

## **Homelessness Policy Review – Service Provider Engagement: The Supporting People with Basic Needs network**

### **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 late 2018 the Town was approached by the local Supporting People with Basic Needs network, requesting a collaborative review of the Homelessness Policy. The group expressed concern that the current policy was not achieving its intended purpose.

Representatives from the Supporting People with Basic Needs network and Town staff formed a collaborative group in May 2019 to commence this review. This report summarises the activities and feedback received from May until November 2019 when the collaboration disbanded.

### **2. Summary of feedback**

The collaborative group advised that Policy 113 Homelessness – The Town’s Role is narrow in scope, and limits the Town to actions around supporting rough sleepers alone. Homelessness affects more than just rough sleepers and multiple Town service areas have touch points with people who may be homeless, at risk of homelessness or represent organisations which support people’s basic needs.

The collaborative group suggests the Policy Statement include a comprehensive list of principles. It was important to the collaborative group that the Town demonstrate a commitment to housing as a human right, supporting people who are vulnerable, respectful collaboration with the sector and balancing the rights of all people to participate in the community. A list of commitments was also drafted to action the intentions of the principles.

### **3. Group members**

The following organisations were represented in the collaborative group:

- Sussex Street Community Legal Service
- Victoria Park Youth Accommodation
- Connect Victoria Park
- Victoria Park Community Centre
- Town of Victoria Park

Other groups involved over the period include:

- Kensington Policy and Community Youth Centre
- Communicare WA
- Office of the Hon. Ben Wyatt MLA

#### 4. Activities

The following activities were undertaken by the collaborative group:

- Mapping of local services
- Development of a hard copy brochure of services
- Delivery of 'Home, Safe Home' community event for Homelessness Week in August 2019
- Audit of Western Australian and some Eastern States LGA policies on Homelessness
- Initial review of *Policy 113 Homelessness*

#### 5. Next steps

The Town will commence internal engagement to obtain feedback on the suggested policy content and input into the development of the Implementation Plan to operationalise the reviewed policy.

Feedback will be sought on the follow key areas:

- Impact of homelessness on internal service areas
- Local laws, policies or procedures affecting internal service areas' work around homelessness
- Potential actions internal service areas can undertake
- Requirements for action
- Feedback on suggested content provided by the Supporting People with Basic Needs network

#### 6. Feedback provided

The collaborative group, the Supporting People with Basic Needs network provided to the Town the following suggested content for *Policy 113 Homelessness – The Town's Role*:

Policy area	Suggested content
Policy objective	The Town of Victoria Park recognises that it has a responsibility as the custodian of the community in which people experiencing homelessness live and the effects of homelessness are felt, to play an active role in minimising the impact of and ending homelessness in the community.
Policy scope	This policy applies to all Elected Members, working groups and committees of Council, Town staff and contractors, and is to be applied to all relevant policy frameworks and across all service areas/functions of the Town of Victoria Park.  This policy does not prevent any business or other agency from taking appropriate action where they consider there is a health or safety risk.
Policy definitions	Homelessness At risk of homelessness

	<p>Housing stress Affordable housing</p>
<p>Policy statement: policy principles</p>	<p><u>Right to housing:</u> The Town recognises that access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing is a basic human right, essential to individuals’ mental and physical wellbeing and necessary for community members to meaningfully participate in education, employment, cultural and social activities. The Town has a responsibility to formulate policy to address homelessness, housing needs and the provision of diverse housing options.</p> <p><u>Support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups:</u> The Town recognises that people who are homeless are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community, and experience higher rates of trauma, mental and physical illnesses and substance dependence. The Town further acknowledges that homelessness is not an individual issue, rather a reflection of systemic failures affecting the whole of community. The Town has a moral obligation to address and advocate for the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged people to facilitate structural change within our community.</p> <p><u>Right to participate:</u> The Town acknowledges that a thriving community is one where all community members are encouraged and able to participate in community activities and events. The Town also acknowledges that some vulnerable and socially excluded people within its population may need special assistance to enable them to participate and experience greater social inclusion.</p> <p><u>Access to public spaces:</u> The Town recognises the right of all community members to access public spaces and utilise public amenities, whilst also acknowledging their responsibility towards other community members who have the right to live in a safe and peaceful environment. The Town is committed to balancing the needs of all members of the community to use public space.</p> <p><u>Respectful collaboration with relevant community organisations:</u> The Town acknowledges that local community organisations working to address homelessness, provide housing, and support people with other basic needs, are key partners in ending homelessness and that their connection to people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness is an asset on which to build essential advocacy, assistance and support.</p> <p><u>Furthering Town prosperity:</u> The Town acknowledges that the visibility of homelessness can impact current and prospective resident, business and visitor perceptions of the Town. The Town is committed to affecting change to improve the lives of homeless people</p>

	<p>themselves, and to also ensure the ongoing economic, environmental, cultural and social prosperity of the Town and its various communities. The Town further acknowledges that 'managing or servicing' homelessness is very costly to the community, and that planning to solve people's homelessness, through permanent supportive housing, is a significantly more cost effective strategy long term.</p>
<p>Policy statement: policy commitments</p>	<p>The Town will both facilitate and advocate for diversity in housing stock and the attraction and provision of affordable housing.</p> <p>The Town will identify and facilitate the contribution each service area/ function and staff member can make to minimise the impact of homelessness in our local community.</p> <p>The Town will, in carrying out its various functions, act with compassion, empathy, care and respect when connecting with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in our local community.</p> <p>The Town will work collaboratively with all levels of government, homeless support services, community organisations and neighbouring local governments towards a coordinated and effective approach to ending homelessness in our local community and the greater inner-city region.</p> <p>The Town acknowledges that local businesses and commercial enterprises are key partners in ending homelessness and will engage with them to ensure their contributions are part of a long term homelessness strategy.</p> <p>The Town will build capacity within the community to end homelessness by providing financial and practical assistance to community organisations and social enterprises through, but not limited to, community grants, operating subsidies, subsidised rent and other funding streams.</p> <p>The Town will collect, collate and share accurate data to understand and respond to trends and issues regarding homelessness in our local community.</p> <p>The Town will advocate for the provision of State and Federal government funded services and evidence based policies to both minimise the impact of homelessness and address the underlying causes which result in homelessness.</p> <p>The Town will engage in activities to raise awareness of the nature, impacts and challenges of homelessness and the ways in which all of our community can play a part in minimising the impact of and preventing homelessness in our local community.</p>

Policy implementation	<p>The Homelessness Policy Implementation Plan details the actions which will be taken by the Town to operationalise this policy.</p> <p>The CEO will establish management practices to guide Elected Members, Town Officers and Town contractors in implementing this policy across all service areas and functions of the Town.</p>

