

**Submission
No 43**

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Organisation: Woollahra Municipal Council

Date Received: 13 August 2021



Council Ref: 21/157338
Your Ref:

13 August 2021

Wendy Lindsay MPC
The Chair
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Lindsay

At the Finance, Community and Services Committee meeting of Woollahra Council, held on 9 August, 2021, it was resolved that Council make the following submission to the NSW Government enquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address social housing shortage.

The following areas are both relevant to the enquiry and align with Council's initiatives to meet unmet community needs. Woollahra Council has responded to identified local deficiencies, normally provided by State and Federal Governments, due to increased housing demand, in a number of different areas and out of concern for the Woollahra community.

In accordance with the enquiry's terms of reference, Council wishes to highlight the following:

a) Options to better support 'meanwhile use' (temporary supportive accommodation), and the current major planning barriers to 'meanwhile use'

Provision of a Homeshare service

HomeShare is a unique solution to two of Australia's largest social issues, social isolation / loneliness and affordable housing. Older homeowners living alone with a spare room, provide affordable accommodation for younger people facing housing instability, close to their work, study and social needs. In exchange, the homeowner benefits from companionship, peace of mind and some extra help around the home, minimising the needs for some home support services.

Homeshare is facilitated by one of Woollahra's key community organisation's Holdsworth Community. Staff match Householders and sharers in an organised and mutually beneficial way.

Identified Need

- Social isolation in older people leads to an increase in demand for services at home and premature entry into residential aged care. In the 2016 Census, 23.7% of the Woollahra population were aged over 60 years, in comparison to 19% for Greater Sydney.

The majority of older people do not want to enter residential Aged Care and would prefer to age in their own home. There is currently a wait list of 1706 people for a Home Care Package in South East Sydney to enable older people to remain at home.

Over the last 12 months, Holdsworth responded to 108 sharer enquiries and 79 owner enquiries about HomeShare, the majority being from women. 38 people were interviewed and 6 matches are currently in place, effective 30 June 2021. There are 7 sharers and 3 owners waiting to be matched. Noting the impact of COVID -19 on the delivery of this service.

- HomeShare is a much needed solution for older women who are at risk of homelessness. Holdsworth Community received over 35 enquiries from potential sharers between the ages of 45-70 years, 72% or 25 of whom were women. The number of older homeless women in Australia increased by over 30% between 2011 and 2016 to nearly 7,000 (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), April 2019). According to the AHRC, there are limited services for older women who have lived conventional lives, but have found themselves renting, recently separated or no longer employed.

Since launching HomeShare in October 2018, 74% of sharer enquiries have been from women. The majority of which are experiencing financial hardship. This gender analysis has identified that there is a genuine need to assist women experiencing housing affordability stress with a hardship subsidy.

Council's response

In 2019, Council provided a seeding grant of \$50,000 to support Holdsworth Community's Homeshare program to establish and demonstrate success. In July 2021 Holdsworth was awarded a \$200,000 tender to pilot the Homeshare program across Sydney by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

Recommendation to NSW Government

The NSW Government needs to provide increased funding opportunities to community based organisations to develop similar Homeshare initiatives and to provide ongoing funding to Holdsworth Community to extend the program, beyond the \$200,000 pilot funding project, described above.

b) Options to improve access to existing accommodation to provide community housing

Housing needs for women, with dependent children who are subject to domestic violence

The Woollahra LGA is known as a wealthy and privileged LGA but, like all LGAs, it also faces a range of social issues including incidences of domestic abuse. In the Woollahra LGA, there are an increasing number of women who are subject to domestic violence including psychological and financial abuse.

They are faced with limited options when looking for alternate accommodation. They need to look into either private rental; affordable or social housing, pursue home ownership, or remain in their home in an untenable situation.

Many of these women remain in abusive situations because:

- they cannot receive social housing assistance as they do not meet the income requirements or cannot access their family's money;
- societal pressure and shame; and or
- wanting to keep their children attending the local schools and for local support groups.

Identified Need

- Domestic and Family Violence in NSW 2016-2020 statistics show that in the last 12 months, total Domestic Violence assault incidents recorded by the NSW Police were 32,078. This is an increase of 2.4% over the last 5 years. In the Woollahra LGA, there has been an average of 220.2 Domestic Assault incidents reported each year between 2011 to 2021.
- The Deli Women's and Children's Centre is a key service providing counselling, support and referral for women in the Eastern Suburbs. The Deli have experienced an increase in demand during both the 2020 and 2021 COVID lockdowns, compared to previous years. Clients are

reporting an escalation in domestic violence, possibly due to COVID related stressors, exacerbation in mental health issues and women feeling isolated and uncertain.

In comparison to the pre COVID period, January to June 2019, the Deli has received an increase in monthly enquiries, ranging from 24% to 172% for January to June 2021.

- Bondi Beach Cottage, who provides counselling services and refers clients to Woollahra Council’s Domestic and Family Violence Accommodation and Support Program advised on 30 July 2021 that *‘The need for housing is enormous. If there was housing available right now, we have 8 clients who would be interested in pursuing this option. Some of these are still living with the perpetrator because they cannot afford to leave’*.
- In the recent national report, commissioned by *Everybody’s Home*, titled ‘Nowhere to go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women who have experienced domestic and family violence’ by Equity Economics July, 2021, outlines the need for increased social housing for women facing domestic violence across Australia.
 - Family and domestic violence is the primary reason women and children seek specialist homelessness services, but only 3.2% are currently receiving the long-term housing solutions they need.
 - Over the period, March 2020 to March 2021, there has been a 5.9% increase in the number of women seeking specialist homelessness services that had experienced domestic violence, compared to a 0.4% decrease across all other client groups.
 - Equity Economics estimates that the lack of long term social housing is leading to approx. 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners and approx. 9,120 women a year becoming homeless after leaving their homes due to domestic and family violence and being unable to secure long-term housing.

Council’s response

The Woollahra Council Domestic and Family Violence Accommodation and Support Program was established by Woollahra Council and The Women’s Housing Company (WHC) in February 2019. Council funds this program at a cost of \$360,000 each year, with the tenancy managed by WHC. This is a 3 year agreement and ends on 30 June 2022.

The clients of the Program are residents of the Woollahra local government area and are women with dependent children who are escaping domestic and family abuse. The Program enables women to remain affordably housed in the Woollahra LGA, to maintain community and support connections, while stabilising and improving their circumstances, with the aim of exiting the Program into sustainable private long-term housing.

Clients are nominated and supported by local specialist service providers (Jewish Care and Bondi Beach Cottage) and have access to additional brokerage funds to support sustainable tenancies. Council currently supports 10 units (8 x 2 bedroom units and 2 x 3 bedroom units) with the tenancies ranging from 6 months to three years. The Program is currently housing nine women and fourteen children. The average age of the women is 42 and the age range of the children is between two and fourteen years old.

In WHC’s 30 June 2021 Program Report, they advised that *‘With each successive expansion of the Program, the WHC has received tremendous response and feedback from local support services, expressing how valuable it is to have this affordable housing option for their clients to stay in the local area while dealing with the many and varied impacts of domestic and family violence.*

Recommendations to NSW Government

- The NSW Government needs to support women, who are not able to access social housing or other financial assistance, due to high family income or assets. A more flexible approach is

required, understanding that each family is different and access to social housing and support payments needs to be open to women with high family income or assets.

- The NSW Government needs to provide financial support to community housing providers to provide similar programs to the Woollahra Council Domestic and Family Violence Accommodation and Support Program for women who do not meet criteria to be eligible for social housing and support payment assistance.
- The NSW Government needs to provide grant funding opportunities for local Councils to implement similar initiatives such as the Woollahra Council Domestic and Family Violence Accommodation and Support Program.
- Woollahra Council supports the need for additional social housing as indicated in 'Nowhere to go: The benefits of providing long-term social housing to women who have experienced domestic and family violence' by Equity Economics July, 2021. They present that there is an immediate need of 16,810 additional social housing units (across Australia) to ensure that women and children escaping family and domestic violence have somewhere to go and are not forced into returning to a violent partner or homelessness. (p15)

c) Options for crisis, key-worker and other short term accommodation models:

Woollahra Council adopted the Draft Woollahra Housing Strategy and Draft Woollahra Affordable Housing Policy 2021 on 28 June 2021, for the purpose of public exhibition.

Council is committed to protecting existing housing and facilitating new affordable housing to meet the needs of our community, particularly key and essential workers on low and moderate incomes. One of the five Housing Objectives listed in the Draft Woollahra Housing Strategy's aims to support the increased supply of accessible housing and affordable rental housing.

Key measures to help achieve this include:

- Facilitating accessible and affordable housing close to health services, retail, cafes, and restaurants, pharmacies and a range of other services.
- Increasing affordable and social housing supply
- Requiring dwellings to be adaptable

The Draft Strategy states that Council will work with neighbouring councils, the NSW Government, our community and industry to identify opportunities and innovative mechanisms to address increasing the supply of affordable housing and social housing.

More than 10 of the 32 specific actions in the Draft Strategy focus on addressing the issue of affordable housing. These actions include advocacy, policy development and investigation into opportunities for affordable housing on Council land.

Identified Need

- The Draft Woollahra Housing Strategy has identified that Woollahra's housing affordability is poor compared to the Sydney average. Housing prices and rents have been increasing over the last 20 years and are unaffordable for households.
- The Woollahra LGA is one of Australia's premium residential markets and prices are significantly higher than the Sydney average. This affects redevelopment feasibility, community demographics and affordability. In December 2020, the average sales price for a home in Greater Sydney was \$1.216 million and in the Woollahra LGA it was \$2.928 million. The Median rent was \$650 per week. In this context it is expected that rents and sales prices will remain high in the Woollahra LGA.

- SGS Economics and Planning identified that in 2016, approximately 10.3% of households had a weekly household income of less than \$650 and 46.6% had a weekly income of more than \$3,000. While demand for social and affordable housing in Woollahra is lower than the Sydney average, there is a significant shortfall in both these housing types.
- The NSW Family and Community Services (FACS) reported that in 2016, nearly all low income household in the Woollahra LGA were in rental stress and over half low income households were in mortgage stress. There is also very little affordable or social housing stock in the Woollahra LGA. In 2016 there were only 140 social and affordable dwellings. The Woollahra LGA does not have housing for Indigenous communities.
- There are significant waiting lists and waiting times to access social housing in the Eastern suburbs area. For affordable rental housing, analysis by SGS Economics and Planning identified a gap of at least 1,900 dwellings. SGC Economics and Planning estimates that based on prices rising faster than wages, demand for social and affordable housing is likely to increase. Council is concerned that the current mechanisms available to facilitate affordable and social housing are not delivering sufficient supply to keep up with demand.
- Council is concerned that if key workers (jobs considered essential to supporting community life – e.g. health care, education, emergency and other services) are unable to access affordable housing in and around Woollahra they may need to live much further away. This not only reduces diversity in the community but may limit businesses and other critical services.

Recommendations to NSW Government

- The NSW Government needs to make refinements to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Affordable Rental Housing) 2009 to help ensure that:
 - Boarding houses are defined as a type of affordable housing and managed by a registered not-for-profit community housing provider;
 - Part 3 allows Councils to mitigate the loss of affordable housing by levying monetary contributions; and
 - Floor space bonuses in genuine affordable rental housing outcomes; and
 - Affordable rental housing is provided in perpetuity and supports key workers. Conditions of consent will be prepared to reinforce this requirement.
- In advocating for expanded affordable housing mechanisms, Council requests the NSW Government to permit the preparation of affordable housing contributions scheme for all new apartment developments.
- The NSW Government must increase its investment in public housing in Greater Sydney and protect the existing public housing stock in the Woollahra LGA.
- The NSW Government, in coordination with the Commonwealth Government, take action to improve housing affordability, by reducing the upward pressure on housing prices and rents

and improving housing affordability through measures such as tax reform, rental assistance programs and funding to increase social housing.

- Woollahra Council would welcome opportunities to work with the NSW Government to encourage private schools to provide low cost housing for teachers, such as through greater use of school facilities.

Other housing matters

With the COVID -19 pandemic in mid-2020, local residents living in public housing estates approached the local State and Federal members, Council and Holdsworth Community for support to address food security concerns, the supply of reusable face masks and providing information regarding services available. More recently there has been the need to address transport to a COVID Vaccination hub.

Identified Need

The Department of Housing owns four sites within the Woollahra LGA for public housing. This represents a housing estate of 55 units in Paddington, another 3 large blocks of units in Woollahra and 2 residential houses in Woollahra/Paddington.

Council's response

Woollahra Council has responded to the needs of residents living in public housing estates in Woollahra, in particular supporting residents living in Lawson St in Paddington.

- The OzHarvest Hamper Program has delivered free fresh food hampers to residents of Public Housing units in Paddington since August 2020 by way of NSW State funding provided to OzHarvest. The program, delivered in partnership with Council, OzHarvest and Holdsworth Community, commenced with an 8 week trial delivering 50 hampers weekly from August to October 2020 and continued a delivery of 50 hampers fortnightly from October 2020 to 30 June 2021. The program was recently extended due to the latest lockdown, tentatively until end September 2021.

Council is currently exploring solutions to provide more sustainable food security options for these residents once the OzHarvest Hamper Program finishes to include: partnering with COA Incorporate to deliver food to senior residents; promoting Holdsworth Community's Home Cuisine program; and, consulting with City of Sydney on partnerships they have developed with other service providers operating in neighbouring suburbs.

- 230 reusable masks were delivered to public housing residents in October 2020 with information on safe use of masks and other NSW Public Health requirements and recommendations. Council has recently coordinated for Holdsworth Community Transport to provide free transport to and from a COVID-19 vaccination hub in Woolloomooloo and will continue to do so until residents using the service are fully vaccinated.
- Council continues to provide pathways to support and information for individual community members by connecting these residents with local service providers, circulating information about relevant support and/or wellbeing programs that may be of benefit.

Recommendations to NSW Government

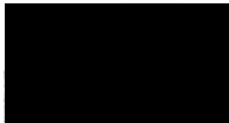
- Although not fully within the Terms of Reference for this enquiry, the NSW Government needs to consider funding for ongoing food security for public housing residents within the Woollahra LGA through either OzHarvest and/or other service providers.

- The NSW Department of Housing install noticeboards in the Lawson St Public housing site, as requested by residents since October 2020 to help improve quality of life and access to information.

Woollahra Council looks forward to the outcome of the NSW Government enquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address social housing shortage and to see new opportunities and initiatives arising from the enquiry.

If you have any further questions please contact [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Craig Swift-McNair
General Manager