Communities could be used as a measure of NGOs performance, assisting the Department of Communities in the management and administration of contracts with various NGO. The critical nature of the information supports the notion that Department of Communities should own the database and contribution to the database be a condition to receiving funding to NGO operating in the sector.

In order to be optimally effective, the database needs to facilitate access to a range of organisations. To alleviate concerns over inappropriate access to sensitive information, a

system of tiered access system could be applied to each service provider or government agency with access to the database.

A database administered by the Department of Communities would provide accurate and reliable data on the number of people experiencing homelessness. The data could also be used to better determine the number of homeless people in different areas, as well as their movement across the metropolitan area. This information may be invaluable in planning programs and infrastructure as well as monitoring their effectiveness.

A detailed record of an individual's interactions with services is critical for robust case management. The varying needs of individuals, in turn, means sound case management is critical to the long-term success and better outcomes for each individual.

Situations can develop where all attempts at resolution have been exhausted and an enforcement approach is necessary. In these situations, it is essential to have an accurate record of every attempt at engagement and/or offer of assistance. Having records that illustrate all alternatives having been exhausted is essential to demonstrating a defensible course of action.

Additionally, there will always be some individuals who do not wish to be aided in transition towards housing. A database is useful in recording those individuals who consistently refuse assistance, as police can be informed an individual has declined assistance and factor that into their enforcement decision making.

The benefits of a tiered-access database will include a more efficient, accountable and coordinated approach to service delivery in this sector, which is likely to result in better fiscal management and better outcomes for homeless individuals. In turn, this may have positive outcomes to improve the perception of public safety in areas where he homeless individuals are present and highly visible.

Yours sincerely

CHRIS DAWSON APM
COMMISSIONER OF POLICE
STATE EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

23 March 2022