

Enquiries: J Thomas, T Hartland
Our Ref: TH: KS

11 March 2022

Tracey Sharpe
Committee Clerk
Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Ms Sharpe

Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in WA

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the above Inquiry. The City of Mandurah has worked closely and pro-actively with State Government, non-government organisations and our local community, to establish a strategic approach to homelessness and street presence that aligns with the State Government's '10-year Strategy to End Homelessness'.

The *Mandurah Homelessness and Street Present Strategy 2021 – 2023* involved very wide consultation and can be viewed on our website. The City is very active in its role to end homelessness with a number of targeted approaches. It facilitates an interagency-network group, high level stakeholder group, capital support for projects like Peel Community Kitchen, operational support for services like Peel Shower service, domestic violence prevention, suicide prevention and a vast array of other initiatives.

The City has been very deliberate in its position to attract funding for local homelessness services, and extends its gratitude for this support. Key projects underway include:

- Common Ground: Mandurah determined as the second site for construction of this permanent, supportive housing for people on low incomes, and people who have experienced chronic homelessness. This \$28.1 million facility is anticipated to open in 2024 and the City is looking to welcome new residents.
- Housing First: Committed by State Government, with \$2.4 million allocated for Mandurah/Rockingham to be serviced by St Pat's with support from Ruah and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation via consortium that provides wrap around supports to people sleeping rough. The City has been actively engaged with delivery of the model, and supports its core principles.
- Mandurah Assertive Outreach Trial Project: Implemented by the City via WA Police State funding, the Assertive Outreach Project is funded \$350,000 over two years. It provides one-on-one support with people sleeping rough, street present and homeless and provide wrap around supports in partnership with Mandurah's community services sector.

The City commends the State Government commitment to redevelop and expand the Peel Health Campus (\$152 million), including the introduction of a 10-bed Mental Health Emergency Centre. The funding commitment towards a co-response to mental health will support the Mandurah Homelessness and Street Present strategic approach.

The City makes the following points in relation to the Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in WA:

- The City supports the direction of the '10-year Strategy to End Homelessness'. The Strategy affirms the role of local government is one of facilitation, support, coordination and advocacy (and not direct service provision, which is best with specialist service providers).
- The City is in strong support of the 'Housing First' approach. For this approach to work, a high priority is the need to significantly and quickly increase housing stock, in terms of supply, diversity of housing types and timeliness to access when needed. The City has noted housing shortages across the board, including large families. The State Government's commitment to expend \$2.5b for housing and homelessness in the next four years is much welcomed.
- The City currently has two pilot projects operating on State Funding, Homelessness Assertive Outreach, and Housing First which are both delivered by St Pat's and funded for 2 and 3 years respectively. There is early evidence that demonstrates both pilots are proving highly successful, with a material increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness being found secure accommodation.

The Assertive Outreach also alleviates the need for City Rangers to be so directly involved in supporting rough-sleepers, which is an increasing part of their role which diminishes their ability to undertake core duties. Whilst training is provided and the City has very compassionate Rangers Services, they are not trained to the degree of a social worker or specialist homelessness practitioner which is why the outreach workers are so important.

The City considers it a high priority for these Assertive Outreach and Housing First programs to be funded by the State Government permanently to meet demand. It's recommended equivalent rollout of these services statewide to ensure the positive impacts of such services are consistent for maximum benefit.

- A high priority issue is the need to award local homelessness service providers long term contracts to enable stability, longevity and service continuity to ensure optimal community benefit. Several key local homelessness providers report that they have been on rolling year-by-year contracts since 2013, with no substantial funding increase to match significantly increased demand.

Consequently, funds have been eroded as service providers try to meet the needs of a community with one of the highest population growth figures in the state. Local providers report that not only are the number of clients increasing, but the complexity of issues being faced is increasing as well. This impacts their ability to attract, retain and train staff which are at growing risk of burnout and leaving the sector completely. It impacts the ability to service clients in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Awarding long-term contracts with substantially higher amounts to meet demand is urgent.

- The intent of the \$6 million 'Local Government Partnership Fund for Homelessness' released in 2021 was greatly appreciated. In terms of application, it is considered the first round of this fund had some key challenges, namely:
 - It was released with a timeline that had a short turn-around which hampered ability for local government processes to run their due course (eg reports to executive or council). It didn't allow sufficient time for LGA's and NGO's to discuss and build evidenced, relevant programs or projects with depth.
 - It was in the months leading up to Local Government elections
 - It required a co-contribution from local government which could not be placed in the budget at short notice.
 - The co-contribution drew local government into service provision which is inconsistent with the role of local government identified in the 10-year Strategy to End Homelessness.
 - It would be helpful if the grant extended to the purchase of equipment and small capital items

- It's a Strategic Priority of Council to support the expansion of the Peel Health Hub. The Peel Health Hub 2.0 Business Case (October 2021) shows that Peel urgently needs more community-based services for people living in disadvantage and with complex health needs. It further states that without investment in community health and well-being, Peel will not reach its goals for economic development.

- The City would like to see continuation of State Government campaigns and funding that provides increased dignity and breaks the stigma surrounding homelessness.

- The City recognises the need for State Government to fund a workforce pipeline that creates, supplies and retains skilled workers in the homelessness sector. This needs to grow as a highly regarded profession.

The Mandurah community is proud, compassionate and hopeful. We have a strong desire to ensure all people live a life they value, and feel like they have a safe, secure home.

The City of Mandurah is a values-based organisation with a commitment to end homelessness with courage, connectedness, innovation, integrity and excellence. The partnership and funding by State Government to date has proven to have a positive local impact, and we acknowledge there is still a lot of work to do in order to end homelessness. We look forward to working with the State Government and key stakeholders in the future to end homelessness.

Should you have any queries on the information contained in this submission, please contact me at the City on (08) 9550 3777

Yours sincerely

Jude Thomas
Director Place and Community