

**Subject: LMM 27/07/2021 - Strategies to ameliorate the conditions of those in homelessness in Newcastle**

**MOTION**

**That City of Newcastle:**

**Part A: Strategies to ameliorate the conditions of those in homelessness:**

1. Recognising the immediate needs of the increased number of people, and the changing demographics of people, experiencing homelessness, commits to:
  - a. Receiving a report back on partnering with NSW Government agencies, Hunter Community Alliance leaders, Soul Cafe, and civil society to pilot *safe rough sleeping zones* for a minimum 24 months with regular assessments of the initiative. This would be a zone where Council staff, NSW Police, and service providers can suggest people park their cars, or sleep in tents, or under existing shelter, when emergency accommodation service providers are at capacity, and where wrap-around services could potentially attend to people.
  - b. The partnership would investigate:
    - i. Safe locations for rough sleeping zones suggested, such as Newcastle Showground, or local Neighborhood Centers;
    - ii. Framing and implementing safe and informed protocols for Council rangers and staff so that people sleeping rough are moved to safe housing, accommodation options, or a safe rough sleeping area;
    - iii. Establishing a locker system for people sleeping rough, in which they can store and protect limited personal belongings.
    - iv. The collection and reporting on homelessness and poverty data from private and charitable sector service providers in summer and winter.

**Part B: Social and Affordable Housing Memorandum of Understanding:**

1. Works with NSW Land and Housing Corporation (NSW Government) to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to expedite the delivery of new and refurbished social and affordable housing, including the exploration of a *'Make Room Project'* in Newcastle.

**Part C: Implementation of the Affordable Housing Contributions Scheme:**

1. Notes that on 27 April 2021, Council supported a Lord Mayoral Minute, titled *Housing Affordability crisis in Newcastle*; and continues to pursue all the actions detailed in that Lord Mayoral Minute in response to the housing affordability crisis in Newcastle;
2. Recognises major funding for affordable housing is the responsibility of State and Federal Governments;
3. Recognises that City of Newcastle has within its control the development of an Affordable Housing Contributions Scheme which Council has described as the concept of a 15% Affordable Housing Mandate on privately developed land, whereby 15% of new dwellings or floor space on privately developed land is mandated as Affordable Housing in new housing developments and considers this rate as a part of the development of the Affordable Housing Contributions Scheme.

4. Once again reiterates the urgency of the finalisation and implementation of the Affordable Housing Contributions Scheme and commits to this being implemented as soon as practicable.

**BACKGROUND:**

**Correspondence from the Hunter Community Alliance**



To City of Newcastle Lord Mayor and Councillors,

Motions supported by a majority of councillors in an April Mayoral Minute [**LMM 27/04/2021 - Housing Affordability crisis in Newcastle**] acknowledged and helped draw further attention to the housing affordability and homelessness crisis that people in our city are experiencing.

Hunter Community Alliance and its member organisations, representing 250,000 residents of the Hunter region, thank the Council for passing those motions and now calls on Councillors to support further actions to alleviate the short and long-term impacts on residents affected by the crisis.

As your Notice of Motion [**LMM 27/04/2021 point 1**] acknowledged, this is a local humanitarian crisis<sup>1</sup>. Homelessness NSW modelling forecasted homelessness to increase by nearly 40 per cent, and people living in housing stress to increase by 70 per cent, in our city by June 2021.

Data from local service providers, and personal stories from Newcastle residents, show that those **worst-case scenarios are playing out now**. Nova for Women and Children provides one example of what all local service providers are dealing with: it has government-funded capability to support 758 people in Newcastle West for the 2020-2021 financial year, but data shows it opened 1163 cases of people in need of homelessness support for the period in Newcastle West.

In the 6 months to June 2021 the number of people assisted by Hunter Tenants Advocacy and Advice Service has increased by 25% from the previous year. Almost 50% of advice relates to terminations of agreement, up 20% in 2019. The number of working families identifying as being at risk of becoming homeless due to the inability to secure affordable rental housing has increased significantly. Our clients tell us that they are applying for 50 or more premises without success, even with a good tenancy history.

Data shows an almost tripling of matters relating to rent increases and given the reduction in Commonwealth income support and the instability of many casual and part time roles, we expect to see more tenants unable to maintain tenancies in the private market.

This data also shows that the demographics of Newcastle residents facing homelessness and the risk of it is changing and now includes to a greater degree: the fastest growing cohort of women over 50, families with working parents, and young people squeezed out of the rental market

Some Newcastle citizens experiencing the crisis have shared their stories:

*"I was homeless for two years. There was family violence and it wasn't safe for me to go home. I slept on trains and in parks. I was disappointed with the services. The people in authority didn't take me seriously. I could have died. I started going to the Grainery Church and they helped me. They provided emotional support. I needed a connection. It makes a difference. I volunteer there now." -- Marni*

*"I was homeless from the age of 13 until I had my own kids. I didn't know about how to access services. How was I supposed to go to school if I didn't have somewhere to sleep? The availability of affordable housing is just not there. My sister has 5 people in a one-bedroom granny flat. So there is overcrowding and it's just not healthy living. It's just bad for your mental and physical health. Stuff happens in people's lives and then there's just nothing there to support them. There needs to be more prevention to stop the cycle of poverty. I know if my rent was cheaper we could live a completely different life." -- Ash*

*"I'm a Director and owner of a disability support business and despite leasing my current property for over two years, I have been informed that my rental has been sold and I have 30 days to vacate. I currently lease 4 properties for my business but cannot find a new rental property. The current scenario is horrific and I keep thinking about other single parents with young children that are in the same scenario." - Gene*

It is our understanding that all of the policy and initiatives we request of the City of Newcastle in the proposed Mayoral Minute are within the recommendations of the NSW Government response to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services Inquiry into the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places, particularly Recommendations 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

Thank you for consideration and recognition that this is an evolving crisis gripping our city.

We are hopeful and look forward to hearing of your support for progressing these modest but achievable proposals in response to the crisis.

Yours,

Teresa Brierley

**Co-Chair of Hunter Community Alliance, and Director of Pastoral Ministries Catholic Diocese Maitland-Newcastle**

Kelly Hansen

**CEO Nova for Women and Children**

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**Co-Chair of Hunter Community Alliance, Chair, Adamstown Uniting Church, Director, Margaret Jurd College, MAICD**

***On behalf of Hunter Community Alliance members***

# Hunter Community Alliance

