

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST  
RENTAL ACCOMMODATION**

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**Legislative Council**

**Standing Committee on Social Issues**

**Inquiry into homelessness and low-cost rental accommodation**

**A submission by Parramatta City Council**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- The scope of this submission covers information that will assist the Legislative Council with their enquiry into policies and programs outside of mainstream public housing that are being implemented within Australia and internationally to **reduce homelessness**. It does not report on policies or strategies to increase the availability of key worker accommodation.
- This submission demonstrates that:
  - Parramatta Local Government Area, as Sydney's second CBD, is a critical site for business and a focus area for residential and employment growth in coming years.
  - Homelessness in the Parramatta Local Government Area (LGA) is a significant and growing issue, and this trend will increase as Parramatta's CBD continues to develop and the economy weakens.
  - In this context, there is a critical need to be proactive in managing homelessness, for the benefit of individuals at risk of homelessness, those who are homeless and the Parramatta community more broadly including residents, visitors and businesses.
  - The role of Parramatta City Council (PCC, or 'Council') in homelessness includes research and analysis, strategic planning, infrastructure support, partnership development, and capacity building strategies focused toward local homelessness community service providers.
  - Currently all of Council's homelessness activities are funded by Council itself.
  - Further funding for local community service providers is absolutely necessary to meet the growing demand and the identified gaps in service delivery that currently exist – for example support and service delivery for women with teenage sons and for families with children (particularly women with children), and closing the gap in continuity of care between crisis care and medium and long term care.

### About Parramatta City Council

- The City of Parramatta lies 24 kilometres west of Sydney's CBD at the heart of the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Region. Parramatta is located at the head of Sydney Harbour, with hills and valleys to the north of the Parramatta River and the Cumberland Plain to the south.
- The head of the Parramatta River was home to the Burrumatta, a clan of the Darug people whose name means 'the place where eels lie down'. Parramatta's rich Indigenous heritage is reflected in its name, Council's crest and the widespread use of Indigenous designs in public art throughout the City.
- Today, Parramatta is recognised as Sydney's second CBD, the sixth largest CBD in Australia and the economic capital of Western Sydney, Australia's fastest growing region.
- It is a major regional transport hub accessible by road, rail, bus and ferry. Parramatta is the fourth busiest station on the CityRail network.

- PCC has developed a long term strategic plan for the City called Parramatta Twenty25. Parramatta Twenty25 was developed over an 18 month period incorporating the findings of a great deal of research, including over 400 local, state and national policies and plans. It is also based on extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders through a consultation process called Dreaming Parramatta. The plan identifies 7 Destinations which we will work to achieve:
  - D1- Land and water that is protected, respected and sustained
  - D2- A society that is health and compassionate
  - D3- Businesses that are dynamic, prosperous and socially responsible
  - D4- Neighbourhoods that are liveable and distinctive
  - D5- A community that is diverse and cohesive
  - D6- People and places that are linked by sustainable transport and communication networks
  - D7- A city that is innovative and inspirational
  - See [www.dreamingparramatta.com.au](http://www.dreamingparramatta.com.au) for further details
- Work to improve the well being of homeless people and reduce the impact of homelessness on the city relates to Destinations 2,3,4 and 5.

## 2. THE HOMELESSNESS NEED IN THE PARRAMATTA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)

### A. Findings from the Federal Government's White Paper on Homelessness

Data from the white paper shows the following national trends in homelessness:

- Young people aged 12 – 18 are the largest group of people experiencing homelessness
- Over the last 5 years the number of children who are homeless under the age of 12 has increased by 22%. The vast majority of children who are homeless are with their parents.
- Families with children who are homeless have increased by 11% since 2001.
- The 2006 census showed large increases in the number of older people who were homeless.
- Many people who use specialist homelessness services have difficulty finding alternative accommodation to move to after they have received support. Over the last 5 years the average length of time spent in specialist homelessness services has increased from 33 days to 50 days.

(Source: Commonwealth of Australia. The Road Home: Homelessness White Paper. Canberra, 2008)

### B. The ABS Statistics

The 2006 Census reported that there were:

- 78 improvised dwellings/sleeping out/tents;
- 35 people living in boarding houses and private hostels;
- 57 people living in hostels for the homeless, night shelters and refuges;  
*This is a total of 170 homeless people on census night (although Census does not capture a true picture)*
- The majority of homeless people counted in the Census were single males
- The census is unlikely to have identified a large number of homeless women and children falling into the category of secondary and tertiary homelessness as these groups are largely hidden.

### C. What Local Service Providers are saying about the need

Service providers within the Parramatta LGA see a more disturbing picture of the homelessness need in the area.

- Service providers estimated **between 200 - 300 people are homeless in Parramatta every night;**
- Service providers identified the number of instances of support provided is 4,669 clients within the July 2006 to June 2007 period (note: this takes into

account repeat uses). This equates to 933.8 instances of support per day per 5 day week`;

- Difference is attributable to services providing meals and other basic services which may be used by those at risk of homelessness, and also to clients using more than one service across the year;
- Service providers report that the majority of users are men 15 - 34 years old;
- Males alone were the most common group using services, followed by females with children;
- 8.6% of the referrals are of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background compared to 0.8% of all people in the Parramatta LGA.

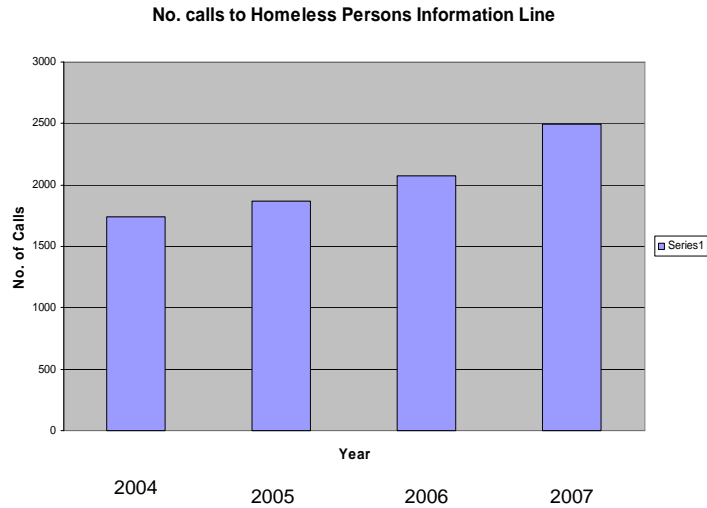
(Source – Environmetrics Report on Homelessness and Support in Parramatta, December 2007)

#### **D. Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) Data for Parramatta LGA**

City of Sydney's Homeless Persons Information Centre collects data from its callers. Data from callers from the Parramatta LGA for 2004 – 2008 show the following significant and worrying trends:



## Calls to the HPIC from people in the Parramatta LGA are increasing

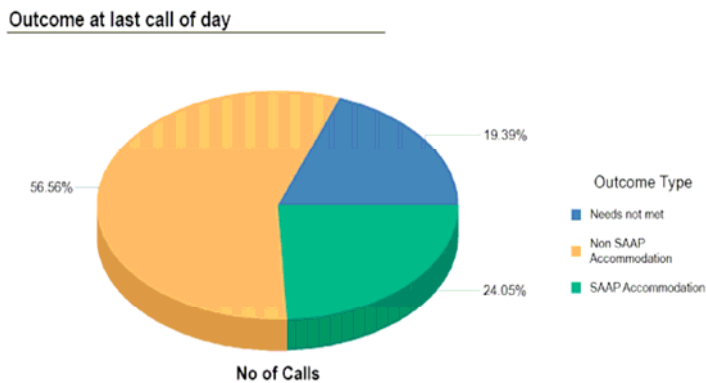


In 2007, there were 2493 callers

Data from Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) City of Sydney

Note: Parramatta LGA had higher than average growth in homelessness than other areas covered by HPIC between 2001/2 and 2006/7. (Source: Environmentrics Report on Homelessness and Support in Parramatta, December 2007)

## Not all callers needs can be met

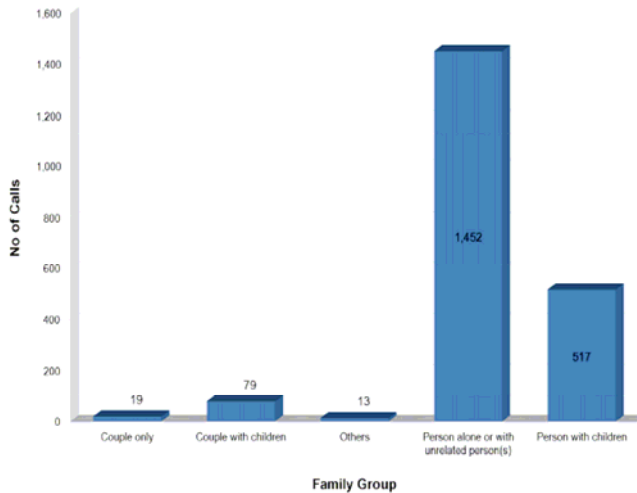


In 2007, 19% Parramatta callers did not have their need for accommodation that night met

Data from Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) City of Sydney

## Most callers are alone or with an unrelated person

HPIL caller - family type 07 - 08



### WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 2004?

The number of homeless persons with children is growing

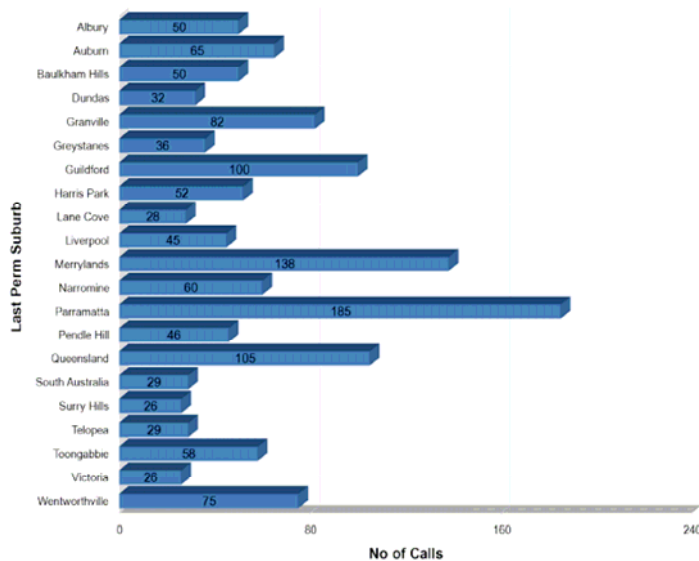
2007 = 20% total calls

2004 = 15% total calls

Data from Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) City of Sydney

## Most callers last permanent address is in Parramatta LGA

Top 20 last permanent suburbs



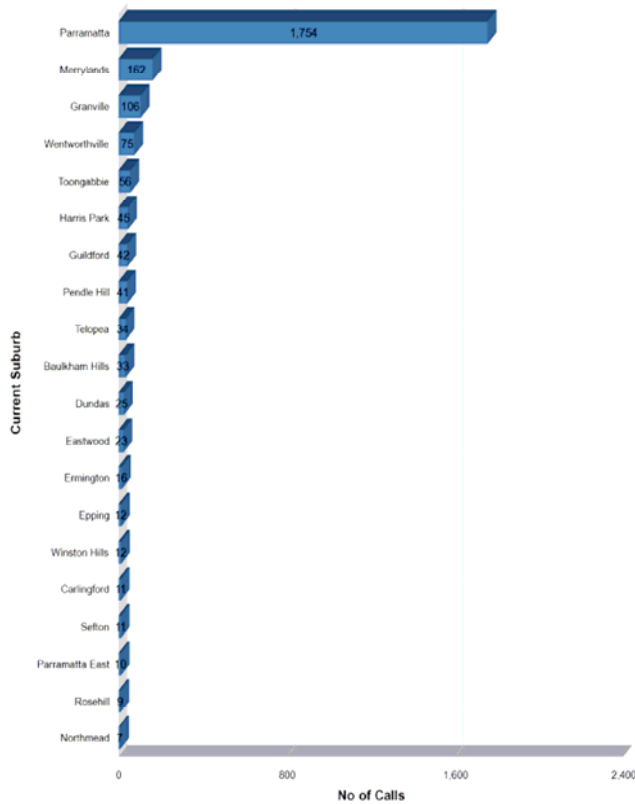
### WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 2004?

More people from interstate

	2004	2007
Parra LGA	11	7
Syd Suburb	5	4
Country	2	2
NSW Interstate	2	3

Data from Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) City of Sydney

**Top 20 current suburb**



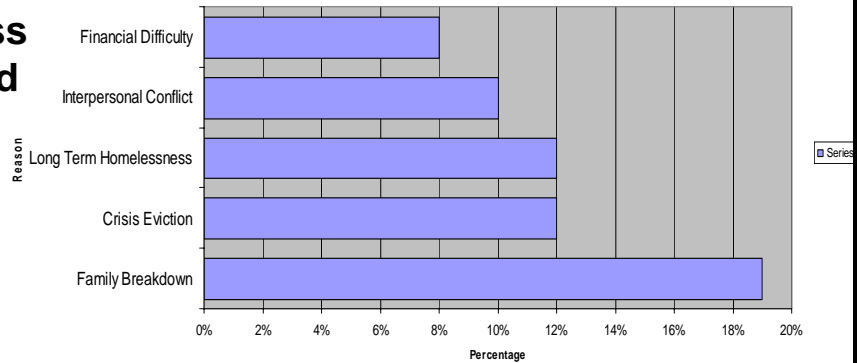
**Most callers call from Parramatta**

**WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 2004?**  
 Top 10 suburbs have stayed the same but ordering has changed  
 Toongabbie now 5<sup>th</sup> (10<sup>th</sup> in 2004)

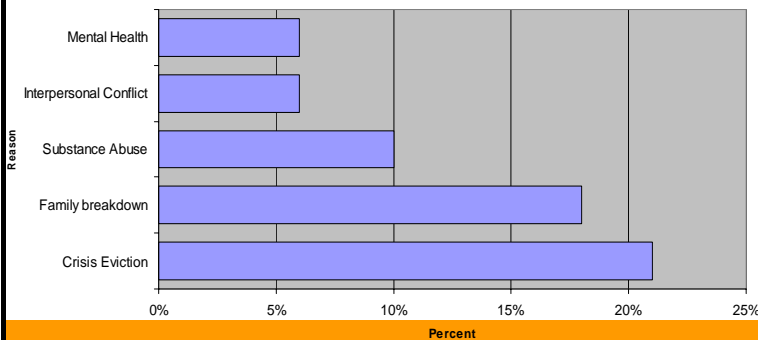
Data Source: HPIC City of Sydney

**Reasons for homelessness have changed**

**Top 5 Reasons for Homelessness 2004**



**Top 5 Reasons for Homelessness 2007**

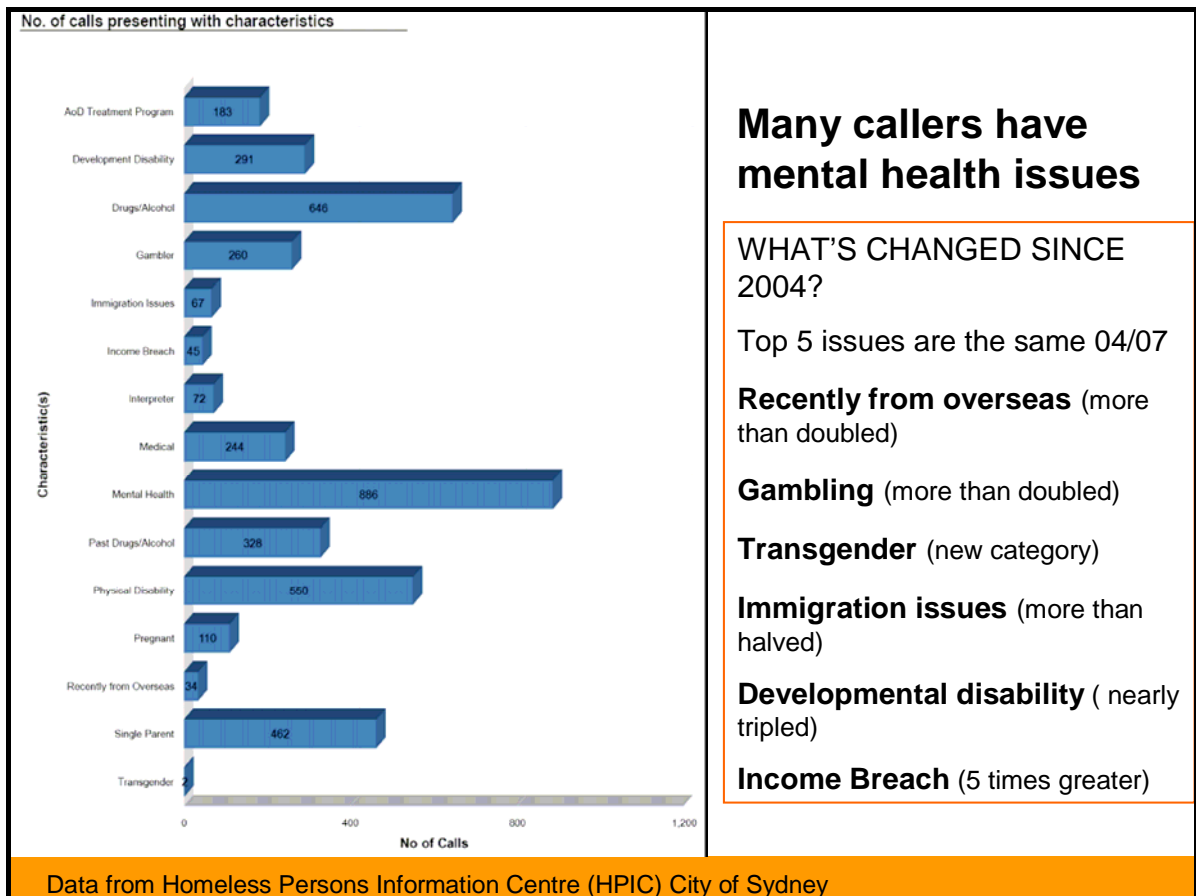


**WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 2004?**

Crisis eviction now primary reason

Less long term homelessness (7<sup>th</sup> compared to 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2004)

Mental health and substance abuse key impacts



## E. The Identified Service Gaps in Parramatta

Data from the ABS, the Environmetrics Report on Homelessness and Support in Parramatta, and the HPIC show there is a growing and changing homelessness need in Parramatta. Service providers need to be able to adapt to meet the needs of:

- Growing numbers of single men requiring accommodation
- Homeless women with children and teenagers
- Homeless people with mental health issues
- Homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Homeless Teenagers 13-17years old
- Homeless people from interstate
- Homeless people with gambling issues and those in income breach (i.e. those who have had their government benefits cut due to a failure to meet mutual obligation requirements).
- Homeless people with developmental disability
- Homeless people who are transgender

The following gaps in service provision in this area have already been identified:

- Services for families with children, particularly women with children
- Lack of medium and long term accommodation, especially for women with a larger number of children;
- Lack of services that cater for women with teenage sons;
- There is a gap in continuity of crisis care into medium and long term support.

(Source – Environmetrics Report on Homelessness and Support in Parramatta, December 2007)

### **3. PARRAMATTA CITY COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS**

The role and responsibilities of local government as defined in the *Local Government Act 1993* indicate that with its scope, resources and expertise, Councils can make a significant contribution to addressing both the causes and the effects of homelessness. If work is undertaken in partnership with other key stakeholders, the effectiveness of its interventions will be increased.

Parramatta City Council's role in responding to homelessness has developed over the past 5 years due to a number of factors:

- Growing evidence of the increasing need
  - There are large numbers of homelessness people in Parramatta and this is growing. The current financial crisis and its impact on housing affordability is likely to further exacerbate the rate of homelessness.
  - The number of homeless people accessing government and non government services within the LGA is increasing.
- The increasing visibility of homeless people, particularly within the CBD, and the impact this is having or is likely to have on the community more broadly, for example visitor and resident perception of safety, and small business productivity.
- Council's commitment to acting to improve the social needs of residents of the LGA through its long term strategic plan Parramatta Twenty 25. This plan particularly highlights actions to improve health, safety, housing and the amenity of neighbourhoods.
- Acknowledging that Parramatta LGA, especially the city centre, is defined as a growth area. Sydney Metropolitan Plan growth targets plan for dwellings to reach 21,000 in Parramatta by 2031. The employment capacity target is set at 27,000 for the same time period. As the City grows, and we continue to promote the development of the CBD, it is likely to attract more homeless people who seek safety in the anonymity and the built form infrastructure that a larger city offers. There is a critical need, therefore, to be proactive in managing homelessness in this context, for the benefit of individuals at risk of homelessness, those who are homeless and the community more broadly.

Council's homelessness activities are funded through Council itself. Funds cover staff time, project costs and community grants. The main activities Council is involved in are listed below.

## Research and Analysis

- Sourcing up to date information on the homelessness need in the local community as well as initiatives undertaken by local governments here and overseas

## Strategic Planning and Partnerships

- Planning for the best use of Council resources to benefit people who are homeless, as well as planning about how Council will work in partnership with the homelessness sector and other key stakeholders to collaboratively tackle the issue.

## Capacity Building of local Community Service Providers

- Provision of funding for programs and services for homeless people. Council's 2008-09 Community Grants Program allocated \$50,000 in funds to a number of community services working with homeless people across the LGA.
- Provision of current and future trend data on the local homelessness need and service delivery gaps, in order to assist community service providers in their own strategic and program planning and reviews.
- Facilitating the strengthening of existing community service provider partnerships, as well as the seeding of new partnerships (government and non government) with the aim of increasing homeless people's access to local resources by increasing the number and range of services and programs in the LGA. Three examples of these strategies follow.

## **Capacity Building Strategies to address homelessness**

Three strategies are discussed further:

- Issues Forums: Seeding and resourcing action to address homelessness
- Support for the establishment of a new women's specific network
- Supporting existing partnerships: Parramatta Homelessness Coalition and the Homelessness Week Working Party, Single Women's Project (WSAAS funded)

*Driving development of Issues Forums: Seeding and resourcing action to address homelessness*

- Issues forums are a recognised group strategy combining the presentation from experts of 'new' information, analysis and/or perspectives on a particular issue, and participatory sessions in which participants explore issues in more detail (using for example workshopping or group discussions). An issues forum enables consultation, participation *and* the development of action plans to address an issue.
- The Parramatta Homelessness Forums were initiated in 2008 by Parramatta City Council. An early planning meeting hosted by Council with key stakeholders from government and not for profit agencies resulted in the establishment of a Steering Group which prioritised and adopted the objectives of the Forums.
- The Forums aim to provide community services with the opportunity to work together to increase the opportunities for homeless people to access resources, supports and programs.  
They do this by:
  - Sharing knowledge and information on current issues and topics and on what services/ programs actually are on offer to homeless people
  - Building and strengthening partnerships between services and encouraging networking with other service providers and agencies
- The first Forum was held in November 2008 and attracted over 70 participants from over 50 agencies who work to support and resource homeless people in the LGA.
- This Forum appeared to have modest aims: the Steering Group decided to focus on identifying what services and programs in the LGA were currently available to homeless people (based on the advice of the Steering Group that the majority of services were *not* well informed on this) and what innovative models were being run in the LGA.
- It is note worthy that the Steering Group identified the need for the first Forum to focus on *local existing* programs and resources because of what they were being told by homeless people themselves i.e. homeless people in some instances had information on a particular program or service that other service providers were not aware of.
- Participant process evaluations of the first Forum clearly indicated that the objectives were met: participants had learnt more about existing services and had linked and networked with other services. Of most significance, participants had begun to identify ways in which they could work together to strengthen the resources and services available to homeless people in the LGA.
- The predicted outcomes of the Homelessness Issues Forums are already emerging:



- accurate and detailed mapping of existing services and resources has begun
  - *shared* priorities regarding homelessness are being identified (e.g. single women, young people)
  - *potential* new solutions and new models of service delivery are being identified
  - a reduction in the isolation experienced by some services and programs
  - the identification of potential additional resources
- Following the success of the first issues forum, a second Parramatta Homelessness Issues Forum will be held in April 2009 and will focus on the White Paper, particularly as it relates to homeless people in Parramatta. Expert speakers will include the Commonwealth Minister for Housing Tanya Plibersek, State Minister for Housing, David Borger and a representative from a peak not for profit, Homelessness NSW who will present different perspectives on the White Paper. Small Group workshops will enable participants to discuss in detail the issues. Once again, the Issues Forum model will inevitably strengthen networking. This combination (expert input, detailed discussion and linking/connecting) will increase participants' (service providers) potential and real ability to continue to address homelessness in the LGA.

#### *Supporting the establishment of a new Homeless Women's Coalition*

- The Single Women's Project is a Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme funded project that aims to break the cycle of homelessness for single women in Western Sydney through early intervention, referral, advocacy and resource development.
- The project also empowers women to develop the skills required to gain employment through education and training.
- Over the life of this project, a strong network of services has agreed to work towards the development of a women's homelessness 'coalition'. The 'coalition', while in its preliminary planning stage, aims to help services to build sustainable pathways and partnerships that appropriately meet the needs of clients.
- Council sits on the Steering Committee for this project and will continue to provide guidance and input.

#### *Supporting the Parramatta Homelessness Coalition*

- The Parramatta Homelessness Coalition came to fruition in February 2002 when a working party comprising Department of Community Services and representatives from three men's accommodation services in Parramatta began meeting to consider and negotiate an integrated service system.
- In December 2002, the Coalition was officially established. It comprises representatives of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program funded

services: Parramatta Mission, Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society. Representatives also attend from the Department of Housing, the Office of Community Housing and Parramatta City Council.

- When established the Coalition had a specific focus on men's homelessness issues impacting on the service delivery system in Parramatta. The Coalition linked to the broader strategic directions of the Western Sydney Strategic Plan for Homelessness (WSSPH).
- In 2007, a review of the Coalition was undertaken. Proposed new objectives were:
  1. To ensure effective and collaborative service response and use of resources to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
  2. To develop and maintain partnerships with the community, government, business and non government agencies to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
  3. To review available research and resources around homelessness and implement findings where appropriate
  4. To conduct evaluation of service delivery within the coalition
  5. To address stigmas and perceptions of homelessness
- Council is a partner in this coalition and provides resources in terms of staff time and expertise.

#### **4. SUMMARY**

Homelessness is a significant and growing issue for the City of Parramatta, and it will remain this way as the city itself continues to develop and grow in line with Sydney Metropolitan targets. Parramatta City Council is actively involved in working with partners to prevent homelessness where possible and improve the quality of life of those who are homeless in the LGA. Council is also focused on managing homelessness for the benefit of the broader community of visitors, residents and businesses. Gaps already exist in current service delivery for homeless people, impacting mostly on provision of appropriate support for families with children, particularly women with children and teenagers. An injection of funding is required to ensure Council and other local community service providers can continue to meet the current needs, and strategically plan and implement innovative services for growing and changing future needs.

## **5. REFERENCES**

Commonwealth of Australia. The Road Home: Homelessness White Paper. Canberra, 2008.

Environmetrics Social and Market Research Pty Ltd. Report on Homelessness and Support in Parramatta. Sydney, December 2007.

City of Sydney Homeless Persons Information Centre. Homelessness caller data 2004 – 2008 for Parramatta LGA. In excel data sheets provided in personal communications to Parramatta City Council, 2008.