
Auckland Council's position and role in improving, ending and preventing homelessness

File No.: CP2017/14815

Purpose

1. To decide on Auckland Council's position and role in relation to improving, ending and preventing homelessness.

Executive summary

2. This report responds to the Regional Strategy and Policy Committee's request in September 2016 for "further policy work to determine council's role and position in addressing homelessness, including emergency housing" (REG/2016/90). The scope was agreed by the Committee in February 2017. It does not include interventions to address housing supply and demand factors.
3. The Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness includes people living without shelter (rough sleepers), in temporary accommodation or sharing temporarily, and people living in uninhabitable dwellings.
4. Analysis of 2013 census data by the University of Otago (the University) found that 20,296 people were homeless in Auckland, an increase of 26 per cent since 2006. Based on the average increase between censuses, and excluding all other factors, homelessness could stand at 23,409 in 2017, and 26,522 by 2021.
5. The rapid growth of Auckland's population is outstripping growth in the supply of housing. Housing affordability (for rent and purchase) is declining, and there is significant unmet demand for social, affordable and emergency housing. The problem cannot be solved without addressing supply.
6. There are significant adverse consequences for those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, and wider impacts on communities, business and the image of the city. Consequently, there is a high level of public, media and political concern and growing demand for Auckland Council to do more.
7. Homelessness has a complex set of determinants, and requires a coordinated cross-sectoral response. Auckland Council contributes significantly, but in the absence of a cross-sectoral plan and clear leadership, there are significant gaps.
8. Four options for Auckland Council's position and role have been considered. They progress from low tolerance (which would be to do less), case by case (the status quo), responsive (strengthening established levers) and progressive (focusing on affordable housing).
9. Options 3 and 4 address the gaps, and are presented for a decision. Option 4 is widely supported, but the role of central government and the potentially prohibitive costs are acknowledged. Option 3 is therefore the preferred option.

Recommendation/s

That the Environment and Community Committee:

- a) agree that Auckland Council's preferred position and role on homelessness is:
- either
- i. Option 3 (preferred): A responsive approach where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring¹, and the council's role (in addition to the status quo) is to strengthen established levers, with a focus on:
- Strategic leadership, including a cross-sectoral homelessness plan
 - Inter-sectoral coordination in terms of a shared vision and goals
 - Systematic integration of homelessness into relevant policies and regulation
 - Development of a sustainable funding base
 - Monitoring and evaluation.
- Or
- ii. Option 4: A progressive approach where (in addition to Option 3) the council's role is to increase the supply of social and affordable housing, with partnerships to deliver integrated health and social services. The focus would include:
- Development of an affordable housing strategy
 - Investigation and implementation of opportunities to deliver more social housing
 - Formalising partnerships with central government agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) for the delivery of integrated health and social services.
- b) request the Chief Executive report back to the Committee with an implementation plan (for either option), including:
- Establishing mechanisms to engage with cross-sectoral agencies
 - Analysis of relevant housing demand and supply
 - A more detailed stocktake
 - A shared purpose statement and high level, cross-sectoral plan
 - Costings
 - A monitoring framework.

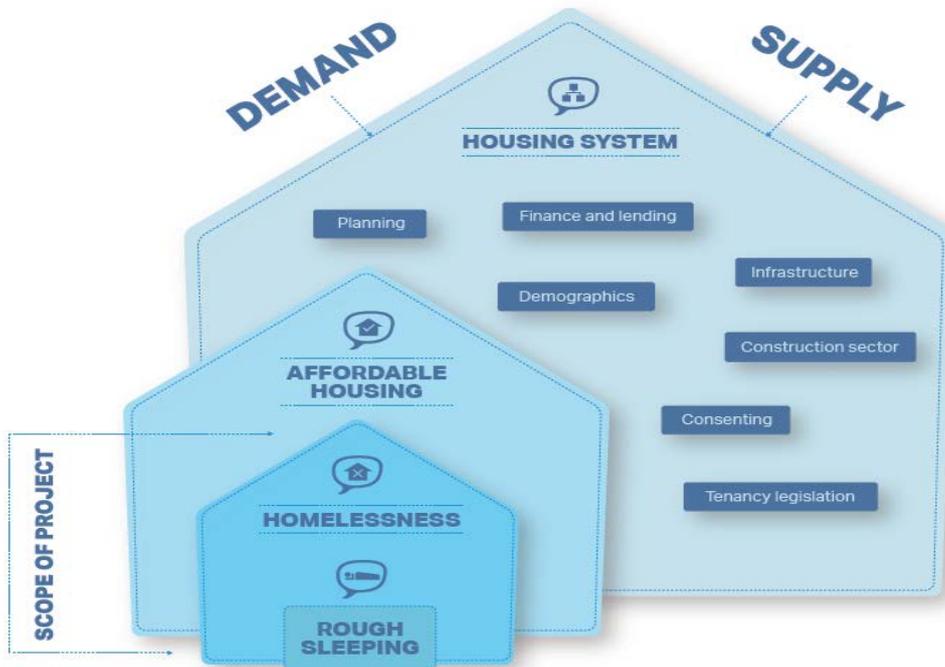
¹ A vision for homelessness increasingly used in the strategies of other jurisdictions such as Vancouver

Comments

Background

10. This report responds to the Regional Strategy and Policy Committee's request in September 2016 for "further policy work to determine council's role and position in addressing homelessness, including emergency housing" (REG/2016/90). In February 2017, the Community Development and Safety Committee approved the scope (ENV/2017/13) which included reporting back on:
 - improving, ending and preventing homelessness
 - the main causes and drivers of homelessness, and its relationship to the broader housing system
 - the scale, severity and nature of homelessness in Auckland
 - the international experience and what has worked
 - engagement with key stakeholders to identify the most effective roles for the council.
11. A full report responding to this resolution can be found in Attachment A.
12. The scope of this project did not include interventions to address housing system supply and demand factors as illustrated in Figure 1.
13. The report applies the Stats NZ 2015 definition of homelessness. This includes living:
 - without shelter, e.g. rough sleeping or in vehicles
 - in temporary accommodation, e.g. emergency, transitional or boarding housing
 - in shared accommodation temporarily with a household, e.g. couch surfing
 - in uninhabitable dwellings, e.g. garages.
14. Prevalence statistics are based on analysis by the University of Otago (the University) using census data, supplemented with data from service providers. There are limitations arising from non-participation, reliance on self-reporting (and reluctance to disclose true living situations) and a five year lag between censuses.

Figure 1: Homelessness, the housing system and the scope of the report

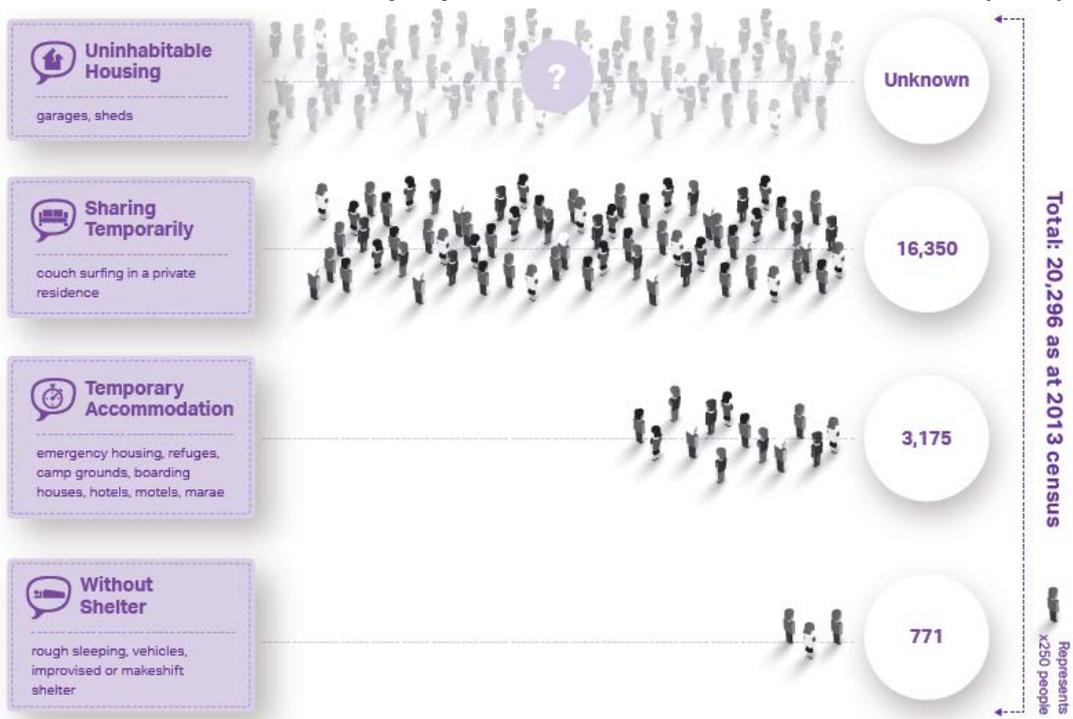


Consideration

Problem definition: Unmet demand for housing is impacting heavily on vulnerable people

15. Figure 2 shows that there were 20,296 homeless people in Auckland in 2013, with a breakdown across the dimensions of homelessness. The group of people living in uninhabitable housing is possibly the largest, and this number is unknown.

Figure 2: The number of homeless people in Auckland across the continuum (2013)



Source: Amore, 2016.

16. Based on the average increase between censuses, and excluding all other factors, homelessness could stand at 23,409 in 2017, and 26,522 by 2021.
17. Auckland City Mission's 2016 annual street count of rough sleepers within three kilometres of the Sky Tower, found 177 and a further 51 in emergency accommodation or hospital who would otherwise have been on the street. This was an annual increase of over 50 per cent.
18. A recent report from Yale University placed New Zealand at the top of homelessness rates in the OECD².
19. Nationally, low income households, children and young people (51 per cent), and sole parent families (43 per cent) were the most affected groups. Pacific people were ten times, and Māori five times more likely than Europeans to be homeless. Other groups who are affected include rainbow youth, people with mental health problems, those who have experienced family violence or been in state care, and inmates on release from prison.
20. In 2013, there were 203,817 Aucklanders (36,594 households) living in overcrowded³ conditions, and accommodation was classified as unaffordable⁴ for 44 per cent of people renting. These groups are not classified as homeless, but are particularly vulnerable.
21. There are many negative health, social, cultural and economic impacts for those who experience homelessness. In particular, children can experience serious health consequences and disruption of their education.
22. Homelessness also impacts on communities, businesses, and the image of the city. There are costs associated with greater need for health and social support services, justice and financial benefits.
23. There is a high level of public, media and political interest with growing demand for central and local government to do more as part of a collective effort⁵:

We have a wicked problem but we have an opportunity to change it now before it gets more complex. Our numbers are small enough that we can solve this problem today.

Homelessness is a very sad situation ... we should never accept homelessness especially when children, the disabled, sick and elderly are involved.

Te Puea Marea steps up to find cancer teen and family a home.

A teenager battling cancer ended up homeless with the rest of her family after moving to Auckland to receive treatment. The Facebook post said it "all went downhill from there":

I wasn't able to swallow, I got infections, I had two massive seizures. I had to have antibiotics and that led to kidney problems so not only do I have cancer, I have kidney problems.

The family moved to an Auntie's house, but there were 15 people staying there. Her father went to WINZ and told them about his daughter with cancer:

They did nothing. He went to Housing NZ, told them. They couldn't find us a house. Too full, they said, too full. I hope we get a house. So we can all live again. So my Dad can go back to work. He's a hard worker.

In winter 2016, the family stayed temporarily at Te Puea marae before a Housing New Zealand home in West Auckland was found.

Source: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11659501 Accessed 24 July 2017

² <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/cities-grow-worldwide-so-do-numbers-homeless> Accessed 23 July 2017.

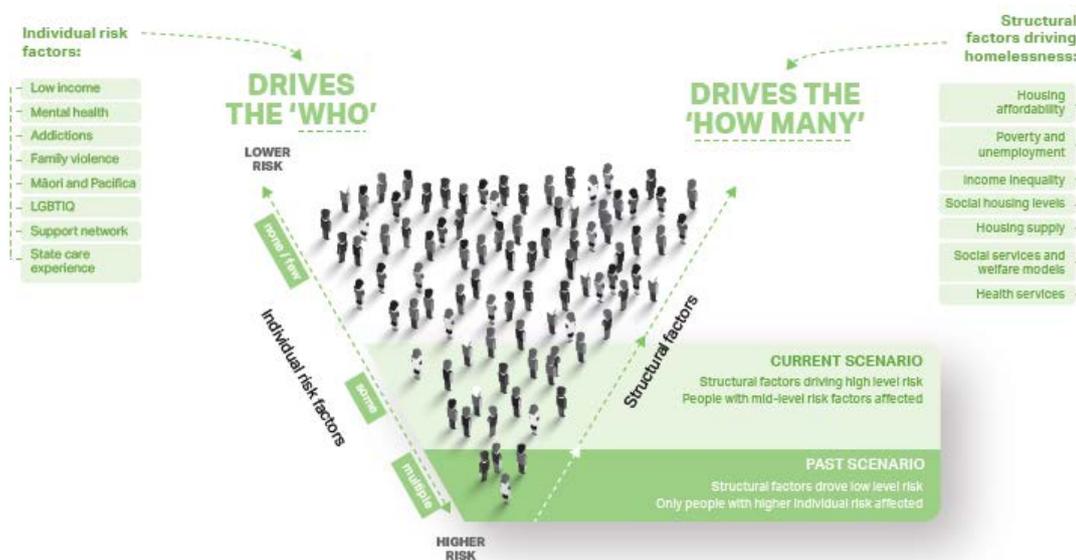
³ Overcrowding includes those sharing temporarily in a severely crowded household.

⁴ The Auckland Plan and internationally accepted definition of housing affordability is spending more than 30 per cent of gross income on housing.

⁵ Quotes from the engagement walk-throughs

24. Media stories reflect the following themes:
- Increasing numbers of homeless people, particularly people who are employed or studying, and families with children
 - Increasing rental costs, and provision of poor quality (uninhabitable) accommodation
 - The housing supply crisis, including few emergency options
 - Concerns about the impact of behaviours (such as begging) on business and tourism
 - High levels of government expenditure on emergency accommodation such as motels.
25. Homelessness is a complex issue. It results from multi-layered structural and individual factors including national policy settings and economic conditions, immigration, access to health and social services, discrimination, family violence, employment and poor health.
26. A key driver however is the housing market, particularly unmet demand for social and affordable housing. This is highlighted by recent estimates⁶ that the government will spend \$50 million nationally on emergency housing (such as motels) in 12 months.
27. As housing supply pressures increase, people with fewer risk factors face homelessness, as illustrated in Figure 3. One risk factor or one event such as job loss, illness, the end of a relationship or debt, can be the trigger. The housing shortage means that people endure homelessness more often and for longer, and achieving sustainable housing can be difficult.
28. Nationally, 52 per cent of homeless adults were working, studying or both.
29. If housing supply met demand, homelessness would be “rare, brief and non-recurring”, but currently homelessness is increasing faster than the growth of housing supply.

Figure 3: Structural and individual determinants of homelessness



Current state: Auckland Council supports multi-agency response to homelessness

30. The roles of central government, local government, NGOs and the private sector are described in Section 7 of Attachment A. Central government has primary responsibility for the provision of social housing and financial support for accommodation.

⁶ <http://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2017/07/govt-admits-it-had-no-idea-of-emergency-housing-costs.html> Accessed: 23 July 2017.

31. Auckland Council contributes positively to addressing homelessness. Activities include:
- *Monitoring:* Wider housing research conducted by RIMU, and funding for evaluation.
 - *Coordination:* Participation in cross-sectoral groups such as the Rough Sleeping Steering Group, and provides some coordination at an operational level.
 - *Policy and regulation:* Regulations which impact on the housing supply (e.g. building compliance) and more directly on homelessness, e.g. the Public Safety and Nuisance bylaw. The findings of the current review of this bylaw will be presented to the Regulatory Committee on 14 September 2017, with recommendations on whether the bylaw should be confirmed, amended or revoked. Similarly, on 10 August 2017, this committee will receive a report seeking a decision on whether to further investigate a freedom camping bylaw. The council response to the Mayoral Taskforce Report is also likely to include policy work to investigate tenure and ownership mechanisms that improve housing affordability. The *Māori Housing Action Plan* is currently being finalised.
 - *Provision of assets and amenities:* Housing for older people, parks and amenities for public use, and design of urban spaces which can reflect varying degrees of tolerance.
 - *Funding and service delivery:* Table 1 includes a summary of funding contributions. Beyond 2017/18, the annual funding commitment falls to \$565,287.
32. The Housing First Auckland pilot is the city’s flagship initiative. Based on an established collective impact model, it is a partnership between central and local government and NGOs. It runs for 18 months from March 2017 in central, south and west Auckland. It aims to support 472 people - approximately half of the current projected population (971) living without shelter in the region. The evaluation will provide evidence on the challenges of delivering the programme in a constrained housing market. Ongoing funding support will need to be determined when the pilot ends in 2018.

Table 1: Summary of funding for delivery of services from 2015/16 to 2019/20

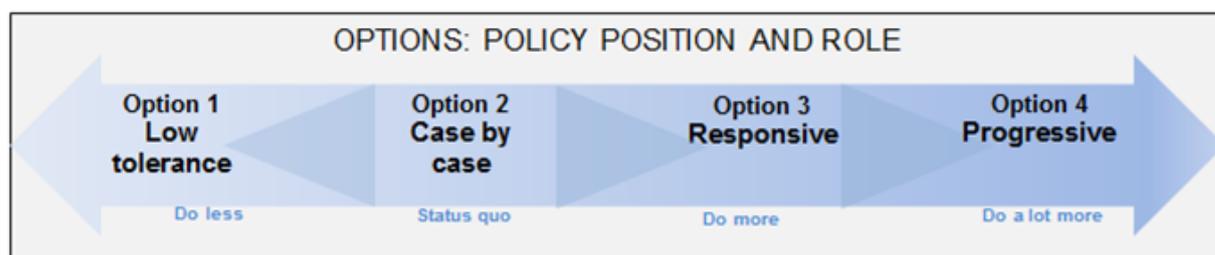
Activities	Timeframe (FY) and budget allocation				
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Housing First (one-off contribution)		\$1million			
James Liston Hostel upgrade, increase in beds		\$2million			
Mayor’s budget: cross-sectoral collaboration including Housing First data collection			\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
LTP 2015/25: emergency housing coordination, inner city amenities, outreach, Awhina website, evaluation activities	\$360,000	\$360,000	\$110,000		
LTP operational delivery by Community Empowerment	\$53,624	\$53,624	\$66,937	\$65,287	\$65,287

What could be improved? The key gap is a cross-sectoral strategic plan

33. Homelessness is a very difficult issue to turn around. It requires collective efforts to address the housing supply, and to provide support services for at-risk and vulnerable individuals (or households). The impact of any solution is unlikely to be significant in the short-term.
34. The current response is positive but it is not at a scale that matches the problem. In the absence of an integrated cross-sectoral approach, there are gaps and opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of available resources.
35. Based on analysis of selected case studies to identify “best practice”, and a systems gaps analysis, a comprehensive response to homelessness in Auckland would include:
 - Strategic direction and leadership across the sector based on collective impact principles, including a regional and/or national homelessness strategy
 - Clear, shared vision and goals, e.g. the position that “homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring”
 - Sustainable funding for implementation
 - Improved coordination, particularly at a strategic level
 - Systematic monitoring to inform investment
 - Increased supply of emergency, social and affordable housing
 - Consideration and inclusion of homelessness in relevant policies, e.g. housing strategies, rental security, bylaws and design guidelines
 - Targeted interventions including employment support and provision of amenities.
36. In addition, stakeholders wanted to see Auckland Council take a stronger leadership role, and more collaboration with central government. They wanted to maintain the focus on rough sleeping, and increase the focus on other forms of homelessness across the region. They also sought a balance across improving, ending and preventing homelessness, with emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Options: Auckland Council’s position and role in improving, ending and preventing homelessness

37. Four options are presented on a continuum requiring increasing commitment from the council. They represent an increasing response to the identified gaps. The position sets the direction for the council and shapes the response to homelessness. The role describes the council’s responsibility, and functions that would be needed to achieve each position.



Option 1: Low tolerance

Position	Actively discourages homelessness and associated behaviours through exclusion, enforcement and deterrents such as the design of public spaces.
Role	The council would ‘do less’ than it currently does. It would involve a mix of policy, regulation and design to manage the symptoms of homelessness, with responsibility for the key determinants of homelessness left to central government.

Strengths	Formalises the position of council for future decision-making. It may address some localised community concerns in the short term.
Risks	The approach shifts rather than addresses homelessness, and may cause perpetual displacement of homeless people. Internationally, this approach has been described as expensive, inappropriate, and futile. It would address some community concerns, but would receive little support from stakeholders. The council has limited ability to establish or enforce the necessary regulations (bylaws, issuance of fines), and would have to rely on police intervention (for infringement powers) or rely on the courts to prosecute. The costs of increased compliance and enforcement are unknown.

Option 2: Case by case

Position	The range of responses is determined on a case by case basis, responding to issues and requests as they emerge. There is no formalised policy position.
Role	The council continues to contribute through its traditional role with ongoing implementation of the status quo activities. Includes allocation of \$5.6million (over five years) to FY2019/2020. Future funding would be sought on an ad hoc basis.
Strengths	Continues Auckland Council's positive contribution within the council's traditional role. It addresses some needs of homeless people, and some community concerns. The Housing First pilot is promising, and the evaluation will inform future efforts. Minimises responsibility and associated costs for council, and increases expectations of a response from central government and other agencies.
Risks	The response is ad hoc and not well aligned with evidence and best practice, resulting in limited impact and value for money. Uncertainty for council governance and staff, the sector, community and homeless people. There is no long-term funding commitment, including funding for Housing First beyond completion of the pilot. The status quo is not supported by stakeholders.

Option 3: Responsive (preferred option)

Position	Council will strengthen its available levers to help make any occurrence of homelessness in Auckland rare, brief and non-recurring ⁷
Role	In addition to the 'status quo' (Option 2), the council would be more responsive to the needs of homeless people, including providing or supporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic leadership and coordination • A cross-sectoral homelessness strategy, with shared vision and goals • Monitoring and evaluation • Systematic integration of homelessness into relevant policies and regulation • Development of a sustainable funding base.

⁷ A vision for homelessness increasingly used in the strategies of other jurisdictions such as Vancouver

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Strengths	It is supported by the evidence and best practice, and aligns with the council's current funded homelessness interventions, such as Housing First. Is within the council's mandate and acknowledges central government's role. Development and implementation of the first phase could be absorbed within existing policy and operational team capacity. It meets the needs of homeless people (without the use of "hard enforcement"), and community concerns.
Risks	The council's role would be constrained by existing, limited resources. Costs of additional initiatives in the proposed implementation plan are unknown.

Option 4: Progressive

Position	Council will expand its mandate to play a lead role in increasing the supply of social and affordable housing, and will form partnerships to deliver integrated health and social services to vulnerable people.
Role	In addition to the 'responsive' position (Option 3), the council would also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an affordable housing strategy, which could include regulatory levers, incentives, and direct provision • Investigate and implement opportunities and incentives to deliver a greater proportion of social housing which could include new developments, including on council-owned land • Formalise partnerships with central government agencies and NGOs for the delivery of integrated health and social services.
Strengths	Focuses on the key determinants of homelessness, particularly housing supply. Is likely to achieve the best outcomes in relation to reducing homelessness. It aligns with an international trend in relation to affordable housing where public bodies are revising their role in the delivery of social and affordable housing e.g. Wellington City Council, Finland, Vancouver and Victoria.
Risks	A significant step outside the council's mandate to intervene in areas where central government has primary responsibility. Would need higher and longer-term financial contribution, so would likely incur significant, potentially prohibitive costs for council. Would require significant policy development, with consideration of a wide range of issues, including social impact assessment.

38. Option 1 is the least responsive to the identified gaps, and does not adequately address the objective to improve, end and prevent homelessness. There was minimal stakeholder support for this option.
39. Similarly Option 2 does not respond adequately to the identified gaps. The status quo has limited focus on ending and preventing homelessness, and on forms of homelessness other than people living without shelter. Further, stakeholders expressed a strong desire for the council to do more.
40. Accordingly, no further assessment has been undertaken on Options 1 or 2.
41. Options 3 and 4 have been assessed against the following criteria:
- Addresses the identified gaps
 - Effectiveness and impact on improving, ending and preventing homelessness
 - Addresses the continuum of homelessness and priority groups, including Māori
 - Supports cross-sectoral collaboration
 - Provides a strong voice for Aucklanders.

Table 2: Summary of assessment of Options 3 and 4 against the criteria

	Option 3 Responsive “do more”	Option 4 Progressive “do a lot more”
	In addition to Option 2:	In addition to Option 3:
Addresses the identified gaps	Addresses the key gaps as far as possible within the council’s current mandate.	Addresses the gaps comprehensively, with a clear focus on the primary determinants – housing supply and services for vulnerable people.
Effectiveness and impact on: Improving, ending and preventing homelessness	Increases the focus on ending and preventing homelessness. Effectiveness will improve. However, the impact will be limited and delayed without a strong focus on the housing supply.	Increases the focus on prevention. Increasing the supply of affordable housing will have the biggest impact on homelessness outcomes.
Addresses the continuum of homelessness and priority groups, including Māori	A strategic plan would span the continuum of homelessness, with targeted interventions for priority populations, including Maori.	There would be a stronger focus on at-risk groups.
Supports cross-sectoral collaboration	A cross-sectoral strategic plan provides a shared vision and goals to galvanise a more cohesive, integrated approach. Provides a foundation to increase collective impact.	Represents a greater role for the council in the delivery and management of affordable housing. Would cross into central government responsibilities.
Provides a strong voice for Aucklanders	Provides clarity at a regional and national level on the position of Auckland Council. Provides a platform for a strong voice for Aucklanders.	Would solidify Auckland Council’s role as a lead agency in addressing affordable housing, and a stronger mandate to be a strong voice for Aucklanders.

42. Option 3 is the preferred option. It addresses the key gaps and fits with council’s mandate and current resourcing. It strengthens the impact of council’s activities by playing our role more effectively, while still relying on central government to address the housing supply. A shared vision and goals with coordination would galvanise a more cohesive and integrated cross-sectoral response. It is affordable in the short term, but more sustainable funding would be needed as current funding comes to an end. It signals an incremental approach, and would create a foundation to consider Option 4 in the future.
43. Option 4 would see the council expand its mandate, service delivery role, and financial commitment significantly by intervening in an area of central government responsibility. The impact would be delayed, but this approach would be the most effective and sustainable. It would require the council to commit much greater financial investment.

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44. If Option 3 is supported, there may be a slower response to addressing the housing supply, which would limit the overall impact of homelessness interventions. If Option 4 is supported, significant council investment would be required. This would impact on resources available for other priorities.

Risk analysis

45. There are reputational and financial risks associated with the preferred option (Option 3).

Risk	Mitigation
Unrealistic expectations about how quickly the recommendations will impact on the nature and scale of homelessness. Progress towards ending and preventing is not likely to be realised in the short term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue status quo activities, including the Housing First pilot and evaluation. Identify short, medium and long term approaches and outcomes in the homelessness strategy. Communicate key messages to manage expectations.
The costs for council to implement additional initiatives as part of the proposed cross-sectoral strategy are unknown.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations include the development of a sustainable funding base, which will require detailed costing analysis, identifying baseline and new funding initiatives. Potential savings, and opportunities for leveraging external funding will be also explored. Investment decisions will be informed by robust monitoring.

Local board views and implications

46. This phase of the project has not involved formal engagement with local boards. Local board members (and key informant interviewees) were invited to participate in engagement “walk-throughs”, where they had the opportunity to see the key findings of the research report, to respond to relevant questions, and to indicate their preference for the options. A summary of the feedback is included in Attachment B.
47. Local board members who attended the “walk-throughs” indicated a high level of concern and a strong desire to see an end to homelessness. They wanted to see:
- More health and social support for homeless people
 - A regional and/or national strategy, with a coordinated response
 - Council taking a stronger leadership role
 - Innovative responses to address housing supply and to improve security of tenure
 - Increased partnering with central government and the private sector.
48. They generally preferred Option 4, but acknowledged that funding may be prohibitive, in which case, Option 3 would be more feasible.
49. The key research report findings were also presented to the Waitemata Local Board and Auckland City Centre Advisory Board, who expressed similar views.
50. It is envisaged that the next phase will involve formal engagement with local boards.

Māori impact statement

51. Māori are disproportionately affected and have the second highest rate of homelessness, after Pacific peoples. In 2013, 32 per cent of the homeless population were Māori. Over 80 per cent of the Housing First participants in the central city are Māori⁸. Over 40 per cent of people on the social housing register are Māori⁹.

⁸ <https://www.lifewise.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Infographic-Housing-First-July-2017.jpg>

⁹ Ministry of Social Development (2016), Social Housing Purchasing Strategy.

52. The report identified a range of additional complexities experienced by Māori including:
- Structural and historical disadvantage
 - Multiple, cumulative risk factors across income, education, employment and health
 - Lack of culturally appropriate services and support
 - Discrimination, particularly in relation to securing rental accommodation
 - Fewer housing options for larger families.
53. The report identifies Māori as a priority population with specific needs to be addressed. While the current homelessness initiatives often reach Māori, targeting is limited. The evaluation of the Housing First pilot will include analysis of the impact on Māori, and could inform future approaches. Options three and four provide greater scope to collaborate more closely with Māori organisations, and to deliver more culturally appropriate services.

Implementation

- a) For either Option 3 or 4, staff will report back to the Committee with an implementation plan. This would include:
- Establishing mechanisms to engage with cross-sectoral agencies
 - Analysis of relevant housing demand and supply
 - Conducting a more detailed stocktake of current service provision and gaps
 - A shared purpose statement and high level, cross-sectoral plan
 - Detailed costings, including what could be done within current resourcing and interventions that could be prioritised subject to resourcing
 - A monitoring framework.
- b) The first phase (development of the implementation plan) would require 1.5 FTEs for six to eight months. The same resource would be required for coordination, monitoring and reporting to implement the plan. This could be absorbed within the baseline of the Affordable Housing Policy team. Funding for delivery of projects by the council would need to be sought through Annual Plan and Long-term Plan projects.
- c) Staff will also continue to work together to consider the potential impact of the Public Safety and Nuisance and (potentially) freedom camping bylaws on homeless people, and agreed actions resulting from the Mayoral Taskforce report on affordable housing.

Attachments

- A. Addressing Homelessness in Auckland Policy Research Report: Identifying Auckland Council's Position and Role.
- B. Summary of “walk-through” feedback on homelessness policy project.

Signatories

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