



**Homelessness Policy:
Responding to the needs of
homeless people in the Inner
West community**

This policy will be reviewed by: Community Services and Culture

Next review date: November 2018

Title:	Homelessness Policy: Responding to the needs of homeless people in the Inner West community
Summary:	The policy outlines appropriate roles and strategies for Council in addressing the complex issues associated with people sleeping rough in public places.
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Related Council Policy:	
Related Council Procedure:	Homelessness Protocol

Purpose

Inner West Council (IWC) recognises the NSW Government's "Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places", August 2014, and thereby respects the rights of people who are homeless to be in public places, to participate in public activities and to be treated in a non-discriminatory, respectful manner. The purpose of this policy is to formulate an appropriate role for Council in addressing the complex issues associated with homelessness, and thereby give local expression to the principles contained in the NSW Protocol. In addition to the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places, a number of policies and protocols from other councils have informed the development of this policy. These references are outlined in Appendix 4.

While homelessness takes many forms, the main focus of this policy is primary homelessness, which often takes the form of rough sleeping. The policy aims to address issues associated with the increasing prevalence of people who are homeless in public places, and in doing so assist Council to meet its obligation to manage these areas appropriately.

Other forms of homelessness (secondary and tertiary) include people living in temporary shelters, severely crowded dwellings, supported accommodation, emergency accommodation, boarding houses, refuges or temporarily staying with others (couch surfing). These forms of homelessness are significant and more prevalent than rough sleeping, however are not the primary subject of this policy.

Context

Homelessness is often the consequence of broad scale social and economic policies that result in homelessness triggers such as housing affordability, unemployment and loss of income support. While homelessness is primarily the responsibility of state and commonwealth governments, local government has a significant role to play as custodians of public open space and other community assets which are used by people who are homeless and others.

In addition, in light of the national crisis in housing affordability and the interventions possible through the local planning system, Council also has a role to play in sustaining and endeavouring to expand the provision of affordable housing. The high incidence of housing stress and possible strategies for the Inner West Council to increase affordable housing are outlined in Council's *Draft Affordable Housing Policy, 2016*.

The causes of homelessness are complex and varied. Men, women and children of all ages are now finding themselves homeless due to a diverse range of problems. Homelessness can result from drug, alcohol and gambling addiction; mental illness; family breakdown; shortage of stable and affordable housing; financial or housing stress; health issues; long

term unemployment; domestic and family violence; loss of social and family networks; and people leaving healthcare services, child protection and correctional facilities.

While the majority of rough sleepers recorded in the local area are men, there are increasing numbers of less visible older women experiencing homelessness. Poverty and lack of housing affordability are significant factors leading older women to seek out less visible options such as couch surfing, sleeping in cars and sleeping rough in the relatively safer daylight hours, thereby not being counted in late night homelessness street counts (McFerran, 2010). Young people can also be relatively invisible, despite comprising 42% of the homeless population. This is in part due to couch surfing being the dominant form of homelessness amongst young people (Flatau et al).

Nature and extent of homelessness in the Inner West

The 2011 Census indicated that homelessness is increasing nationally, with 105,237 people recorded as being homeless, representing an 8% increase on 2006 figures.¹ These increased trends are also reflected in the Inner West Council area. Rough sleepers have been reported in parks; in parked cars; in stairwells associated with public car parks; on verges and footpaths; on private property under eaves and other semi-sheltered areas. Occasionally, tents have been erected in parks, footpaths and nature reserves in both residential and commercial areas.

A late night street count conducted in Ashfield, Summer Hill and Haberfield in March 2016 found that 20 people were sleeping rough in the area. This was followed by a winter street count in August 2016 that found that 23 people were sleeping rough, primarily in Ashfield, Summer Hill, Marrickville and Newtown with smaller numbers in Camperdown and Enmore. It is likely that this under represents the true extent of rough sleeping, however provides a useful benchmark and highlights locations where the extent of homelessness was previously unknown. Quantifying the number of people sleeping rough through street counts is inherently difficult due to some people being deliberately hidden from public view; people still being mobile at the time of the count; and the resources that would be required to check every street and public place in the municipality.

The experience of The Exodus Foundation suggests that the number of people who are homeless in the inner west is significant and growing. The Exodus Foundation's Loaves and Fishes Restaurant serves 600 free breakfasts and lunches each day to people who are homeless and disadvantaged. Early results from a recent survey by Health NSW in conjunction with Exodus found that 20% of the 200 people interviewed at Exodus were sleeping rough. Outreach services such as Missionbeat have also noticed increased numbers of people who are homeless in the inner west.

¹ Information Paper 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011

While many people who are homeless have little adverse impact on others, there have been issues in some areas where nearby residents and other park users have complained about rubbish, the spread of belongings, drug and alcohol consumption, human waste, feeling unsafe and alienation of parkland through the erection of tents and other structures. In addition, Police have reported a number of incidents associated with some of the people who are sleeping rough in local parks, including behaviours which compromise community safety. This heightened level of community and Police concern has highlighted the need for Council to be clear about its role and appropriate responses.

Current Approach to Homelessness

- The Inner West Council Operational Plan reflects a continued commitment to the objectives of providing an inclusive, equitable and socially just community. Respect for people who are homeless and recognition of their rights to fully participate in the local community and access Council facilities gives expression to these values.
- A Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places has been developed and is being progressively implemented across the IWC. This protocol aims to guide the actions of staff in respecting the rights and needs of both people who are homeless and the other residents who share Council's public places. It applies to indoor and outdoor public places including parks and other open spaces, libraries and customer services areas. The Protocol draws upon the principles contained in the NSW Government Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places.
- A collaborative approach with both internal and external stakeholders underpins Council's Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places, which acts as a guide for staff in responding to people sleeping rough in the area. This Protocol recognises the valuable information staff have concerning the location of people who are homeless, and enables this information to be referred to the services offered by specialist homelessness services. In this way people who are homeless may be offered welfare checks as well as information about accommodation and other support services.
- The Protocol also reinforces Council's partnership with Police in addressing any behaviour that threatens the safe and peaceful use of parks by the community. For example, local Police have been very helpful in working with Council's Rangers to address antisocial behaviour associated with the tents that were present in Allman Park towards the end of 2015.
- As part of the 2014 NSW Government's Specialist Homelessness Reform, the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) provides funding to 14 homelessness services which service the Inner West Council area. A list of these, as well as other homelessness services not part of the FACS funding program, are listed in Appendix 1.

Policy Principles

- People who are homeless represent some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society. Homelessness is first and foremost an issue for the people who find themselves without shelter, and the obvious ramifications for them in terms of health, wellbeing, dignity and exclusion from society. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights recognises that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their family, including access to housing (Article 25).
- All members of the community, including people who are homeless, have the same right to be in public places. Equally, all members of the community have a shared responsibility to respect other users of public spaces and not unduly infringe on the safe and peaceful use of the public domain by others.
- In the interest of promoting a socially inclusive society, all members of the community, including people who are homeless, have the right to participate in community events and activities, and use public facilities.
- People who are homeless have the right to carry with them and store their own belongings, and are responsible for ensuring their belongings do not impair the safe and peaceful use of public spaces by others.
- People who are homeless are not a homogenous group. As such, assumptions should not be made about the reasons people become homeless; the types of people who experience homelessness; and whether or not they may be interested in accessing homelessness services.
- Where possible, vulnerable people in public places should be supported by specialist homelessness services and supported to exit homelessness.
- Council's Homelessness Policy does not override existing laws, statutory requirements or regulations; nor does it diminish the ability of agencies to enforce them. The Policy does not prevent relevant authorities from taking appropriate action where health or safety is threatened, or where a breach of the peace or unlawful behaviour has occurred.

Council Role

- **Management of public places:** ensuring public places are accessible and able to be safely and peacefully enjoyed by all residents.
- **Information:** Council may provide information to people who are homeless, Council staff and other interested residents concerning the homelessness services available in the area.

- **Advocacy:** It is appropriate for Council to play an advocacy role concerning the provision of relevant state and commonwealth government supported services and policies that impact on homelessness. This may include policies regarding housing affordability; social housing; income support; and homelessness support services.
- **Community education:** Council has the potential to increase community understanding about homelessness through the way it responds to the issue and the way it is communicated to the public
- **Monitoring:** Council has a role in recording and monitoring the nature, extent and location of homelessness within the municipality
- **Facilitation:** Council plays a facilitating role, through its Community Grants Program, in assisting programs that are targeted towards people who are homeless.
- **Training:** It is appropriate for Council to provide training opportunities for staff who are in contact with people who are homeless through the normal course of their work
- **Planning:** Council has a role to play in encouraging more affordable housing options through its planning strategies and instruments

Policy Objectives and Strategies

The following table sets out Council's three policy objectives and six supporting strategies to respond to homelessness. Corresponding actions are listed in Appendix 2.

<p>1. Improve the wellbeing of people who are homeless in the Inner West Council by:</p> <p>1.1. Promoting social inclusion and encouraging participation in community life</p> <p>1.2. Identifying gaps and advocating for the services and funding needed to address local needs.</p>
<p>2. Reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough in the Inner West Council area by:</p> <p>2.1. Assisting to connect people who are homeless with the homelessness services that can support them to exit homelessness and access other relevant support</p> <p>2.2. Encouraging the provision of affordable housing as a means of addressing one of the major underlying causes of homelessness</p>

3. Minimise any negative impacts of homelessness on local residents and other users of public places by:

3.1. Managing Council's services and programs to facilitate accessibility while at the same time ensuring users do not infringe upon the safe and peaceful enjoyment of public places by others

3.2. Monitoring the nature and extent of primary homelessness and responding accordingly

Implementation

Council staff from across all departments are already involved with dealing with this issue during the normal course of their work. Specifically, this issue impacts on staff from areas such as regulatory services, parks, waste, libraries, customer services and community services. Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach across Council's functional areas has proved to be an effective model for responding to this issue. The Homelessness Working Group will continue to meet quarterly to review homelessness data and the effectiveness of policies and procedures in addressing the issue. The Deputy General Manager, Community and Engagement will be responsible for the monitoring, evaluation and implementation of this policy, together with its review in two years.

Appendix 1 – Homelessness Services

The following list outlines the 14 homeless services operating in the Inner West Council area that are funded by the Family and Community Services Department.

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- **The Inner West Youth Homelessness Service.** Lead provider: Youth Off The Streets Ltd. Clients: young people
 - **Sydney District Boarding House Outreach Service.** Lead provider: Newtown Neighbourhood Centre Inc. Clients: women, men, families²
 - **Sydney Homelessness Early Intervention Service.** Lead provider: Mission Australia (Missionbeat). Clients: young people, men, women, families
 - **Inner West Family Homelessness Support Service.** Lead provider: St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. Clients: families. Also provides refuge and crisis accommodation for women with children at Elsie Women's Refuge and Marian Centre
 - **Sydney District Young Parents Homelessness Service.** Lead provider: Launchpad Youth Community Inc. Clients: families, specifically young parents 16-24 years.
 - **Sydney District West Family Homelessness Support Service.** Lead provider: Women's and Girl's Emergency Centre Incorporated (WAGEC). Clients: families
 - **Transgender Homelessness Support Service.** Lead provider: The Gender Centre in Annandale. Clients: transgender people 18+.
 - **Lesbian, Gay, bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer Youth Homelessness Project.** Lead provider: The Twenty ten Association Incorporated. Clients: young people under 25 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ).
 - **Medium Term Homelessness Services for Girls and Young Women: Youth off the Streets.** Clients: girls under 16 years requiring medium term accommodation and support
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² Newtown Neighbourhood Centre is concerned with the security of boarding house residents in the Inner West, and provides the Boarding House Outreach Service and a Boarders and Lodgers Project. There are significant numbers of boarding houses in the IWC, particularly in Marrickville and Ashfield. Boarding Houses form an important part of the local context of homelessness as many rough sleepers originate from and transition to boarding houses.

- Homelessness Support Service for Girls and Young Women with Complex Needs: Detour House. Clients: girls under 16 years requiring crisis support
- Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Service: Marrickville Women's Refuge. Clients: Aboriginal women and girls requiring accommodation and support leaving DV
- Aboriginal Outreach Casework Project: Aboriginal Corporation for Homelessness: Early intervention and post crisis support for Aboriginal people
- Sydney and South Eastern Sydney Districts Single Persons Homelessness Support Service- Mental health. Lead Provider: Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust through Wesley Mission. Service includes case management and supported transitional accommodation, as well as pathways to move from homelessness to long-term accommodation with appropriate mental health support.
- Multidisciplinary Outreach Post-Crisis Support (MOPS). Lead Provider: Wesley. Assistance and support for chronic rough sleepers who have been allocated housing. Targets men, women & families.

In addition to the FACS funded specialist homelessness services, there are several other organisations providing services in the Inner West:

- The Better Pathways to Housing for People with Severe and Enduring Mental Illness is led by the Sydney Local Health District, FACS and Partners in Recovery to improve pathways to accommodation for people with severe mental illness. The project will map pathways to housing for people with severe mental illness for a range of housing providers and will plan and implement ways to improve this experience.
- The Exodus Foundation provides meals, dental, medical, laundry, showers, referral and social services for people who are homeless and other vulnerable people. Several of the people sleeping rough in Ashfield's parks are regular clients at Exodus, and it is possible that at least some of the people who are homeless are based in local parks to enable them to easily access Exodus services.
- There are a range of other community organisations and churches providing food pantries and meals in the Inner West, including the mobile food pantry at the All Saints Church in Petersham; The Food Shed Enmore at Enmore Church of the Nazarene ; the Pop Up Pantry at Rozelle Neighbourhood

Centre; the Tucker and Land Justice Food Pantry in the Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville; weekday lunches at St Constantine's Greek Church, Newtown; meals and food parcels at the Newtown Mission; and the weeknight Hare Krishna food van outside the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre.

The Department of Family and Community Services also funds the state-wide homelessness phone service, Link2home. Link2home operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides information and referral to homelessness services.

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Appendix 2 - Strategies and Actions

The following tables set out 17 actions that Council will implement to deliver the six strategies identified in the Homelessness Policy.

1.1 Promoting social inclusion and encouraging participation in community life

Action A: Promote Council's services and programs through the Exodus Foundation and Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Action B: Investigate ways in which Council's services and programs can be more readily accessed by people who are homeless

Action C: Prioritise applications under Council's Grants Program that seek to involve homeless people in community activities

1.2 Identifying gaps and advocating for the services and funding needed to address local needs.

Action D: Utilise the NSW Health survey of people using Exodus services together with Council data to identify local demand and service needs

Action E: Liaise with existing outreach services regarding their capacity to meet local needs and where appropriate make representations to relevant government departments and community organisations to address any unmet demand

2.1 Assisting to connect homeless people with the homelessness services that can support them to exit homelessness and access other relevant support

Action F: Disseminate the Homeless Assistance card to homeless people, staff, local community groups and interested residents

Action G: Foster cooperative relationships with Exodus, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Missionbeat, Youth Off the Streets and any other relevant services as they continue to assist Council in responding to rough sleepers

Action H: Keep abreast of the range of services available through the joint Homelessness Forums or networks convened by Exodus in partnership with Council

Action I: Council will undertake an annual street count of rough sleepers to record the location and extent of homelessness and thereby enable homelessness services to respond accordingly

2.2 Encouraging the provision of affordable housing as a means of addressing one of the major underlying causes of homelessness

Action J: Develop and adopt an Affordable Housing Policy for the Inner West Council

3.1 Managing Council's services and programs to facilitate accessibility while at the same time ensuring users do not infringe upon the safe and peaceful enjoyment of public places by others

Action K: Plans of management prepared for Council's parks will encourage accessibility while minimising any negative consequences of rough sleepers

Action L: Explore the potential for the Homelessness Protocol to be adapted for use throughout the Inner West Council.

Action M: The Homelessness Protocol will continue to be implemented and monitored to ensure Council's response to homelessness is consistent with the provision of accessible, safe and peaceful open space.

Action N: The Homelessness Working Group will continue to monitor rough sleeping across the Inner West Council area and the implementation of the Homelessness Protocol.

Action O: Council will provide training opportunities for staff who encounter people who are homeless through the normal course of their work, including staff from Rangers, Waste, Parks, Libraries and Customer Services areas.

3.2 Monitoring the nature and extent of primary homelessness and responding accordingly

Action P: Utilise the information from the street count to help shape the response by Council's operational and regulatory staff to any issues stemming from rough sleeping in Council managed places

Action Q: Maintain a Homeless Incident Spreadsheet in order to record and where necessary respond to incidents of homelessness reported by staff, residents and others.

Appendix 3 - ABS Definitions and Statistics

- When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:
 - is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
 - has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
 - does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

(ABS Reference: 4922.0 - Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012)

- The key national homelessness estimates from the 2011 Census are:
 - there were 105,237 people enumerated in the Census who are classified as being homeless on Census night (up from 89,728 in 2006);
 - the homeless rate was 49 persons for every 10,000 persons enumerated in the 2011 Census, up 8% from the 45 persons in 2006 but down on the 51 persons in 2001;
 - the homelessness rate rose by 20% or more in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT, with the largest fall being in the Northern Territory down 8%.

(ABS Reference: 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011)

Appendix 4 - References

- Department of Family and Community Service
Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places, Aug 2014
- Department of Family and Community Service (FACS)
Specialist Homelessness Services Fact Sheet, Sydney District, August 2015
- City of Sydney Street Count, Volunteer Manual
- City of Sydney Homelessness website
- Parramatta City Council Homelessness Policy, November 2011
- Byron Shire Council Policy No 14/007, Homelessness
- Manly Council, Homeless Persons Protocol
- City of Boroondara, Homelessness Protocol
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