



City of **Perth**

The Hon. Peter Collier MLC

Chair

WA Parliamentary Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations

Parliament House

4 Harvest Terrace

WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Chair,

**Submission to the WA Parliamentary Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations - Inquiry into the Financial Administration of Homelessness Services in Western Australia.**

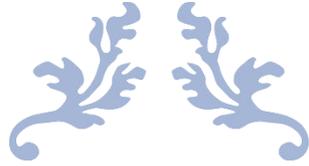
I present the City of Perth's submission to the Committee's Inquiry into the Financial Administration of Homelessness Services in Western Australia.

I advise that I am available to address the Committee in regard to the submission, at the Committee's behest.

Yours sincerely

BASIL ZEMPILAS  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD MAYOR

11 March 2022



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SUBMISSION TO THE WA PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL  
OPERATIONS

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Inquiry into the Financial Administration of Homelessness Services in Western Australia



PREPARED BY CITY OF PERTH

11 MARCH 2022



## CITY of PERTH

### **Submission to the WA Parliamentary Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations: Inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia.**

#### **POSITION STATEMENT**

While understanding that homelessness may never be eradicated, the City of Perth (the City) recognises its role in supporting the Commonwealth and State governments as the leading agencies in reducing homelessness, and rough sleeping, to the point where available services and resources match or exceed, demand – “functional zero”.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating on the community and service providers, who require ongoing support. The City sees the current lack of cohesion between levels of government and the Department of Communities as a significant impediment to the joint efforts to address homelessness in the Central Business District (CBD). It calls for greater coordination of services and strategic oversight – urgently.

Everyone deserves a safe home and nobody should be consigned to a life on the streets. Capital cities account for almost two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. The City recognises that no single organisation has the resources, or skills, to address the issue on its own.

The City recognises that causal factors contributing to homelessness and rough sleeping are highly complex and interconnected.

The City will continue to work with both tiers of government, as well as industry partners, to find a solution to reducing homelessness and rough sleeping numbers. To that end, the City calls upon the State Government to commit to addressing homelessness through improved governance, strategic funding allocations and better coordination of partnerships – while urgently increasing the amount of available social housing in Western Australia.

## CONTEXT

With almost two thirds of homeless people located in capital cities<sup>i</sup>, disproportionate pressure is placed on the City to manage the flow of transient rough sleepers from outlying suburbs and regional areas. Through consultation with existing stakeholders, service providers and those with lived experience, the City identified gaps within service delivery and responded with the *Rough Sleeper Plan*. The four-part action plan includes the City's advocacy positions and priorities, which require support to address homelessness and rough sleeping in the CBD.

While the City will take a leadership role where required, it favours a collaborative and coordinated approach to place-based service delivery. An example of this is the development of the Moore Street Accredited Site in the Public Realm (detailed below). The City has already proactively led a Women's Safe Night Space trial (May 2021 - May 2023) and a men's shelter trial in 2021. Both have had measurable success and were undertaken to demonstrate what the State Government could be delivering. It is clear there remains a critical need for inner-city crisis care with low barrier admission and wraparound supports. There is no City funding allocated beyond these trials, and the City maintains it is the State Government's role to provide crisis care for men, women and children.

Homelessness intersects with other social, economic, health and justice issues<sup>ii</sup>. People experiencing homelessness and those sleeping rough are often blamed, erroneously, for crime and antisocial behaviour - further contributing to negative stereotyping and placing greater pressures on existing services and amenities. The City acknowledges that highly complex social needs require a whole-of-community response to support people to find suitable solutions. The leadership role of the Department of Communities is integral to the City's ability to provide support in the space of homelessness and rough sleeping. The recent creation of the Office of Homelessness is a favourable move but there will need to be continued building in scope and capacity to provide the adequate regional coordination and strategic direction to successfully implement the commitments made in the State Government's 10-year strategy on homelessness.

### ***Case Study: Moore St Accredited Services Site in the Public Realm.***

The City engaged 25 service providers in an accreditation process to operate from a designated inner-city site. This allowed for greater coordination of service delivery including the provision of food and refreshments, personal hygiene and laundry, health and medical services and street-based outreach. This has ensured a considered and coordinated approach to service delivery, with no overlaps in service. It ensured, too, efficiency with the greatest impact and exposed existing gaps within service and needs.

#### ***Reporting Period: February 2020 – February 2021***

No. of Service Providers	No. of Service Hours	No. of Instances of Support Provided	No. of instances of unmet need
25	5874	30,590	624

The Rough Sleeper Plan includes the following initiatives:

- Accreditation Process of Homeless Services in the Public Realm;
- Accreditation Process of Homeless Services in the Inner-City Working Group;
- Rough Sleeper Advisory Committee;
- Safe Spaces in the Inner-city Working Group;
- Safe Night Space (Women’s Only) two-year trial;
- Assertive Outreach (Cultural);
- Point-in-Time street count;
- Homeless Services in the Inner-City Brochure;
- Minor funding and in-kind support;
- Homeless Connect evaluation;
- By Name List – contribution of funding towards the establishment of the By Name List.

The City has also made significant financial contributions to meet the outcomes in the *Rough Sleeper Plan*, as outlined below, not including staff and other on-costs.

Project	2020/21 Expenditure (Ex GST)	2021/22 Budget (Ex GST)	2021/22 Expenditure YTD (Ex GST) *as at January 31, 2022
Safe Night Space for Women	\$911,699	\$1,286,964	\$883,754
Safe Night Shelter for Men	\$12,565	\$210,933	\$210,993
Cultural Outreach	\$108,887	\$292,302	\$78,926
Accredited Homelessness Services Site	\$117,751	\$280,000	\$77,266
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,150,902</b>	<b>\$2,070,199</b>	<b>\$1,250,939</b>

## TERMS OF REFERENCE ADDRESSED

### *The current funding and delivery of services*

Funding distribution for homelessness services needs to be concentrated to areas of the highest levels of rough sleeping, to better support targeted intervention. In September 2020, a \$1.5 billion City Deal partnership between the Federal and State governments and the City was announced, with \$34 million invested towards the provision of facilities, safety improvements and services for people experiencing homelessness. The City committed \$3 million towards the deal, to help fund urgent interim initiatives, as outlined in the Rough Sleeper Plan and presented above. These were intended as temporary measures, ahead of long-term sustainable outcomes being met by the State Government.

#### ***Case Study: Safe Night Space***

The City of Perth identified a 'gap' in inner city crisis accommodation and responded by extending its scope of responsibility to meet the need. The Safe Night Space (Women's Shelter) - funded by the City of Perth and managed by RUAH began on May 31, 2021 - and the Safe Night Shelter (Citiplace, Men's Shelter) - managed by St Barts for a two-month trial period – demonstrate a collaborative approach to low-barrier temporary crisis accommodation.

	Citiplace Men's Safe Shelter	Women's Safe Night Space
No. of Nights of Operation	60	244
Est. No. of Individuals Assisted	65	767
No. of Instances of Support	341	2648

While the City has committed to implementing, monitoring and evaluating its homelessness initiatives, the piecemeal approach of State Government grant allocations can impede service longevity. The City supports the State Government providing funding to Local Government that allows contribution to established or evidenced-based initiatives, rather than prioritising short-term pilot programs - as was the case with the recent Local Government Partnership funds. Additionally, the timing of State Government funding opportunities may not always align with Local Government budgetary cycles, meaning that the City may be unable to find money quickly to match the allocation, as required. The City calls for a more strategic and considered approach to State Government funding allocations, to enable the greatest impact from outcomes.

#### **Recommendations:**

- i. Funding distribution for homeless services be concentrated to areas of the highest levels of rough sleeping to support targeted intervention;
- ii. Timing of State Government funding allocations to better align to budgetary and expenditure periods for Local Government and non-government organisations;
- iii. Continuity and longevity of service provision through the on-going funding of evidenced-based programs that work;

- iv. A review of State Government procurement processes to better support the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation's (ACCO) success in tender processing to deliver for Aboriginal homeless;
- v. A review of the State Government Service Delivery Design, and accompanying procurement process, to ensure culturally safe service provision informed by the Aboriginal community;
- vi. A review of the metropolitan funding models for homeless services to support Aboriginal organisations to lead delivery of homelessness services, particularly for Aboriginal people;
- vii. State Government transparency on the funding contribution and strategic plan across departments which contribute to supporting the homeless.

***All Paths Lead to a Home, Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030***

The City has serious concern that the State Government's WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030 (contained within the All Paths Lead to a Home strategy) - to create 260 new social homes per year - will not meet the current demand of 39,200 social housing homes<sup>iii</sup> within a realistic timeframe. As of August 2021, there was an estimated average two-year wait for social housing, while priority housing had 3,548 families waiting approximately 43 weeks<sup>iv</sup>. However, anecdotal information suggests that those figures severely underestimate the wait-times and, in many instances, have now doubled. Public housing waitlists are upwards of five years. These figures are set to increase in coming years, with estimates that the need for social housing will reach 118,400 houses by 2036<sup>v</sup>. While the State Government promotes the development of social housing properties<sup>vi vii</sup> - as well as inner-city crisis care<sup>viii</sup> - the overall net social housing continues to reduce and has fallen well below 2016-2017 levels<sup>ix</sup>.

These figures are especially significant in the wake of the 2021 ending of the COVID-19 moratorium on rent increases and evictions, which has further contributed to housing stress and increased the in-flow of people into homelessness.

The City urges the State to expedite the development of new social housing properties and the maintenance of existing stock. It would also be beneficial to review the process of re-leasing public housing properties following the completion of tenancies, to allow for faster turnaround in properties becoming available - rather than remaining empty - while waitlists grow. The City further urges the State to increase its development commitment and to consider providing increased incentives to landlords to commit to private rentals as part of Housing First Initiatives.

Furthermore, to realise their full capacity, Boorloo Bidi Mia and other similar intended services - such as the East Perth and Mandurah Common Ground initiatives - will need full inter-departmental co-ordination and collaboration to assist in providing wraparound services to address the complex psychosocial factors that contribute to social housing needs.

Low-barrier accommodation needs to be distributed across the metropolitan region, rather than being concentrated in the State's capital. This approach would reduce the in-flow of people seeking CBD accommodation and allow for metropolitan-based specialist homelessness service providers to continue to support people, in-situ.

The City welcomes the development of the State Government's Office of Homelessness and the Department of Communities' HEART team and supports a more coordinated responsive approach. However, as yet, the scope and capacity of both remains unclear. The City urges the State to ensure full transparency and accountability, with transparent performance indicators at the forefront of operations to ensure the greatest benefit.

**Recommendations:**

- i. Expedite the development of new social housing to meet immediate housing demands and support people to move through the housing continuum;
- ii. Expedite alternative crisis and transitional accommodation options to immediately provide shelter as a priority;
- iii. Establish an Aboriginal-operated short-stay accommodation venue in the City, supporting people to access specialist medical appointments and receive continued accommodation between those appointments, when needed;
- iv. Expedite the development of the City's short-stay accommodation, in recognition of the urgent need for those forced to sleep rough while receiving medical care;
- v. Greater clarity and definition of the roles and responsibilities of government bodies and in defining funding allocations for social housing, homeless services and affordable housing options, through separate strategies;
- vi. Increased transparency and timely reporting on the outcomes achieved by the State Government against the commitments made in the strategy.

### ***Existing data systems and how data informs service delivery***

Currently, there is no clear measurement or articulation of what success looks like in the homelessness space. The City calls for more State Government (Department of Communities) accountability to service providers. Despite investing heavily on service delivery and support, data gathered from City initiatives demonstrates an incremental increase in the number of people in need - resulting in increased pressure on local government, housing and homelessness service providers.

The causes of this are complex, however can be attributed to pre-existing structural, systemic and personal factors. This has been further compounded by the on-going effects of COVID-19 on the private housing market, increasing pressure on specialist homelessness service providers and disrupting the daily operations of homelessness service providers<sup>x</sup>. The cumulative effects of these systemic inefficiencies are being experienced by the community's most vulnerable populations, and the agencies tasked with supporting them.

To better understand the need, the City organised a series of Point-in-Time street counts to provide a snapshot of homelessness and rough sleeping in Perth. The March 2021 count found that there were estimated to be more than 440 individuals rough sleeping within City boundaries at the time. This data informed the development of the Rough Sleeper Plan and identified the scale of support required - including that offered at the Moore Street Accredited Site, the Safe Night Space for Women and the Men's Safe Night Space.

It was soon identified that street counts were ineffective in providing an accurate reflection of homelessness in the City. In turn, the City supported the development of the By-Name List, which provides real-time data to service providers of people experiencing homelessness.

Another significant gap pinpointed in the data system is a lack of a co-ordinated response between the different points of engagement. This occurs at initial engagement with either police, SafeCity Rangers or Cultural Outreach workers who do not have access to real-time bed availability for inner city crisis and accommodation services.

An online database that is accessible to all service providers - and which can provide real-time accommodation availability and service information - would support this transition from street to bed. To further support this, there needs to be a significant increase in the number of police and rangers who are adequately trained to provide a welfare response. It is recognised that the Police Mental Health Co-Response Teams is effective, however it is poorly resourced to provide adequate services across the Metropolitan area and broader State.

The City has continued its advocacy role, while implementing its operational plans through delivery of the following services:

- Accreditation of Homeless Services in the Public Realm at Moore Street. The accreditation site provides access to inner city resources and services. During the 12-month trial, 25 accredited service providers delivered 5874 service delivery hours - resulting in 30,590 instances of support;
- Leveraging of City assets through the delivery of the Safe Night Space for Women, in partnership with RUAH, to provide safe temporary crisis shelter. From 31 May 2021 to 15 December 2021 the centre provided 2536 instances of support to 717 women;
- Leveraging of City assets through the delivery of the Safe Night Shelter for Men. A two-month trial delivered 341 instances of support to 65 people.

**Recommendations:**

- i. Clear and transparent communication on the availability of social housing, crisis and transitional accommodation - available in real-time;
- ii. Clear and transparent referral pathways to access this accommodation and the appropriate supports;
- iii. A coordinated approach to managing and communicating the 'real-time' availability of beds each day for service provider referrals;
- iv. Local Government be consulted, engaged and involved in all State Government decisions relating to homeless services which impact at a local level;
- v. Yearly, consolidated State Government homelessness reports and evaluations which include outcomes across departments, as well as achieved target outcomes.

### ***Any other related matter***

The City commits to providing community awareness and understanding of the various roles and responsibilities of Federal, State and Local government service providers in delivering homelessness services, and to providing clear referral and reporting pathways to members of the community when they identify a rough sleeper in need of support services.

There is continued need for an urgent review of the effectiveness and accessibility of the Patient Assisted Transport Scheme (PATS). As yet, there has been minimal response to a 2015 inquiry<sup>xi</sup>, which recommended fundamental changes to accommodation and transport subsidies. In the past two decades, the Western Australian health system has become more centralised, with regional services being reduced and tertiary level medical care provided in the city. This has increased the need for transport and accommodation services in the CBD. The current PAT Scheme does not adequately meet this need, due to the location of accommodation services outside the CBD and the lack of cultural sensitivity and case management required to support predominantly Aboriginal people accessing this service.

Consequently, vulnerable people continue to be impacted by the on-going inadequacies and are being left stranded in the City. This is having a direct impact on the increasing number of rough sleepers and homeless within the City boundaries and neighbouring Local Government Authorities (LGAs). The increase is placing more demand on City safety and amenities staff, as they respond to growing public safety concerns in identified hotspots.

A review of the current Council of Capital City Lord Mayors' (CCCLM) National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review suggests this concern is shared broadly, as vulnerable people transported from regional areas are left unsupported. Currently, individual agencies are under-resourced to provide adequate support and assistance for regional travel. This requires a coordinated State Government response across expansive geographical regions.

### **Recommendations:**

- i. The State Government communicate the implementation of the recommendations from the findings of the PATS Inquiry since 2015;
- ii. The State Government provide pathways and strategic direction for the continued improvements to the PATS, in recognition of its failure to those who need to travel to the CBD from regional areas for medical appointments;
- iii. The State Government provide timeframes for future improvements to PATS and the interim measures to ensure people accessing specialist services have access to safe and affordable accommodation and affordable transport;
- iv. Assign individual case workers to manage PATS travel, accommodation and obligations to ensure patients arrive at all appointments on time and are supported to return home;
- v. PATS to be aware of the individual disabilities, needs and patient requirements and are suitably prepared to provide adequate support.

## CONCLUSION

Homelessness is a complex matter - impacted by social, cultural, political and economic factors - and no organisation is equipped to tackle the issue on its own. The City acknowledges its supporting role to the lead agencies of the Commonwealth and State governments. However, without working partnerships which harnesses a strategic, cohesive and united approach, the City fears that the provision of vital services to its community's most vulnerable will not be met. While the State continues to commit increased funds to the areas of social housing and homelessness, it is clear that the numbers of households in need - and those entering homelessness – are increasing significantly.

This places further pressure on other departments across human services – including health and justice. Significant savings across the sector may be able to be diverted, through the provision of suitable housing<sup>xii</sup>.

This highly complex societal issue will require a whole-of-government approach to mitigate the risks and reduce these numbers, in a reasonable timeframe. At the current rate of development, this timeframe extends well into the distant future. Additionally, the intended improvement and efficiency of outcomes that were anticipated through the Labor State Government's Machinery of Government (MOG) changes of 2017 have yet to filter down to WA's most vulnerable, who have been hit hardest by the restructuring and consolidation of departments. Staff reductions have resulted in continued failure to create any significant change.

Therefore, it is prudent that the State consider its role as a leader in providing a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to the management of service provision across the region. This includes increasing its commitments to fully resource existing and anticipated initiatives, improving development outcomes and expected timelines, remaining accountable against its commitments and ensuring ongoing improvement within the sector.

The City submits that all of these measures are necessary to bring about meaningful results and change now, and into the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Parkinson, S., Batterham, D., Reynolds, M., and Wood, G. (2019). *The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016. Final Report No. 313*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited: Melbourne.

<sup>ii</sup> Spinney, A., et. al. (2020). *Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system. Final Report no. 347*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited: Melbourne.

<sup>iii</sup> ShelterWA. (2021). *Planning Reform Phase 2. Submission to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. 2021-Planning-reform-submissionFINAL.pdf (shelterwa.org.au)*

<sup>iv</sup> ShelterWA. (2021). Social Housing. [Social Housing - Shelter WA](#)

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<sup>v</sup> ShelterWA. (2020). State Budget Submission: Housing Our Community. [Pre-budget-submission-Shelter-WA-2020.pdf \(shelterwa.org.au\)](#)

<sup>vi</sup> Glossop, A. (2021). Innaloo social housing complex unveiled. [Innaloo social housing complex unveiled | The Property Tribune](#)

<sup>vii</sup> "First Perth projects complete in \$319 million social housing package." *Premium Official News*, 18 Dec. 2020, p. NA. *Gale OneFile*:

*News*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A645987793/STND?u=griffith&sid=summon&xid=23ca184f. Accessed 7 Mar. 2022.

<sup>viii</sup> Govt. of Western Australia. (2021). [Media Statements - Boorloo Bidee Mia homelessness service opens in Perth CBD](#)

<sup>ix</sup> ShelterWA. (2021). Social Housing. [Social Housing - Shelter WA](#)

<sup>x</sup> AIHW. (2021) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020-2021*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21, Policy framework - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>xi</sup> Legislative Council of Western Australia. (2015). *Standing Committee on Public Administration. Report on the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme in Western Australia*. [pc.pat.150609.rpf.025.xx.pdf \(parliament.wa.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>xii</sup> Berry, M., Chamberlain, C., Dalton, T., Horn, M., and Berman, G. (2003) *Counting the Cost of Homelessness: A Systematic Review of Cost Effectiveness and cost Benefit Studies of Homelessness*. [Counting the cost of homelessness: A systematic review of cost effectiveness and cost benefit studies of homelessness \(ahuri.edu.au\)](#)