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Legislative Council  
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To whom it may concern

***RE: Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia***

The City of Rockingham is one of the largest and fastest growing outer Metropolitan local government areas in Western Australia and has a population base of approximately 140,000 residents and an expected growth rate of 2.37 per cent per annum. The Community Development Division, incorporating Community Safety and Support Services coordinate the City's response to homelessness, in collaboration with other business units, including but not limited to Compliance, Health Services, Parks Services and Asset Services.

The approach to Community Support Services is one of capacity building with residents, community groups and the support services sector. It is the City's position that the Western Australian State Government are ultimately responsible for the provision of funding and services to respond to homelessness. This relates to the adequate supply of housing, crisis/emergency accommodation, public housing tenancy support, assertive outreach, counselling and other support services linked to homelessness such as domestic and family violence, mental health, financial difficulties, and relationship/family breakdown.

It is understood that in order to identify, respond and aim to prevent homelessness that at a multi-faceted approach is needed which can only be achieved through a partnership approach from all tiers of Government and the community.

The City is clear with its role and takes a strategic and statutory planning and partnerships role, that under Community Support Services includes;

- Understanding the community needs in relation to the provision of support services and advocate for the provision of these services within the community;
- Support the development and facilitation of local community sector collaboration, partnerships and professional networks including the Rockingham/Kwinana Homelessness Interagency network;
- Support the education of residents in how and where to access support services;
- Support the gathering of data from across the sector to assist the development of strategic partnerships for informed decision;
- The provision of a community grants program to support the community and not for profit sector; and



- Enhancing community resilience and connection through the delivery of targeted community development programs, events, workshops and initiatives.

### Rockingham Homelessness Snap Shot

The City has taken an active role in coordinating the local support services sector with a focus on homelessness by developing the Rockingham/Kwinana Homelessness Interagency network in 2015. This network has been pivotal in gathering local data to inform advocacy efforts and attempt to attract sustainable funding to the local area. It has been an ongoing frustration of the local sector that funding models have not provided the sustainability this community needs to respond to the local situation of homelessness. Short term funding from providers such as the Western Australia Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA), and Department of Communities with positions such as the Project Officer-Homelessness, have proved to take pressure off volunteer based groups. However, set a service level expectation and when funding ceases, it disrupts the sector locally and creates distrust within the people it intends to support. This results in additional barriers to accessing support for clients.

A strategic leadership group was formed in 2019 to prioritise three keys areas to address the matter of homelessness and these included;

1. Data Collection;
2. Assertive Outreach; and
3. Housing/ Accommodation

The City was involved in Connection / Registry Week activities in 2016 and 2019 to obtain data to lead an advocacy approach and following this, the community and local support services sector strongly indicated a desperate need for assertive outreach. In response, in May 2020, Council committed \$450,000 over three years for a fee for service contract to deliver an assertive outreach service in Rockingham.

Following the release of the 'All Paths Lead to a Home' strategy in 2020, the City advocated to the State Government Housing First Homelessness Initiative (HFHI) to include Rockingham, and also for a Common Ground Facility to be located in the South West Region (Rockingham, Mandurah, Kwinana).

Both advocacy efforts for HFHI and Common Ground facility were successful and the State did fund the HFHI in Rockingham. However it is a combined project with Mandurah, therefore the amount allocated specifically for Rockingham is unknown. What is known, is that the funding is not meeting the local demand. The Common Ground Facility is committed to be built in Mandurah, and whilst this is good for the region, it still does not meet the critical gap in the provision of crisis/emergency accommodation in Rockingham.

The City has become an active member of the Advance to Zero (A to Z) Project and supports RUAH Community Services in the delivery. As a result the City now has an active By-Name List and access to quality data.

As of 31 January 2022, there were 97 people listed on the Rockingham By-Name List. The local domestic and family refuges are at capacity and there is an increasing number of woman with children sleeping in vehicles. On a weekly basis, it is estimated that in excess of 1000 people access emergency relief support from local not for profit providers. The local support services sector are reporting that they are operating at capacity with increasing contact from people in need for support with particular stress felt on the mental

health, drug and alcohol and housing sectors. This has been further impacted by COVID-19.

Additionally, over the past six years the City has provided approximately \$200,000 via the community grants program to support local support service providers.

**Response to the underlined Terms of Reference:**

*The following responses are directly related to the City of Rockingham and informed by the partnerships, professional networks and knowledge obtained through local research and delivery of capacity building programs.*

The Current Funding and Delivery of Services

- In May 2020, Council agreed to fund a three year, fee for service assertive outreach contract to the value of \$150,000 per year and directed the Chief Executive Officer to seek additional financial support for the assertive outreach program from the State Government. Prior to advertising the contract the City attempted to partner with the State Government Housing First Homelessness Initiative (HFHI) to combine funds allocated to the Rockingham area. This was intended to reduce administrative requirements for the successful provider, and to streamline the two pools of funding into one project to achieve better outcomes for the community. The proposal to partner was not supported by the State with procurement requirements being the main barrier to this approach. Had this partnership approach been supported by the State, it would have enabled a greater level of direct service provision to support people in Rockingham. This highlights the need for stronger placed based approach to delivery of State funded projects.
- In August 2021 the City awarded the Assertive Outreach Contract to St Patricks Community Centre (St Pats). St Pats were also successful in obtaining the State funded HFHI contract. It is to be noted that each contract for St Pats is limited by funding capacity that could have been enhanced by combining funding.
- The specific funding allocation from the State for Rockingham is unknown to the City. The HFHI project includes both the Rockingham and Mandurah local government areas. The City would like to understand how this funding amount was determined. The amount allocated is not sufficient to cover the local need nor to achieve the intended outcomes with consideration of the large geographical area and the number of people it aims to service. It is evident in Rockingham, that without the City funded assertive outreach contract, the HFHI would be unable to service the demand.
- There is a distinct lack of emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation in the Rockingham area. The State has acknowledged via its funding of the HFHI, that Rockingham is an area of need however no funding has been provided to address the lack of accommodation. The City is aware of three local applications submitted to the 2021 Social Housing Economic Recovery Package (SHERP) funding round with no applications receiving funding. In addition, the recent announcement of the Western Australia (WA) Housing Diversity Pipeline development sites, did not include Rockingham. Rockingham needs to become a priority for the allocation of funding to address the gap in accommodation to enable the transition of people off the street.
- Funding and service levels need to consider the current and projected population of the City, inclusive of the data available for the current number of people experiencing

homelessness and or at risk of homelessness. This also needs to reflect the additional costs associated in supporting people to access crisis accommodation outside of the city.

- The City suggests that funding opportunities need to consider a region approach working with and alongside local government who know the local gaps and service needs as identified by the formation of local partnerships. A consideration of regional collaboration/coalition funding to streamline referral pathways and facilitate the No Wrong Door Approach as per the State Strategy would be welcomed. The State Government tender process should acknowledge the effort made by the City to reduce competitiveness and improve collaboration across the not for profit sector to enhance service outcomes for the Rockingham community.
- Develop a low barrier approach for State Government tendered programs to consider eligibility criteria that enables smaller local services to apply to access funding. There are local examples of smaller not for profit providers delivering trusted and successful local programs/approaches but these providers are often ineligible for funding due to certain criteria eg; Rockingham Street Chaplains or the CREW. The City encourages the Department of Communities to consider a placed based commissioning process to which the city may offer feedback to assist smaller providers to access funding and maintain trusted local service provision with existing relationship with clients requiring support.
- It is evident from feedback from the Rockingham community services sector that continuity and sustainability of funding has been an ongoing concern. It has been noted that for local programs and service providers to build relationships and trust with clients experiencing homelessness, that longer term contracts are required. For example, the Department of Communities Local Community Coordinators was a pilot program across several suburbs in Rockingham and found locally to be very successful in reducing barriers to connect people to support. This program assisted in reducing the reliance on the City to be the coordinating body between State, not for profit and grass roots groups, however it was defunded and the City has had to allocated additional officer time to fulfil this need.
- The City funds programs to create community connection and build capacity of the community. However, it is noted consistently through local professional partnerships that the sector needs the State to increase its focus on the funding of services in the areas of preventing homelessness eg: mental health, alcohol & other drugs, family & domestic violence, financial counselling, legal aid, family support, rent assistance and tenancy support.

'All Paths Lead to a Home'. Western Australia's 10 year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030

- The City requests to be consulted on the planning and implementation of social housing to increase the State's understanding of the greater community impacts of placement of social housing and or lack of. Public housing stock in the City of Rockingham LGA, as at 31 July 2020 was only 956 properties.
- Local interagency feedback identifies the need for greater collaboration between State Departments – health, mental health, housing, justice and child protection, to reduce the numbers of people facing homelessness. This links with the State

Strategy No Wrong Door approach, however it is evident locally that there is a long way to go to achieve this.

- The City is aware of local examples where individuals who had experienced long term homelessness were facing eviction from public housing. This highlights the need to provide flexibility with social housing to enable a person centred approach with discretionary decision making capability within policy eg: housing policy related to evictions, housing rental debt. Additional funding to support the THRIVE program would certainly enhance housing literacy and reduce tenancy evictions, resulting in frequent and longer term homelessness.

#### Existing data system and how data informs service delivery

- The City acknowledges the need for greater collaboration between the State Government and local grass root providers who are not funded specialist homeless services and therefore not obligated to report local service levels or needs to the State. This results in a misleading understanding of the accurate local level impact of homelessness. The City collected data from local providers indicated an accurate reflection of the local situation and was confirmed during the Connection Week activities held in 2016 and 2019 and is reflective of data currently available on the By-Name List. District Leadership groups chaired by Department of Communities could be the tool to collect this information to help inform allocation of funding under the State's homelessness and housing strategies.
- Leading causes to homelessness data should be used to inform the funding of services to respond to homelessness inclusive of prevention (not only response) to break the cycle to advance to zero.
- The City would like the By-Name List to be defined by Local Government area to improve data and inform strengthened advocacy for placed based responses.

#### Any other related matter

- The local support services sector, along with WA Police and Department of Health have identified the need to increase the provision of mental health workers locally to reduce reliance on WA Police to respond to mental health matters linked with homelessness. This creates more pressure on the Rockingham Hospital Emergency Department (ED), removes Police from responding to other matters and does not result in positive outcomes for the people experiencing homelessness. Additional mental health workers or mental health outreach workers would enable people experiencing a mental health episode to receive a more appropriate response, referral and appropriate care. The current system response results in people either being locked up at the Police Station or being admitted to ED and discharged without appropriate referral for ongoing support for their mental health needs.
- The City needs the State to provide more public housing and a crisis accommodation facility in Rockingham.
- Local data from the support services sector identifies a challenge in responding to co-morbidity. The City recommends the development of a priority service model that enables co-morbid services eg: if a homeless person has two or more conditions – drug and mental health, they can't access drug rehabilitation without being treated for mental health conditions and vice versa, if they need to access mental health accommodation or treatment, they can't access these if they are on drugs. Unfunded

services attempt to service this demand and therefore this is not captured in data used to inform service improvements at a State level.

- Reinststate a regional Department of Communities Project Officer- Homelessness. In response to the Ward Road encampment where lives were at risk, the City advocated for the State Government to take urgent action related to a camp on Development WA owned land. A Project Officer-Homelessness was appointed and this role was an invaluable link to coordinate responses to homelessness bringing together State Departments, LG, not for profit sector and people experiencing homelessness. The role enabled timely and placed based data to be reported to inform decision makers on vital responses. The role was the perfect conduit to reduce the impotence on LG to attempt to fulfil this gap in communication between housing, person centred support and informing policy and decision makers at a State level.

Key messages:

1. Homelessness is the State Governments responsibility.
2. Housing and accommodation supply in Rockingham is critical. The priority for Rockingham is the need for the State to increase public housing and fund a crisis accommodation facility in Rockingham
3. The City will continue to partner with Ruah Community Services to deliver the Advance to Zero project to gather data to assist in informing the State Government for local priority setting in responding to homelessness.
4. The City in partnership with the local support services sector identifies the need for the State to consider the procurement process of contracts to enable the delivery of sustainable responses to homelessness and encourage a greater focus on the funding of prevention.
5. The City would appreciate increased transparency from the State on the allocation of funding to the support services sector across contracts. This will assist the City to gain a better understanding of the local provision of services and enable a strengthened relationship with State departments on sharing local data to inform priorities.

The City appreciates the opportunity to present this submission and thanks the State for the funding that has been allocated to Rockingham.

Yours faithfully

Michael Holland  
Director Community Development.