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Responding to Homelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand



Auckland Council's Role in Addressing Homelessness

The Community Empowerment Unit and Community and Social Policy Teams, Auckland Council

Auckland is New Zealand's largest city with a population of just over 1.6 million. Auckland seeks to be a world class, inclusive city that celebrates its unique Māori culture and rich diversity. It is an attractive place to live, welcoming around 45,000 new Aucklanders each year.

At the same time, rapid population growth presents many challenges including a major housing shortage as population growth exceeds housing supply and increases pressure on infrastructure. Housing affordability, for rent or purchase, is declining, and there is significant unmet demand for social, affordable and emergency housing.

Homelessness is a growing reality in Auckland for many individuals and families, including those in employment.

Statistics New Zealand's definition of homelessness includes those sleeping rough, in temporary accommodation, sharing temporarily or living in uninhabitable dwellings. Between the 2006 and the 2013 census the level of homelessness across the Auckland region increased by 26 per cent. 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.

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.

Nationally, low-income households, children and young people (51 per cent), and sole parent

families (43 per cent) are the most affected groups. Pacific people are 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.

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. The housing market is also a key driver with high levels of unmet demand for social and affordable housing. This is highlighted by recent estimates that the New Zealand Government will spend \$50 million nationally on emergency housing (such as motels) in 12 months.

As housing supply pressures increase, people with fewer risk factors face homelessness. A single risk factor or event, such as a 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.

Policy Position on Council's Role in Homelessness

Auckland Council recognised the need to determine its role and position in addressing homelessness, including emergency housing.

In August 2017, the Council's Environment and Community Committee resolved to take a stronger and more aspirational approach where homelessness is rare,

brief and non-recurring. There was commitment to develop a cross-sectoral regional strategy to address homelessness.

At the meeting, Councillor Cathy Casey, a long-time advocate for addressing homelessness issues said Auckland Council should be proud of the work it is doing.

'This council has placed homelessness high on its agenda and continues to work on ways it can support solutions to this growing need.'

'We have agreed to up our game with a regional strategy for addressing homelessness in Auckland and will be a strong voice advocating for the government to do more to meet its obligations to some of its most vulnerable citizens,' she said.

This decision builds on current activity and will help to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration and leverage investment across the sector. Auckland's 30 year spatial plan, The Auckland Plan, has largely guided activity to date and includes priorities and targets relating to affordable housing and homelessness.

An Insight into the Experience of Rough Sleeping in Central Auckland

In January 2015, Auckland Council along with Auckland City Mission, Lifewise and Thinkplace completed a research project on the experience of rough sleeping in central Auckland. The research revealed insights from both people who had first-hand experience of sleeping rough as well as from members of the public.

The research identified many issues, particularly in relation to safety and wellbeing, and how access to health and social services could be made

easier. The research also drew attention to the ways in which the lives of those who sleep rough intersect with others who use public spaces around central Auckland.

Auckland Council Steps up Response to Homelessness

In March 2017, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) made funding available for Housing First in Auckland. 'Housing First' is founded on the principle that permanent, secure, safe housing is a basic human right for all. The model recognises that it is easier for people to address issues such as mental health and substance abuse once they are housed. The priority is to quickly move people into appropriate housing and then immediately provide wrap-around services to support their success.

Auckland Mayor Phil Goff participated in the annual Lifewise 'Big Sleepout' and says homelessness is a growing blight on our city with increasing numbers of people sleeping rough in the city centre and suburbs. He says it represents a huge social and human cost which needs to be addressed.

'The council is working with central government and non-government organisations to progress a Housing First policy. This aims to first house the homeless and to also provide support services to tackle the cause which led to them being homeless,' says Mayor Goff.

Auckland Council has contributed an additional \$1 million to support delivery of the Housing First Auckland pilot. It is operated through a collective of five community social housing providers, including: Lifewise, Auckland City Mission, Kāhui Tū Kaha (formerly Affinity Services), Link People and Vision West.

The pilot has funding for two years. The initiative aims to support 472 chronically homeless people into permanent accommodation and to sustain their tenancy. Their vision is to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring.

In addition under the long-term Plan 2015-2025, the governing body approved \$830,000 funding over a



Waterfall by Fraser Hoffe

three year period for emergency housing, homelessness and rough sleeping responses across Auckland. Response initiatives include the regional outreach services operated by the Auckland City Mission and the Salvation Army Waitakere in west Auckland; the development of a homelessness services website; and enhanced coordination of the emergency housing sector.

Enhancing the city centre's public amenities, including shower and toilet provision, has the potential to considerably enhance dignity and wellbeing for the rough sleeping community. The council's current approach to the provision of public amenities is being investigated to identify opportunities to enhance delivery and outcomes for all city centre users.

In June 2016, Te Puea Marae in south Auckland first opened its doors to homeless whanau for 12 weeks during the winter months and generated regional and national debate about the issue of homelessness. Auckland Council provided financial and in-kind support.

In August 2016, the council agreed a contribution of \$2 million to upgrade the emergency accommodation provided at James

Liston Hostel. This facility provides emergency accommodation for people who are sleeping rough. The much needed refurbishment will be complete by mid-2018.

Auckland Council's investment to address homelessness continues in 2017 with the Mayoral Proposal in the Annual Budget 2017/2018, which prioritised \$500,000 to promote collaboration between agencies across the sector to address chronic homelessness.

A Coordinated Multi-agency Response

At present, Auckland Council convenes the multi-agency Rough Sleeping Steering Group which meets monthly to circuit-break issues relating to rough sleeping. The focus of this group is to provide strategic responses to rough sleeping, originally in the city centre. The development of the city centre Housing First programme was a main goal of this group and key members were part of the project design group. As levels of rough sleeping have increased across the region, the group has taken a wider geographical focus. Additional support is provided on the ground to connect different parts of the sector, enhance collaboration and coordinate delivery of enhanced outcomes for homeless.

Homelessness is a complex issue which requires a planned and coordinated cross-sectoral response. Development and implementation of the cross-sectoral homelessness strategy will require a coordinated approach involving central government, local government, non-government organisations, philanthropic organisations and the private sector. The strategy will focus on responding to the immediate needs of homeless people, along with ending and preventing all forms of homelessness.

Please forward any questions or enquiries to:

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