

Executive Summary

11.1 Homelessness in Frankston

Enquiries: (Liz Daley: Community Development)

Council Plan

Community Outcome:	2. Liveable City
Strategy:	2.4 Improve the health and wellbeing of residents
Priority Action	2.4.1 Adopt a four year Health and Wellbeing Plan that also encompasses awareness of a diverse society

Purpose

To brief Council on gaps in Frankston's service system for ensuring homeless people have access to accommodation, opportunities to improve the service system and what advocacy should be undertaken.

Recommendation (Director Community Development)

That Council:

1. Approves, subject to external organisations achieving funding and Council facilitation support only, a 12 month pilot to establish 3 'Magpie Nest' model houses in Frankston.
2. Subject to Council approval of the project, a report be presented to Council at the conclusion of the twelve months outlining the results.
3. Approves officers to commence discussions with Wintringham regarding how existing Council services can support their model in Frankston at no additional cost to Council.
4. Develop and implement an advocacy platform regarding homelessness
5. Approves work to develop a Rooming House Strategy and Regulatory Practice Guidelines.

Key Points / Issues

- At Ordinary Meeting 264 on December 1 2014, Council accepted that the matter of homelessness in Frankston be considered as Urgent Business. Council unanimously carried the following Notice of Motion.

That Council prepare a report on "Homelessness in Frankston" by the March 2015 meeting. The report should consider:

1. *The gaps in Frankston's service system for ensuring homeless people have access to accommodation.*
 2. *Opportunities to improve the service system and what advocacy should be undertaken.*
- The Frankston homeless population is diverse including single men; older people; women; families and young people. Contributing factors to homelessness can be equally varied, including inadequate housing stock and housing affordability; domestic violence; mental illness; loss of income; and alcohol and drug addiction. Diverse solutions appropriate to gender, age and situation are required.

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- Under-investment by Federal and State Government has been identified as contributing to a growth in rooming houses; inadequate housing supply and service gaps. Council's role is to advocate for local unmet needs and facilitate appropriate local responses. In the rooming house sector, Council receives reports of anti-social behaviours impacting residents and neighbours but has limited enforcement power under the Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.
- Salvation Army's Magpie Nest; Wintringham model of aged care; a Rooming House Strategy and an advocacy campaign are identified as potential roles Council can take to contribute to homelessness solutions.

Financial Impact

It is noted that the State Government has indicated the Council rate increase will be capped at or about CPI from the 2016/2017 financial year. Over a five year period this will reduce Council's revenue by a cumulative amount of approximately \$22 million. This will have a severe impact on Council's ability to maintain services, deliver key initiatives and improvements and maintain adequate levels of capital expenditure.

Magpie Nest: Costs for this program will be sourced externally. Case management costs for 12 month trial are \$115,105 (assuming July 2015 commencement) and \$176,414 for 18 month trial. Pending Council endorsement, discussions with community groups who have an interest in supporting an accommodation project for the homeless community will commence. Any additional costs will similarly be sought from external sources.

Wintringham: Funding requirements are not yet fully understood for establishing Wintringham model in Frankston; however Wintringham has secured philanthropic and government investment at other sites.

Advocacy: There are no costs associated with pursuing an advocacy campaign.

Consultation**1. External Stakeholders**

Preliminary consultation has been conducted with CityLife: RDNS Homeless Persons Project; Community Support Frankston; Neami; Peninsula Health Community Health; WAYSS; Centrelink; Salvation Army Melbourne Project 614, SalvoCare Eastern, Wintringham and other support services that work directly with homeless people.

2. Other Stakeholders

Internal stakeholder consulted to date include: Councillors, Director Community Development, Community Strengthening, Family and Youth, Community Safety, Planning and Environment, Financial Services and Active Aging and Disability Services.

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It is envisaged that the recommendations in this report will have meaningful positive social implications for Frankston's homeless community. Housing is identified as a "basic need", and is necessary to ensure that individuals have the stability required to successfully achieve positive outcomes. Health and wellbeing, economic participation and positive social inclusion are all contingent on stable housing. Research shows that homelessness leads to mental illness, entrenching homelessness and requiring yet greater supports to be available¹.

Legal / Policy / Council Plan ImpactCharter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

All matters relevant to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities have been considered in the preparation of this report and are consistent with the standards set by the Charter.

Legal

The recommendations in this report are consistent with Council's legislated responsibilities. The Local Government Act (1989) Victoria provides that the functions of a Council include:

- (a) advocating and promoting proposals which are in the best interests of the local community;
- (b) planning for and providing services and facilities for the local community;

Policy Impacts

This report is consistent with the Frankston Housing Strategy. Particularly, it seeks to fulfil aims of the strategy relating to diversity and affordability.

Officer's Declaration of Interests

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no Conflict of Interest in this matter.

Risk Mitigation

Options detailed in this report seek to deliver service system improvements through appropriately trained staff in relevant third party agencies. Existing standard operating procedures are robust and effective enough to ensure that risk is managed to within acceptable levels.

Conclusion

There are significant service system gaps in the provision of housing for some of the City's most vulnerable residents that is predominantly attributed by inadequate State and Federal Government investment. Council can bridge the gap through facilitating partnerships, advocating for direct investment, as well as policy and legislative reform. Local housing agencies are skilled in direct service provision to homeless populations and have expressed interest in working with Council to address gaps.

¹ Johnson and Chamberlain, 'Are the Homeless Mentally Ill?', 2011

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ATTACHMENTS

Nil

11.1 Homelessness in Frankston Officers' Assessment

Background

Homelessness is a significant problem in the Frankston municipality and agencies indicate that the problem is growing. The local 'front-door' emergency housing agency, SalvoCare Eastern (SCE) reported 2,200 unique clients in the 2012-13 financial year and an additional 600 repeat clients. This equates to approximately 1 in every 65 members of our community requiring emergency accommodation in any given year. Agencies report that 83% of local homeless people are aged 26-55. 64% are male. Since 2012-2013, SCE have reported an increase in demand for their service. In 2014 one major provider of emergency relief reported a 30% increase in clients with no fixed address this year.

The Frankston area has one of the highest proportions of rough sleepers (those without shelter) in Melbourne². However, while highly visible, rough sleepers account for just 11% of local homelessness³. The vast majority of Frankston's homeless population lives in rooming houses, temporary shelters or with friends and relatives, a situation known as couch surfing. These forms of accommodation are considered to fail to meet minimum community standards, and are not typically safe, stable or comfortable enough to allow residents to fully participate in the community. Such lodgings typically lack the stability that affords residents the opportunity to address the causes of their homelessness and successfully access appropriate health support, re-enter or retain a position in the workforce or acquire suitable housing. Similar or identical supports are required for those in these living situations and rough sleepers. As such, while not 'roofless' these populations are still homeless in many respects. This assertion is supported by the following dominant definition by 'Mackenzie and Chamberlain' of homelessness ascribed to by the sector and most organisations.

- **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation (living in the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks, etc);
- **Secondary homelessness:** people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses (also known as rooming houses); and
- **Tertiary homelessness:** people living in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure.⁴

Issues and Discussion

Homelessness is a complex issue influenced by such varied factors as housing supply, family breakdown, health concerns, community resilience, economic conditions and childhood development, to name but a few important relevant factors. Family violence is a major cause of homelessness for women and children. It is important to recognise that these factors are complex and diverse, and accordingly so are the needs of homeless people. Different approaches to alleviate homelessness for different gender, age and situation is crucial.

Traditionally, the federal government has funded public housing in Australia, while the states have planned, provided and managed it. The two jurisdictions have shared responsibility for funding homelessness programs around health and/or social support. As governments move away from direct provision and toward funding for third party providers, the role of planner has been largely vacated. Given the place based nature of disadvantage, it is crucial that place based planning should occur if housing and homelessness issues are to be resolved.

² ABS, estimating homelessness, 2006

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

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Officers' Assessment

There is a heavy reliance on the not for profit sector to provide support for homeless citizens. Locally, SalvoCare Eastern is funded to work with homeless people to locate emergency accommodation but the funding does not extend to proactive services for those at risk of homelessness. In addition most homelessness agencies are funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness which expires in June 2015. Negotiations on a new partnership agreement are yet to commence, despite a new agreement having been due to commence in June 2013. Successive renewals of the previous agreement cut funding, while the insecurity of funding for services threatens their ability to serve our community over the longer term.

Community groups such as Frankston Churches Community Breakfast and CityLife rely on community and philanthropic support to deliver vital food and social services. A relatively new local service, the Frankston Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS) - Homeless Persons Program has a three year funding commitment by the Gandel Foundation until mid-2016. RDNS has quickly proved to be an essential health service supporting chronic needs arising from insecure housing and sleeping rough. Continued funding of this service will ensure healthcare for people who otherwise would not access such a service and should be included as part of Council's advocacy campaign regarding homelessness sector funding.

Community Support Frankston provides essential emergency relief to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Recently they have learnt their funding will be reduced by \$100K per annum over the next 2 years for emergency relief. This represents more than 25% of their budget and will impact on staffing and service levels; ultimately further disadvantaging vulnerable citizens. The insecurity of funding for services threatens their ability to serve our community over the longer term.

Local government has a complex role in relation to housing affordability and homelessness. Council has responsibilities in the planning and regulation of housing; in fostering housing supply; and working with community service organisations involved in health and wellbeing, including homelessness. Some local governments have initiated not for profit housing agencies, allowing them to secure substantial public funding. Brisbane City Council's investment of \$18.1 M over almost 15 years has been matched by \$214 M in state and federal grants. The *Local Government Act (1989) Victoria* provides that the functions of a Council include:

- (a) advocating and promoting proposals which are in the best interests of the local community;
- (b) planning for and providing services and facilities for the local community.

This provides the impetus for Council to apply pressure on State and Federal Government to invest in the Frankston community to alleviate homelessness through adequate funding and support to community groups as well as to facilitate collaborative partnerships and consider if there are service delivery opportunities to bridge current gaps. An advocacy strategy and two models, Magpie Nest and Wintringham are presented as successfully operating elsewhere that, duplicated locally, may provide some relief for the homeless community.

Model 1: Magpie Nest Model of Housing

Magpie's Nest is a rehousing initiative currently operated in Melbourne's northern suburbs by the Salvation Army, with support from the Collingwood Football Club. Dedicated to providing high quality accommodation to homeless people, Magpie's Nest is notable for the inherent challenge it creates for rooming house operators; to operate high quality services or to be prepared for others to challenge them in the market.

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Through Magpie's Nest, rental properties are leased through the private market for the program for 3 tenants who are thoroughly assessed as compatible and pay rents that are comparable to rooming house prices. Residents are then provided with support services that they would normally receive in a traditional homelessness facility such as Hanover. No damage has been done by tenants or guests to Magpie's Nest properties.

As the major sponsor, Collingwood Football Club guarantees to real estate agents that rents will be met by the club should tenants lapse in payment, and provide the bond. Collingwood Football Club further supports the program by seeking support for residents from secondary corporate sponsors; for example, Collingwood Football Club successfully sought sponsorship for provision of white goods and dental care for Magpie's Nest residents through existing corporate sponsors.

The program is run and administered by The Salvation Army. Of crucial importance to the program is the high level of support for residents, including psychological assessment, and care plans administered by case workers. Starting with 2 houses in 2013, Magpie's Nest now has 29 houses. It is envisaged that by the end of 2015, Magpie's Nest will operate 100 houses in Melbourne's North, placing significant pressure on rooming house operators failing to meet the program's high standards.

Opportunity for Frankston

There is good local support for the Magpie's Nest model, with SalvoCare Eastern indicating that they would welcome a joint venture with Frankston City Council. The Frankston model will take people sleeping rough on the streets and in unsafe rooming houses and provide them with quality safe accommodation, reduced rents, wrap-around case model support with links to mental health services, drug and alcohol services, legal, employment and training assistance. This model aims to demonstrate that, given the opportunity to enter the rental market and with the right support, homeless people can create a home, build lives for themselves and their communities and improve their health and wellbeing. In the first twelve months, a collaborative model with support agencies could include:

- 3 houses to be rented accommodating 3 men in each aged 30-60 years
- Houses to be fully furnished; close to public transport with large rooms especially the kitchen area
- The model will provide one full time case manager employed by SCE to assist in addressing the immediate housing needs of participants and further develop supports for participants to develop skills for the long term
- Referrals to come through SalvoCare Eastern Crisis Centre Frankston (SCE) or through support partners. The initial intake and assessment would be undertaken by a case manager and mental health worker. From this assessment a support plan will be developed and participants will be required to actively engage this support plan.
- Mental health services would provide clinical support (required at intake and assessment and longer term)
- SCE case manager would actively work with participants to:
 - Provide linkages to support services as required focusing on mental health and education, employment and training
 - Actively engage participants in their support plan
 - Provide participants with the skill set required to maintain their tenancy
 - Work with participants to secure their own rental property during the course of their magpie nest tenancy. Participants to be involved in every part of the tenancy process from house-hunting and preparing rent applications, to liaising with real estate agents.
 - Enable opportunities for increased social inclusion within the community.
- After hours phone support provided to tenants from identified agencies (Hanover; Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team; Police ; PACER - joint Police/Mental Health Teams)

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- A Reference Group would be established to oversee the Model; implement protocols; provide easy referral pathways and review progress.

We have been advised Frankston Rotary Sunrise have an interest in supporting an accommodation project for the homeless community. If Council indicates support for the Magpie Nest concept discussion with Frankston Rotary Sunrise to explore their interest in assisting with the project could occur.

Model 2: Wintringham Aged Housing

Wintringham Housing is a not for profit housing agency dedicated to providing high quality, affordable, group accommodation for older people (aged 50 years and over) who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. Wintringham is one of Victoria's most lauded registered housing associations. Wintringham is particularly notable in two aspects of its model; the quality of its housing, and the breadth of support available to its residents. Wintringham residences are notable for their high quality aesthetic, based on the belief that the physical environment shapes residents' behaviour and self-image. A high level of service provision allows Wintringham houses to become homes for life. Wintringham tenancies are funded largely by the Commonwealth Government as an aged care service eligible to those aged 50 and older, provided that they have previously been homeless or at risk of homelessness. Philanthropic and government support is required for capital costs.

Opportunity for Frankston

Wintringham Aged Housing has shown interest in Frankston. Wintringham has proven their model aesthetically enhances neighbourhood amenity and provides crucial support for the social, health and welfare needs of vulnerable community members in unstable housing aged 50 years and above. This model would fill an unmet need in Frankston and there is a potential site that needs to be considered with Councillors through a commercial in confidence process.

Advocacy Strategy:

While Council may work with community partners in seeking to achieve the above aims for Frankston's homeless community, it is critical that State and Federal Governments commit to supporting Frankston's homeless community in areas where they retain jurisdiction. Council's advocacy can consider three core areas of homelessness policy:

- Emergency Accommodation
- Homelessness Sector Service Funding
- Rooming Houses.

1. Emergency Accommodation

While a range of agencies provide support to homeless people in the local area, significant service gaps are evident. Local agencies indicated the greatest concern is lack of appropriate emergency housing. The Frankston municipality has no dedicated emergency housing, with the closest facility operating in Dandenong, over 20 kilometers away where there is strong competition for places. It is crucial that emergency accommodation is suitable for the needs of the demographic cohorts to which it caters. Emergency accommodation is needed for:

- Women and children escaping domestic violence; and
- Secure 24/7 general crisis accommodation facility similar to Hanover Dandenong.

2. Homelessness Sector Service Funding

Improved certainty around homelessness funding would allow for improved service planning for agencies. Currently crucial services either do not have recurrent funding or are experiencing funding reductions. As well, community groups providing food and emergency relief depend on fundraising and donations. Negotiations on a new partnership agreement for homelessness agencies funded under the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* that expires in June 2015 are yet to commence.

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Officers' Assessment****3. Rooming Houses:**

Within the local area the emergency accommodation need is met largely by rooming houses; some of which are poorly run. These can be extraordinarily volatile places that fail to provide stability for their vulnerable residents and often create significant concern for neighbours. Council has numerous legislative and regulatory mandates regarding rooming houses, focusing largely on their sanitarianess; built form; upkeep and fire safety. Many rooming houses are unsanitary, and some are located in unsound buildings. Residents often have complex behaviours, negatively affecting the safety of other residents and the amenity of neighbours. Council further works to address these concerns. These diverse responsibilities sit across a range of Council departments. Greater consistency is required between these departments to ensure that work units complement each other, in line with Council's core values of Excellence, Accountability and Teamwork.

The legislative context for rooming houses is difficult and confusing can arise with numerous acts and definitions, which have given rise to misinterpretation and 'loophole opportunism'. While there is a definition of a rooming house in the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 which has been aligned to the definition of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, there is no definition in the Planning and Environment Act 1987 or the Victorian Planning Provisions. Council should complete a Rooming House Strategy and Regulatory Practice Paper to ensure procedures dealing with matters of planning, registration, regulation and prosecution are complementary and consistent as well as to inform Council's advocacy in this area.

Options Available including Financial Implications*Option 1:*

Accept all recommendations of this report

Option 2:

Accepts some recommendations of this report

Option 3:

Do not accept this report

The resource requirements associated with this report are not budgeted and are indicated below:

- **Magpies Model:** Costs for this program will be sourced externally. Case management costs for 12 month trial \$115,105 (assuming July 2015 commencement) and 18 month trial \$176,414. Pending Council endorsement, discussions with community groups who have an interest in supporting an accommodation project for the homeless community will commence. Any additional costs will similarly be sought from external sources.
- **Wintringham:** Funding requirements are not yet fully understood for establishing Wintringham model in Frankston; however Wintringham has secured philanthropic and government investment at other sites.
- **Advocacy:** There are no costs associated with pursuing an advocacy campaign and a Rooming House Strategy will be developed within existing staff resources.