

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

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Rachel Simpson
Director
Standing Committee of Social Issues
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

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Dear Ms Simpson

Re: NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry into Homelessness and Low Cost Rental Accommodation

Thank you for the opportunity for Liverpool City Council to respond to this Inquiry. Please find attached a copy of our response regarding homelessness and low cost rental accommodation.

The submission has been developed with feedback from a range of Council departments, including Strategic Planning, Statutory Planning, Community Planning, Enforcement, Community Services, and Property Management (Finance).

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact Council's Social Planner, Marlene Henry on 9821 7786.

Yours sincerely

Phil Tolhurst
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NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL'S INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

SUBMISSION FROM LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL MARCH 2009

Australia is currently experiencing a critical lack of affordable and appropriate accommodation options for people who are at risk of becoming homeless or who are already homeless. Public and social housing stock has decreased over the past decade, and waiting lists for this housing stock have increased. Throughout NSW, the number of people seeking temporary accommodation rose to over 7,600 in 2007-08, representing a 643 increase per month compared to the previous year. During the same period, private rental costs have increased due to the increased interest rates in 2008. Also many families have struggled to keep up with mortgage repayments and sadly have experienced foreclosures on their home. The Liverpool experience closely matches the situation statewide.

A current snapshot of the Liverpool LGA has revealed that:

- In 2008, housing stress (where which is defined as more than 30% of income being spent on mortgage and household repayments) was experienced by 53% of all low and moderate income households renting in the private rental market in Liverpool
- In 2008, the City of Sydney Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) received 927 calls for assistance from people who listed their last place of permanent residence as Liverpool.
- The most common reasons for homelessness for those calling from the Liverpool area, and also the Sydney region, were family breakdown and crisis eviction.
- According to the 2006 Census, in Liverpool, there were 247 people living in caravans, and 27 individuals were improvised sleepers or were sleeping in tents
- According to data from HPIC, mental health issues, single parenthood, drugs and alcohol and medical issues are additional triggers and concerns for those who are homeless in Liverpool
- According to Bankwest Key Worker Housing Affordability Report released in June 2008, Liverpool LGA remained an unaffordable place to live in both 2002 and 2007.
- Local media has highlighted contradiction in the affordability of housing in Liverpool: in past months, mortgage foreclosures and home repossessions were high in Liverpool in 2008 due to high interest rates, and many families have not been able to bounce back into an affordable repayment plan for their families and are now living on the street. Conversely, recent media has highlighted that the Liverpool market is one of the most affordable in Australia for those currently entering the housing market.
- A recent report about the Liverpool Housing Market provided to Council by NSW Housing stated that of all those in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) in Liverpool, 39% were experiencing housing stress.

STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Models of low cost rental housing

Anecdotal evidence and discussions with local service providers have reinforced the view that there is a need to increase the diversity and amount of housing stock that is affordable, accessible and appropriate to local needs. Whilst there is a demand for one bedroom housing stock, this should be provided with adequate links to social services in order to address additional factors such as social isolation, mobility and wider health issues.

Council's Strategic Planning unit supports Landcom's 7.5% provision of affordable housing in new developments. Council has achieved success with diverse and affordable housing mixes in recent developments in Middleton Grange, Cecil Gardens and Greenway Park. However, Council is unable to request developers to apply this benchmark as it can be difficult to attract private sector investment if their return is not profitable or in their favour.

The Landcom social housing model (a shared equity scheme) has also been considered as a favourable model to provide low cost housing. Building social equity rather than requesting developer contribution may be a model to examine if future needs create a demand.

With regard to traditional models of low cost housing, there are no official boarding houses operating in Liverpool. However there are some services providing similar services. Referrals are made to several low-cost motels and hotels in the area and region, but may have not met fire safety regulations and are considered to be appropriate for families with young children.

The Liverpool DCP requires a minimum of 10% of units to be 1 bedroom and an additional 10% to be 3 bedroom units within each residential development in the CBD. This seeks to improve the diversity of unit types available within the CBD to provide housing options to people that responds to differing income levels.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Encourage the requirement of 7.5% affordable housing mix to become a formal part of Council's LEP to ensure greater flexibility in the provision of housing across the local government area.
- Promote Council's strategic approaches through the Liverpool LEP and consolidated DCP to include higher densities and a diverse housing mix, as well as promoting the provision of public transport and facilities development to provide a greater range of housing choice and price brackets.
- Continue to require in the Liverpool DCP a mix of apartment types within Liverpool's CBD to meet demand for smaller and more affordable dwellings for a range of family sizes.

The capacity to delivery low cost rental accommodation

Many social housing service providers are looking for affordable land to build housing or related services but such land is in short supply. One option could be to utilise community land in Council ownership. However, it is hard to release this land for a particular purpose because Community land usually has a fixed tenure of use with leases limited to 21 years in duration.

In the past, Council has received a number of applications to build and create low cost housing options in Liverpool. However, the perception of this type of housing and the discrimination and stigma attached to those who live there may have contributed to the applications being unsuccessful or undetermined.

The Liverpool Central Business District (CBD) has a requirement in place to encourage mix of housing. This is regarded as a positive strategy in order to encourage a greater mix of residential development in the CBD, but this requirement has not been favoured in the past by the NSW Government

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Encourage diversity in housing stock in Liverpool for those who are looking to access the private rental market, and for lower income earners seeking to purchase affordable homes that reflect their housing needs.
- To undertake an audit of community facilities and community land in Liverpool LGA to determine:
 - if any facilities are able to be utilised to provide social services or support for those who are homeless or at risk
 - if any community land can be utilised for housing projects

Current barriers to growth in low cost rental housing

It is hard to offer further incentives to developers in order to increase their delivery of a diverse housing mix. Incentives such as offering a greater density or increased floor space ratios in order to influence capacity of low cost housing may not be enough as they are often included within the current DCP controls and it is difficult to offer further incentives. The Liverpool LEP already promotes higher density developments along public transport corridors, around retail and service centres and in areas of high amenity. The development of a Council policy for the provision of a more accessible, appropriate, affordable and adaptable housing mix may be useful. This policy may also examine the nexus between affordable housing and the provision of housing for those at risk of becoming or who are homeless.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

For Council to consider the feasibility of:

- Developing a policy to enable a greater accessible, appropriate, affordable and adaptable housing mix in Liverpool.
- Ensuring that housing mix and density is identified and addressed through Council's social impact assessment process (to be developed).

Strategies to avoid concentrations of disadvantage

In 2002, Council developed a Policy on Homelessness to ensure its commitment to this issue. This policy promotes the social planning process and in partnership with key stakeholders to:

- identify the extent of homelessness in the local area and region
- monitor trends in homelessness
- develop appropriate strategies for generating action to address homelessness.

In order to improve housing diversity, and implement key objectives in the policy, Council utilises the following mechanisms:

- Implementing the LLEP and LDCP 2008 which through zoning and controls promotes the provision of higher density development in areas of greatest accessibility, sets minimum standards for unit mix in the Liverpool CBD, and allows a greater diversity of housing stock across the LGA.
- Influencing macro housing, economic and social policy changes
- Planning and design of a safe urban environment, facilities, community space
- Planning for the provision of affordable housing options and development of alternate models of housing
- Implementation of SEPP 10
- Service provision including local service support, service coordination and information provision
- Greater community awareness, including for Council staff

Councils, in general, may have a role to bring together community housing and social service providers to examine the local resources and issues. If local government can be resourced appropriately, it is well placed as a driver to facilitate discussion at a local level.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Revise and review Council's Policy on Homeless, in line with the development of an affordable housing policy
- Investigate rebates from rates for a specific amount of time for charitable/welfare organisations operating from the Liverpool CBD who are directly assisting those who are homeless or at risk, including soup kitchens, night patrols, financial counsellors, legal services, etc.
- For the State Government to resource the Liverpool City Library CBD Branch to encourage services who outreach to the community to operate within the library, and examine the feasibility of a partnership for service delivery between key state government departments and the library.
- Investigate state or federal government funding opportunities and the development of a Council program to assist and provide community education to clean up land, remove rubbish, etc, and to help local residents to understand Council regulations (similar to the NSW DADHC home maintenance service, but specifically to assist councils).
- As part of community facilities strategic plan (which is in development), undertake an audit of all Council owned spaces and look innovative uses of this space and the capacity of available space spaces to be utilised for the delivery of social services.

- Encourage access to and promote information about the availability of the federal government rebate program to landlords in order to provide lower cost rental accommodation.
- To support the current Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre project to increase culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community access to low rental housing in Liverpool.

Contact

For further information in relation to this submission please contact Marlene Henry, Council's Social Planner, on 9821 7786 or by email m.henry@liverpool.nsw.gov.au.