

Homelessness Policy Review – Broad Community Engagement

1. Background

The Town of Victoria Park currently operates under *Policy 113 Homelessness – The Town’s Role*. Under this policy, the Town aims to partner with local homelessness service providers to connect people in need to services, resources and facilities that enhance their physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

In 2019 the Town formed a group with the Supporting People with Basic Needs network to review *Policy 113 Homelessness*. The collaborative group determined a broader policy focus was required, leading to a period of engagement with the Town’s internal service areas. Various ways in which the Town can contribute to reducing the impact of or ending homelessness in the community was collated during this period.

Over February 2020 the broader community was invited to take part in the Homelessness Policy review. The engagement included an online survey and community workshop, whereby the community provided their feedback on the draft policy principles as well as potential activities that may be undertaken by local governments around homelessness.

This report summarises the feedback received during the broad community engagement period.

2. Summary of feedback

Policy principles

Survey respondents and community workshop participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of proposed draft principles to guide the Homelessness Policy. The highest ranked principles included:

- A compassionate approach
- Access to public spaces / everyone’s needs are respected
- Right to housing / housing a basic human right
- Whole of community response
- No wrong door to accessing services

The role of the Town

Respondents and participants were asked to provide feedback on activities that may be undertaken by local governments in regards to homelessness. There was support around activities whereby local governments played the following roles:

- Advocacy to other levels of government
- Sharing or distributing information to the community
- Facilitating community organisations coming together
- Partnering with community organisations

- Employing an informed and respectful approach to working people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who connect with the Town

Further considerations

The engagement period revealed community assumptions requiring further consideration. In one survey question 7% of respondents connected homelessness to incidents of anti-social behaviour in their comments. In another question, 3% of respondents commented that homelessness is a personal choice and/or that people who are homeless do not want assistance. It is important that perceptions of safety are addressed by the Town, and that partnership initiatives with the Police are communicated to the community. However, the assumption that homeless people are 'criminals' or do not require support also needs attention. If left unaddressed, this assumption may harm the support local community organisations have in the community.

3. Communications

A variety of communication tactics were used to create awareness of and encourage broad participation in the Homelessness Policy Review engagement.

The following tools and tactics were used:

Tool or tactic	Reach
TV sliders at Town buildings and outstations	N/A
A6 postcards distributed at Town buildings and community locations	500 postcards distributed
Southern Gazette advertisement	N/A
VIBE e-newsletter	
Vic Park Biz News e-newsletter	
Your Thoughts monthly e-newsletter	2358 subscribers
Your Thoughts project update e-newsletter	2350 subscribers
Your Thoughts web page	1660 visits
Sounding Board email	133 subscribers
Community group email	112 recipients
Google ads	
Facebook ads	

4. Engagement

The following demographic information was collected:

Demographic information	Number of participants
Relationship to the Town (more than one can be chosen)	
Live in the Town	283
Work in the Town	37
Represent a business in the Town	28
Have lived experience of homelessness	20
Represent a community service located in the Town	15
Represent a community service located outside of the Town	8
Residential suburb (if live in the Town)	
East Victoria Park	146
Victoria Park	46
St James	21
Carlisle	20
Lathlain	18
Burswood	10
Other	2
Bentley/Curtin/Tech Park	1
Welshpool	0
Provide assistance to people who are homeless or to homelessness organisations (if business or community service)	
Community services	7
Businesses	5

The following engagement methods took place:

Method	Community participation
Community workshop	19
Online Your Thoughts survey	282
Hard copy survey	1

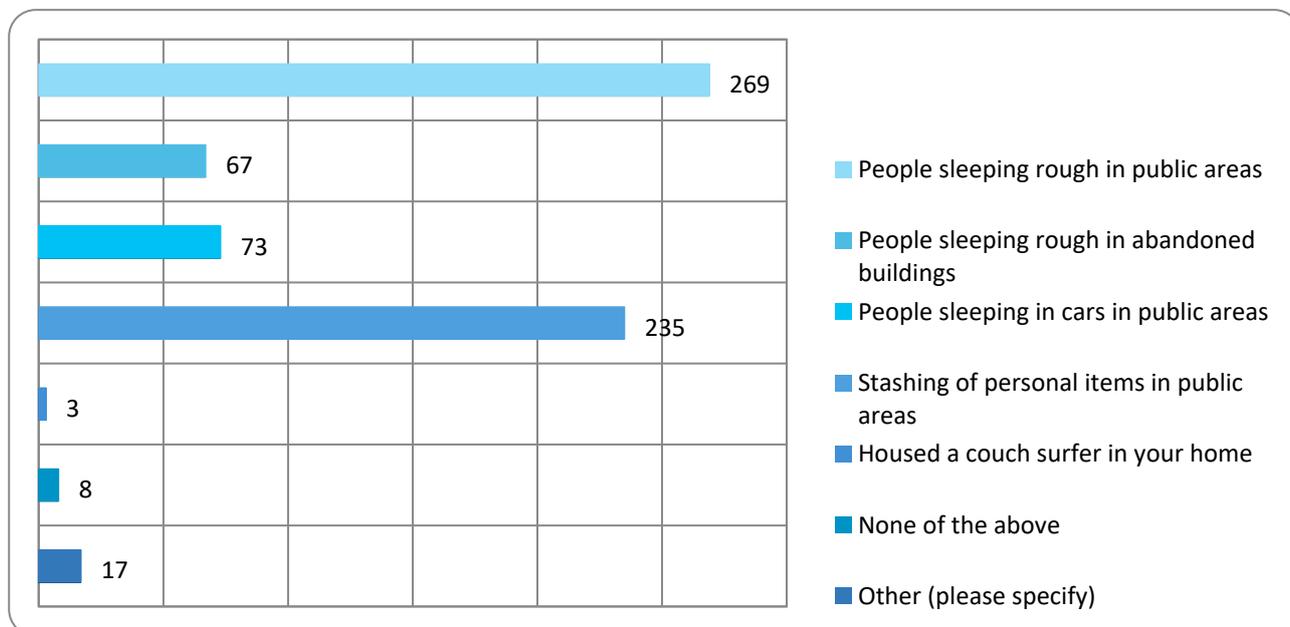
5. Next steps

The Town will collate all feedback received to finalise the review of *Policy 113 Homelessness – The Town’s Role* and develop the Homelessness Policy Implementation Plan.

6. Feedback provided

Experiences of homelessness

Survey participants were asked to indicate their experiences or what types of homeless behaviour they had witnessed in the Town over the last 12 months. More than one option could be chosen.



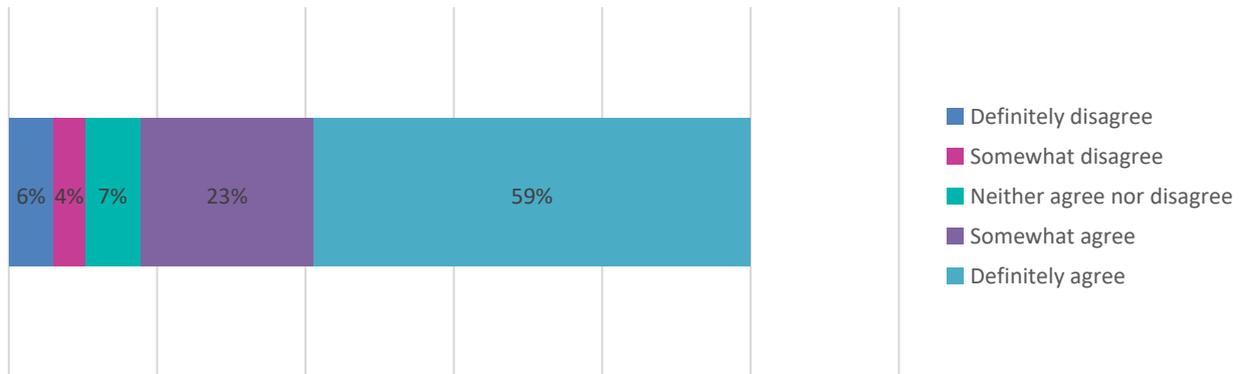
Of the 17 respondents who chose 'Other', six referred to begging and two referred to anti-social behaviour in their open answers.

Policy principles

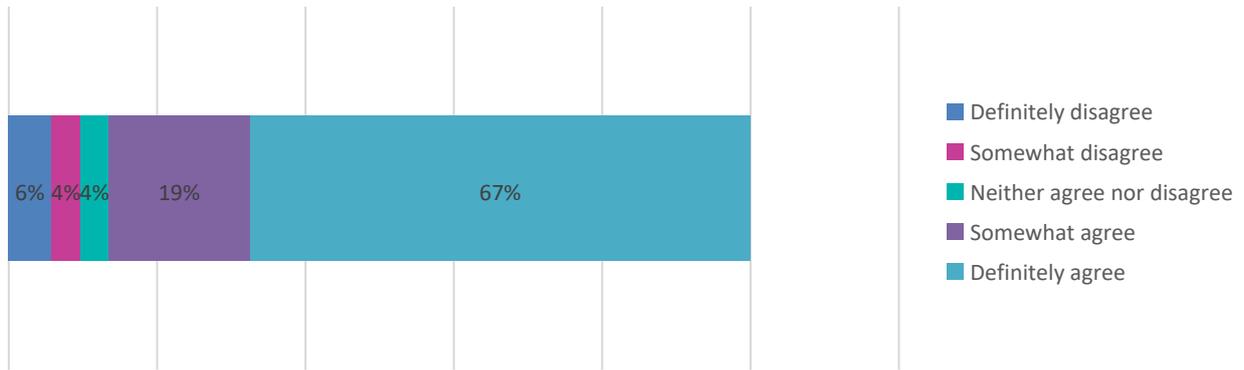
Feedback was requested from survey participants and workshop respondents on a number of proposed draft principles to guide the Homelessness Policy. Principles were contributed by the Supporting People with Basic Needs group, from the WA 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness and the Town's current policy.

Principles contributed through Service Provider Engagement:

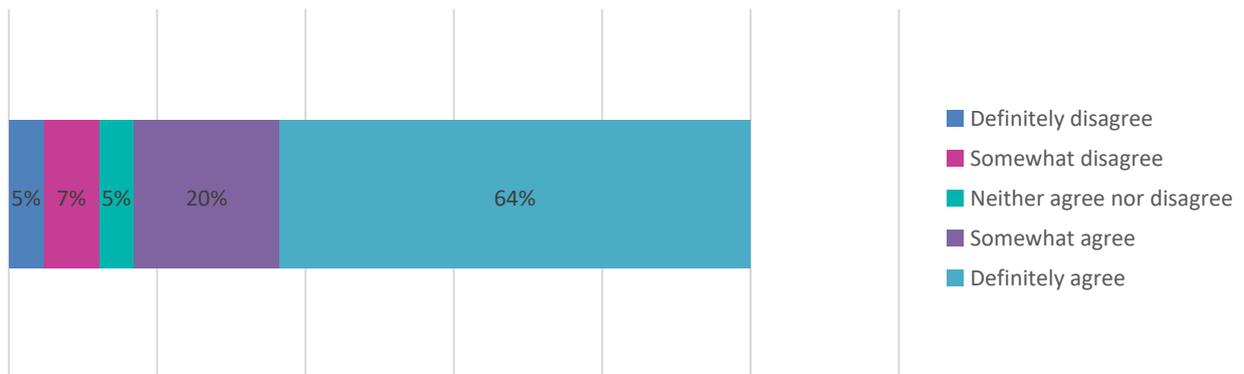
Right to participate in community activities and events



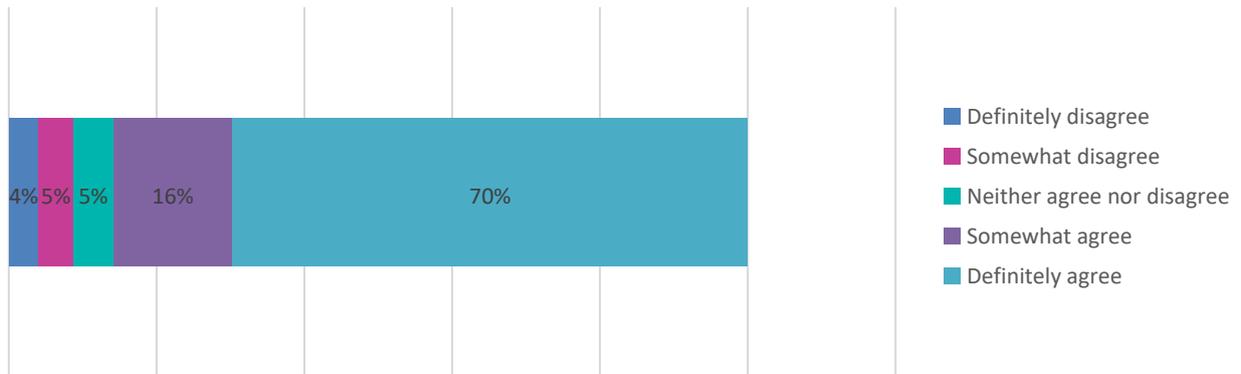
Right to housing / housing a basic human right



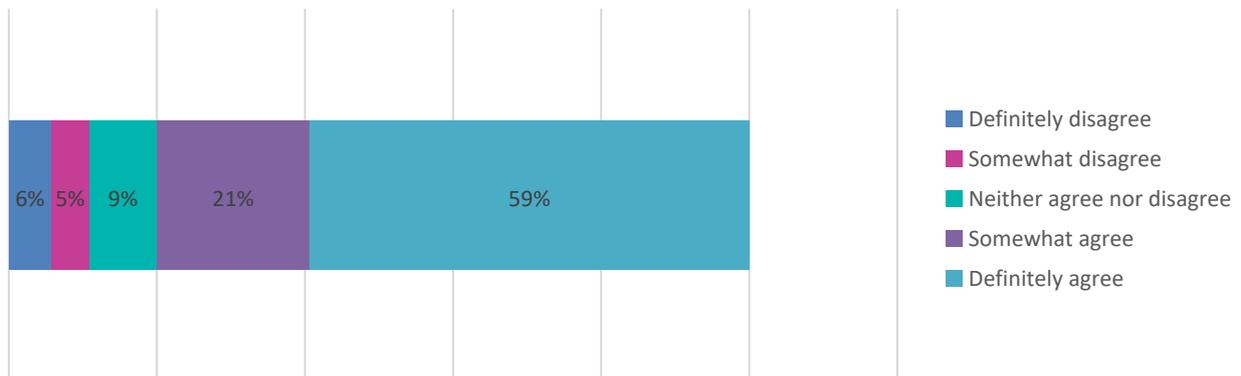
Support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups



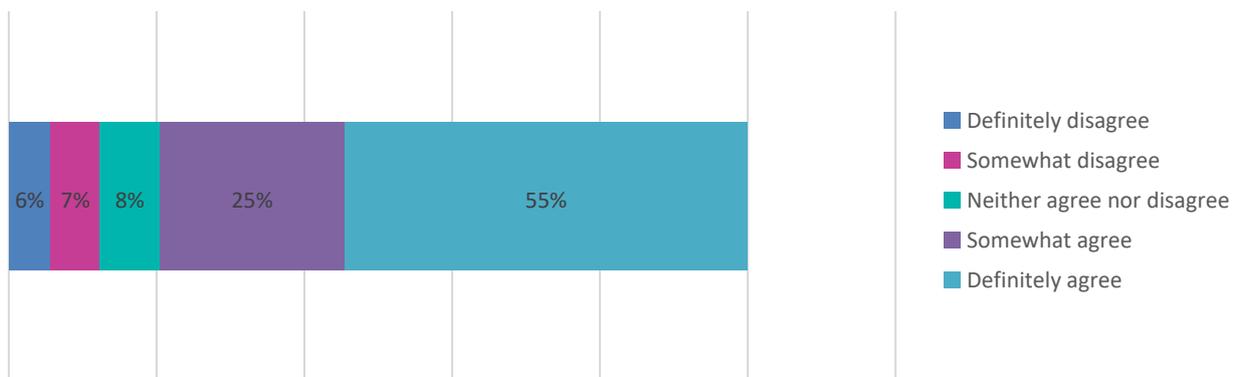
Access to public spaces / everyone's needs are respected



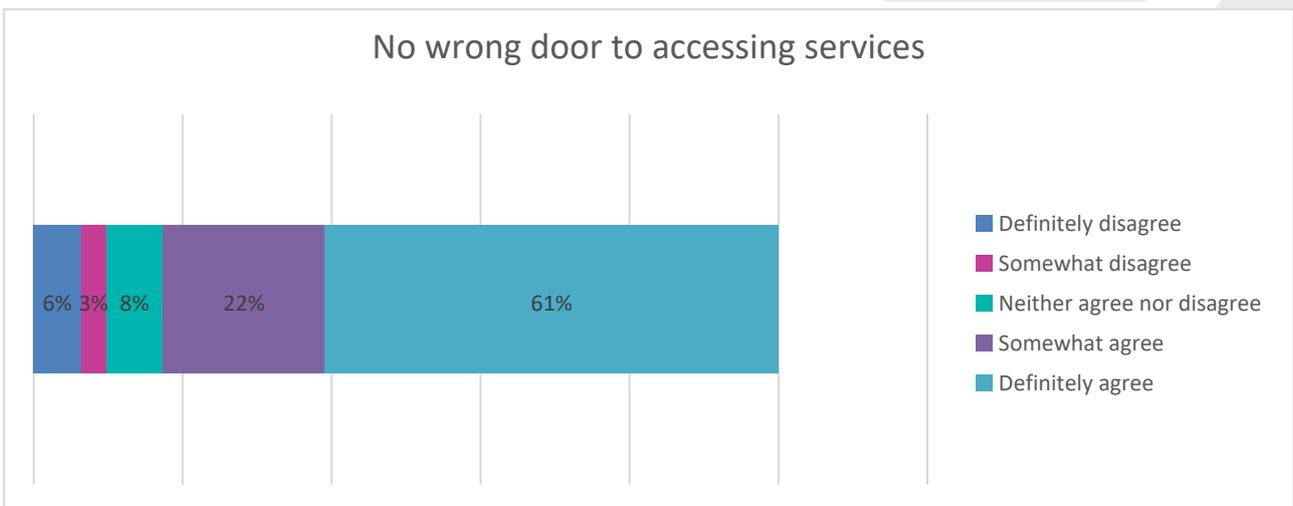
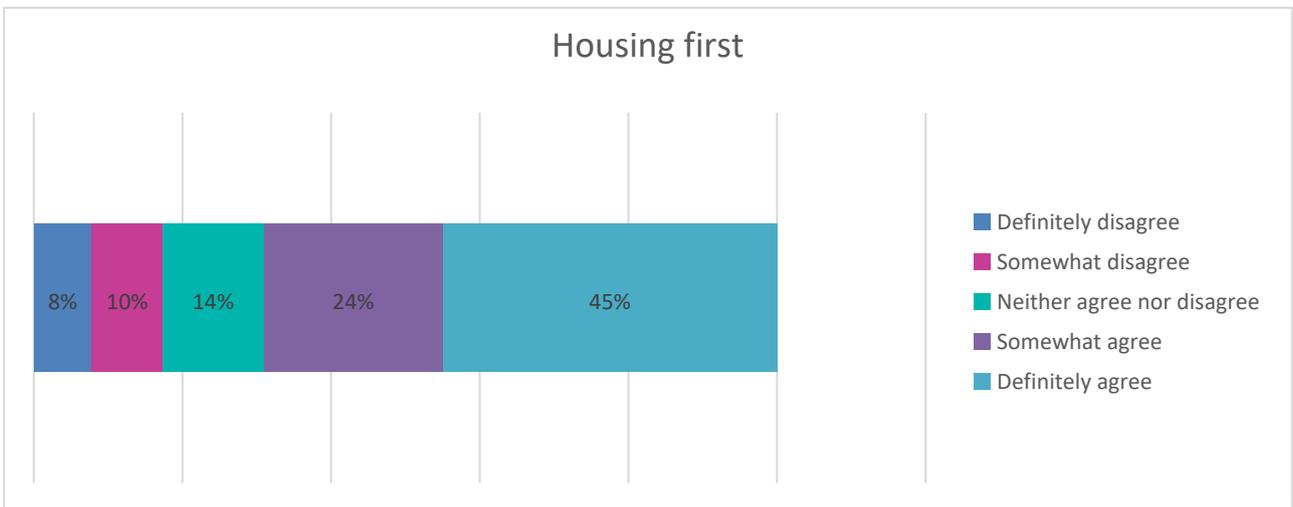
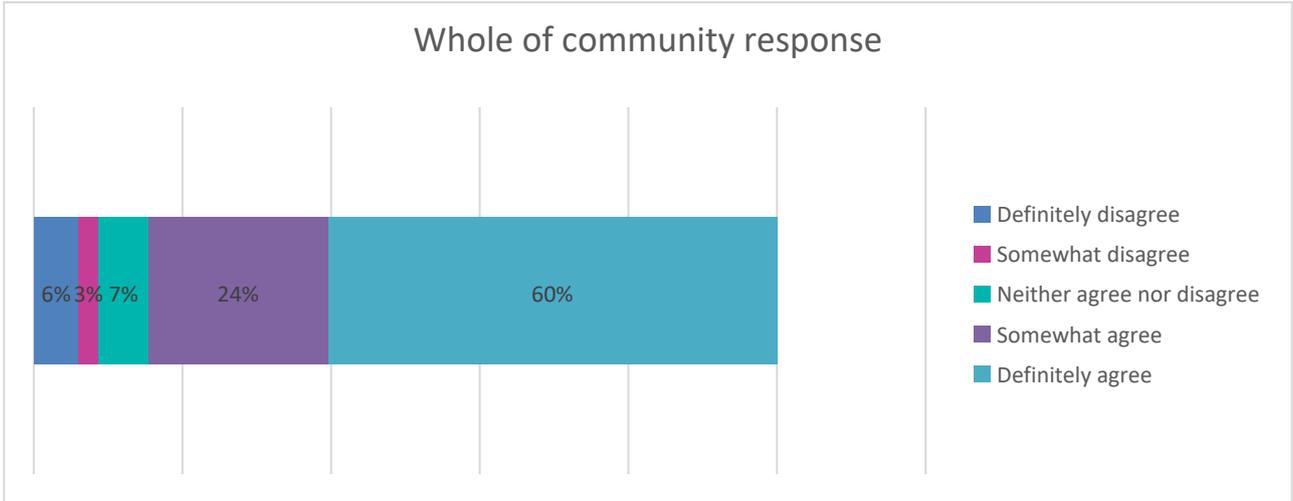
Strength in local knowledge / collaboration with community organisations



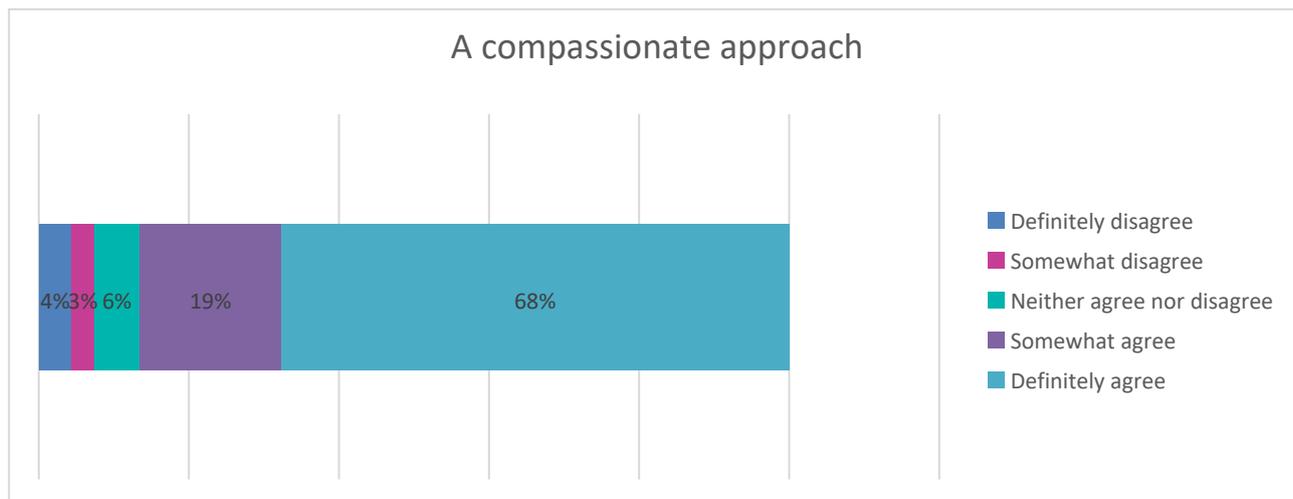
Furthering prosperity / the impact on the local economy to be considered



Principles within the WA 10-Year Strategy:



Principles within the current Policy 113 Homelessness:



Agreement with the principles are ranked in the following order:

Principle	Rank	Agreement	Notes
A compassionate approach	1	87%	This statement had the highest level of agreement overall, with only 7% disagreeing.
Access to public spaces / everyone's needs are respected	2	86%	
Right to housing / housing a basic human right	3	86%	
Whole of community response	4	84%	
Support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups	5	83%	
No wrong door to accessing services	6	84%	Although agreement with this statement ranked higher than 'No wrong door', it had the third highest rate of disagreement at 12%.
Right to participate in community activities and events	7	82%	
Strength in local knowledge / collaboration with community organisations	8	80%	

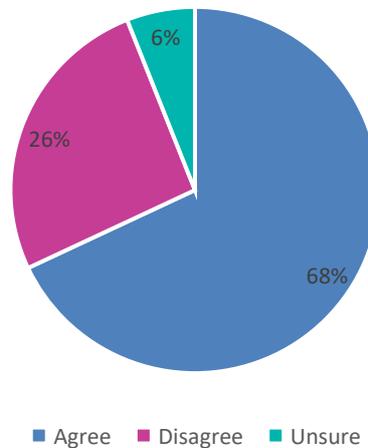
Furthering prosperity / the impact on the local economy to be considered	9	80%	<p>This statement had the second highest level of disagreement at 13%.</p> <p>Some respondents specifically commented that they did not feel it was appropriate for the perception of the Town's 'prosperity' to be coupled with the Town's general approach to homelessness.</p>
Housing first	10	69%	<p>This statement also had the highest level of 'neither agree nor disagree' at 14% and highest level of disagreement at 18%.</p> <p>Although this approach is premised on the understanding that housing is a basic human right, some respondents commented that housing should not be provided without conditions, nor necessarily in the Town.</p>

Potential approaches

Participants were asked to provide feedback on activities that may be undertaken by local governments around homelessness. Examples provided were either real (for the community workshop) or fictional (a reduced version for the online survey), however, were based on current or previous Town, other Perth metropolitan and Eastern State Local Government activities.

Community education
<p>(1) Partnering with local community organisations to deliver awareness raising events</p> <p>Survey feedback</p>

Community education



- 68% agreed with the approach, versus 26% who disagreed. For those who disagreed many stated they felt the approach does not 'solve' homelessness.
- 19% of respondents were concerned that a one off event during homelessness would have limited reach, and 17% suggested that the event should be part of a greater communications strategy to build understanding in the community.
- 8% of respondents referenced the importance of service providers being involved in these events.
- 5% of respondents did not feel this was the role of a local government, with some suggesting State Government should be lobbied to deliver awareness raising events.
- 7% of respondents used the opportunity to comment on anti-social behaviour in the Town, connecting homelessness with feeling unsafe and/or perceptions of a rise in drug-related crime.

Workshop feedback

- Participants agreed with the approach in building community understanding around why someone may become homeless. However, suggested the events should be held more than annually, and greater promotion would be required to capture a greater audience.

(2) Installing collection boxes in public areas to divert donations to local homelessness services

Workshop feedback

- Participants were supportive of this example and how it encouraged community members to donate to local community organisations.
- However, there was some concern that if money was being diverted away from people begging on the streets, would people begging be supported to access the service this money where this money is now going?

Analysis

Feedback to both examples supports community awareness raising activities being undertaken by the Town in partnership with local services on an ongoing basis. However, as picked up in the

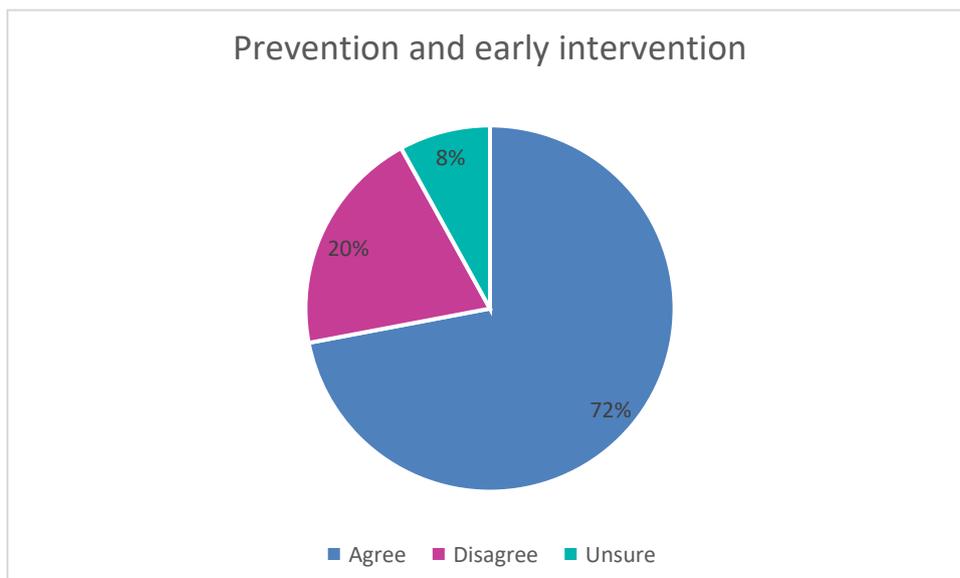
survey and workshop, events are only one way in which to educate the community. The Town has access to a number of communication tools to distribute key messages around homelessness, promote the work of local organisations and communicate how the community can get involved. Individual responses demonstrated a lack of knowledge around local homeless responses, and/or a willingness to be more involved in supporting local efforts if provided knowledge on how to do so.

Addressing anti-social behaviour is outside of the scope of the Homelessness Policy Review. However, there are partnership projects between the Town and the WA Police Force underway. The survey responses additionally support a need for greater promotion of the Town’s Neighbourhood Safety projects.

Prevention and early intervention

(1) Producing a hard copy brochure of local services

Survey feedback



- 72% of respondents agreed with the response, while 20% disagreed.
- 23% of people who disagreed and 12% of respondents overall suggested a personal connection or conversation needs to also take place when providing information to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. 8% of respondents also commented that services should be involved in these conversations.
- 9% of respondents were concerned about the accessibility of a brochure written in English, and 15% provided various suggestions around wider online and hard copy distribution.
- 5% of respondents suggested that Town staff should be trained if providing information to people in need. 5% of respondents suggested the Town have 'liaison' type workers to provide information to people in need, while 12% of respondents suggested the Town offer a case management/social work service to people who are homeless.

- 6% of respondents did not believe this was the remit of local government, rather State Government or local organisations should be printing and distributing information on local services.
- 3% of respondents commented that people who are homeless either (a) have made the choice to be homeless or (b) do not want assistance.

Workshop feedback

- Participants' main suggestions for this example were to make sure it was readily available and accessible.

(2) Delivering employment-readiness programs

Workshop feedback

- Participants valued the program and the opportunity for people taking part in the program to build confidence and self-esteem.
- One participant questioned whether a similar program was being delivered by Ruah Community Services.

Analysis

Feedback received demonstrates a diverse range in expectations around the role of local government. In the brochure example, generally respondents and participants were supportive of the Town printing and promoting local services. Suggestions made were around ensuring the information remains up to date, is widely distributed and is backed up by a conversation if someone in need approaches the Town. However, there was concern expressed around Town staff being adequately trained to provide this information, with 12% of survey respondents going as far to suggest social workers be employed to case manage people in need. In contrast, 6% of respondents disagreed with the Town having a role in this space, indicating that local services and State Government agencies are funded to perform this role.

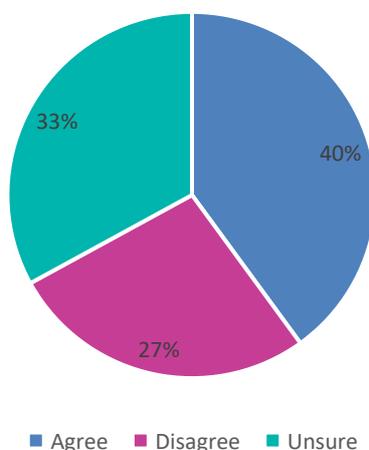
The Town will need to carefully consider its role in direct service delivery to ensure it is not in competition with service providers. The workshop example demonstrated support for delivering programs and workshops, however, one participant questions whether this would be in direct competition with a service provider. The Town provides workshops around learning English for new migrants, digital literacy, and low-cost healthy eating which indirectly address risk factors around becoming homeless. Future prevention programs proposed or a Town-facilitated case management service will require a needs analysis to be undertaken.

Management of public spaces

(1) Immediate disposal of left belongings in a public area

Survey feedback

Management of public spaces



- 40% agreed with the response taken to immediately remove belongings from a park, while 27% disagreed and 33% were unsure. Many who were unsure did not necessarily agree with the approach taken in the example, however, did feel it was important public areas are kept clean.
- Suggestions made to improve the approach included leaving a written notice that the belongings were to be shortly removed (11%), having staff trained or directed to consider whether items are personal belongings or rubbish before disposal (18%) and storing items for a period of time before disposal (41%).
- Respondents were divided on how the Town should respond to rough sleepers. 11% suggested rough sleepers should be moved on immediately, with 84% of this group suggesting a Police response. 11% also agreed that at some point rough sleepers should be moved on, with information or assistance provided to the person on available services. 17% of respondents stated that rough sleepers should not be moved on unless there is illegal activity. The remaining 61% did not specify how, when or if a rough sleeper should be moved on.
- Within the questions around rough sleepers, 15% of respondents suggested that the Town should directly provide housing and/or a case management services.
- 5% of respondents also used the opportunity to voice their want for community education to inspire compassion in community members who have a low tolerance for rough sleepers.
- Further, 5% of respondents specifically mentioned 'compassionate' to describe the approach to be taken by the Town in these examples.

Workshop feedback

- Participants were in consensus that belongings should be collected and stored for a period of time before being disposed of, and that staff should be trained to provide information and connect rough sleepers to organisations.
- It was also discussed that the Town needs to communicate its approach to left belongings and rough sleepers, and assist in promoting local services in the area.

Analysis

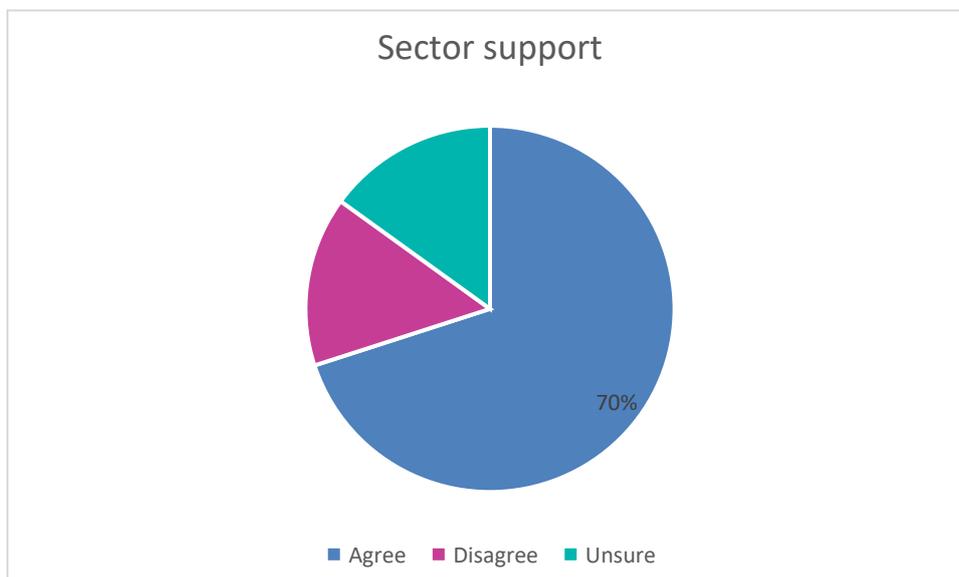
There was a higher level of ‘unsure’ responses, as well as high numbers of people who disagreed or agreed with conditions in their comments. This suggestions in the example provided around ‘immediate disposal of left belongings’ as well as the follow up question around responding to rough sleepers, many respondents and workshop participants were appreciative of the complexity of managing public space.

Both the respondents and participants provided actionable suggestions around how the Town can improve its practices around responding to left belongings and rough sleepers. However, a number of respondents suggested that the Town provide housing for rough sleepers. This specific suggestion is outside of the scope of local government, and rather indicates that the Town needs to be clear in communicating its role versus the role of other levels of government around homelessness. This was supported by the workshop participants, wo suggested that the Town needs to promote the work of local services, so the community is aware of the groups who are actively supporting rough sleepers in the Town.

Sector support

(1) Funding a local agency to conduct a point-in-time count of rough sleeper numbers in the area

Survey feedback



- 70% of respondents agreed with the approach, while 15% disagreed. 34% of those who disagreed felt this should be funded or facilitated by State Government.
- 12% of respondents commented that they supported the collaboration between stakeholders demonstrated in the example.
- Many suggestions were offered in way of improving or building on the approach, including lived experience advisors (8%), using the date to inform advocacy to State government (6%), and working collaboratively with our local government neighbours in the region (4%).

Workshop feedback

- Participants' key take away from this example was the importance of ensuring the data collected is used to develop tangible actions.

(2) Facilitating a multi-agency, community-based action group on homelessness

Workshop feedback

- Participants supported the collaborative nature of the group in the example, and suggested that people with lived experience be part of the group.
- A couple of workshop participants did query whether there was follow through from these meetings, suggesting that they only saw value in the meetings should concrete actions emerge from them.

Analysis

In the first example, the Town was approached to partner and provide funding to initiate a community-led project, and in both examples facilitated stakeholders coming together to work collectively on the emerging themes. This 'facilitation' role was highly regarded by both survey respondents and workshop participants, as many considered collaboration a key requirement for action on homelessness.

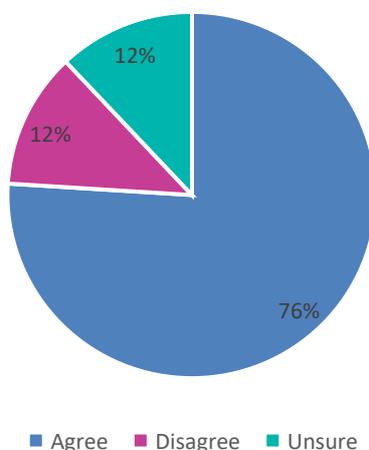
However, many also commented that they only saw value in working groups if real actions were created. A couple also commented that the plans and actions arising from these groups be communicated widely to the community, so to ensure a level of accountability to the community. It will be of vital importance in all future work undertaken in the community that the community is kept informed, and involved where appropriate.

Advocacy

(1) Joining a regional working group on family and domestic violence – a risk factor in leading to homelessness, and writing to State Government requesting additional funding for the community

Survey feedback

Advocacy



- 76% of respondents agreed this was an appropriate response to take by local government, while 12% disagreed.
- 26% specifically commented that advocacy to other levels of government, and/or seeking funding from alternate services to address gaps in service level is an important role of local government.
- 6% of respondents commented that they supported the collaboration between stakeholders in the example.
- Although the example intended to highlight the advocacy work a local government can perform, and in this example alongside a working group, some respondents used the opportunity to suggest the working group should be more proactive in providing women's shelters (5%) and FDV services (7%). This indicates that the example may not have adequately explained the differentiation between the role of the working group, versus the role of the individual agencies comprising the working group.

Analysis

The example had the highest level of agreement demonstrated by the survey respondents. Respondents demonstrated in their comments that a whole-of-community response is required to address homelessness, and 26% of respondents specifically mentioned that advocacy in order to attract funding around local service needs was of vital importance.

This was the last example in the survey, and as such comments were brief. This suggests the survey may have been too long, given the depth of the questions asked.

Feedback received from the examples provided suggests that the community considers the Town to take on a number of roles around homelessness. Advocacy, partnering with local services, facilitation, and an informed and respectful approach to working with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are key roles supported by the feedback. Directly delivering services that blur the division of responsibility between local governments and service providers or State Government – e.g. provision of housing or case management services, was a role that was mentioned, however at

a rate of approximately only 11% in each example.

It is difficult to ascertain why this response was given. Potentially respondents/participants were supportive of the Town to cross into this space. Or alternatively, respondents/participants were unaware that this space is funded and provided from outside of the sphere of local government. Regardless, the sentiment expressed was that additional services are required in the Town. This would indicate that the Town's role to promote local services, work collaboratively with local services and advocate for additional services, where evidence suggests is needed, is vital for addressing this concern.

