

5.2 REGIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHARTER HOMELESSNESS & SOCIAL HOUSING [DRAFT]

Responsible Officer: Dr Andi Diamond, CEO

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorses the Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness & Social Housing [draft].

INTRODUCTION

It is recommended that Council endorse the Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness & Social Housing [draft] which represents 13 Eastern and South-Eastern Councils and two million residents.

The Charter [draft] will be submitted to the 13 Eastern and South-Eastern Councils during July and August Council meetings and is marked as draft to allow for any feedback that may occur through this process.

BACKGROUND

During late 2019 – July 2020 a coalition of 13 Eastern and South-Eastern Councils united to develop a regional local government Charter to respond to homelessness and to advocate for an increased supply to social housing across Victoria. Please find attached the draft Charter **[ATTACHMENT ONE]**.

Regional Local Government CEO Forum on Homelessness & Social Housing, November 2019

On November 26 2019, CEOs and executive staff representing 13 Eastern and South-Eastern Councils came together in a forum focused on homelessness and social housing hosted by Monash Council in response to an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping across the region.

CEOs present at the forum agreed that there had been increase in homelessness across the Eastern and South-Eastern metropolitan communities and that local government staff are often first responders to people experiencing homelessness in local communities. Councils representing the 13 municipalities often do not have access to the same resources and support services as inner metro Councils to adequately respond to increased homelessness and people experiencing rough sleeping.

There was strong consensus from the CEOs that the local government sector must come together urgently to champion the issue of homelessness as a collective and work to find a solution.

The *CEO Forum: Local Government Regional Response to Homelessness* reached consensus that adopting a Regional Charter with three clear leverage points for local government would create the power and pressure for systemic change.

The Charter [draft] recognises that housing is a human right for every person, that housing solves homelessness and that social housing is core infrastructure for local communities. The 13 metropolitan Councils representing more than 2 million residents are united in seeking to influence the urgent need for increased social housing and a more effective, integrated and supported homelessness service system.

It is important to note that the agenda set by the coalition of Councils elected not to focus on service and crisis response to homelessness and community education, whilst recognising the critical importance and value of these interventions. The focus of the Charter's agenda was to prioritise the most impactful strategic levers available to the local government sector to achieve large-scale change.

Social Housing

The emphasis on social housing in the Charter [draft] is informed by research that Monash Council had commissioned through the Council to Homeless Persons in October 2019 '*Making a Difference – effective local government responses to homelessness.*' **[ATTACHMENT TWO]**

Council to Homeless Persons recommends that the most powerful action that local governments can undertake to reduce homelessness is to support the delivery of homes that people can afford. For the lowest income households most vulnerable to homelessness, this means the provision of social housing.¹

Social housing refers to housing owned either by the state government or by not-for-profit community housing providers that is rented to low income households at either 25% (public housing) or 30% (community housing) of household income.² Social housing does not generally include crisis or rooming houses.

For further information on Homelessness in Melbourne's East & South-East region, please refer to **ATTACHMENT THREE**.

Regional Charter Working Group

Following the forum in November 2019, the CEOs of all 13 Councils nominated 'Charter Champions' to represent the 13 Eastern & Southern Councils in a Working Group.

Since February 2020 the Working Group has met monthly to produce the draft Charter. The Working Group has received significant partnership support by the *Eastern Region Group of Councils, Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance, Municipal Association of Victoria [MAV]* and the *Department of Health & Human Services*.

Monash Council has led the Working Group meetings and has provided leadership, secretariat support and media and communications direction and design of content. Throughout the process, the CEO of Monash Council, Dr Andi Diamond, has regularly briefed the 13 CEOs and sought review and feedback to the progress of the draft Charter.

For more information on the Terms of Reference of the Working Group, please refer to 'Terms of Reference' **[ATTACHMENT FOUR]**.

COVID-19

During the process of drafting the Charter, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. The Working Group has re-pivoted the Charter to ensure it captures the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019-20 bushfires impact on homelessness and social housing.

The economic and health and wellbeing implications of COVID-19 means that now more than ever, the local government sector needs to be a powerful champion in advocating for permanent, safe and timely housing for the those experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness.

DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Charter

The purpose of the Charter [draft] is for the 13 Councils to collectively act to address the urgent need for increased social housing and a more effective, integrated and supported homelessness service system.

The Charter [draft] recognises that housing is a human right for every person, that housing solves homelessness and that social housing is core infrastructure for local communities.

The Charter [draft] represents a powerful example of the local government's sector ability to come together in a relatively short period of time to unite agendas and timelines with the fundamental commitment to solve homelessness through social housing.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Once endorsed, the Charter will be used as a local government sector platform and partnership tool representing the East and South-East with federal and state governments, and public and private sector partners. A formal launch of the charter and supporting communications plan will occur once the Charter has been endorsed by all 13 Councils and will be guided by Monash Council.

By endorsing the Charter, each of the 13 Councils commit to implementing the three regional commitments in their municipalities, guided by its core principles.

The Charter requires each Council to take on the challenge by ensuring their decisions align with the intent and the principles of the Charter.

The Working Group representing the Charter will re-convene at key intervals over the 12-month period following its endorsement to ensure the Charter is prioritised, progressed and implemented at a regional and local level.

Each Council may wish to include the Charter's principles and regional commitments in their relevant policies and plans associated with housing, human rights and health and wellbeing.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Charter [draft] seeks systemic change to increase the supply of permanent, safe, appropriate and timely housing for the most vulnerable members of our community and to embed 'Housing First' as key foundational principle, fundamental to health, recovery and safety.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The Charter [draft] recognises that housing is a human right for every person and that housing solves homelessness. It adopts a 'Housing First' approach which is a strategic response that prioritises permanent and stable housing for people experiencing homelessness.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The implementation of the Charter [draft], once endorsed, will be undertaken utilising existing Council resourcing. There are no financial implications attached to the Charter.

CONSULTATION

The Charter, once endorsed, will be used as a local government sector platform and partnership tool with federal and state governments, and public and private sector partners.

CONCLUSION

The Charter [draft] represents the commitment of 13 East & South-East Councils to collectively act to address the urgent need for increased social housing and a more effective, integrated and supported homelessness service system.

REFERENCE LIST

REFERENCES

¹ Council to Homeless Persons 2019, *'Making a Difference – Effective Local Government Responses to Homelessness'*, commissioned by Monash Council October 2019, p.7

² Council to Homeless Persons 2019, *'Making a Difference – Effective Local Government Responses to Homelessness'*, commissioned by Monash Council October 2019, p.1