

2.2 MONASH SOCIAL HOUSING FRAMEWORK 2020 – 2025

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins, Community Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025* for consideration.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES

The *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025* guides Council's efforts to address homelessness and to influence an increase to the supply of social housing, primarily through outreach and advocacy.

Throughout this framework, Monash endorses the evidence that the most powerful action 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.

Monash Council is a leader in the local government sector at championing the rights and needs of people with lived experience or at risk of homelessness and in advocating for a greater supply of social housing across the State. This is demonstrated through Council's leadership in 2020-21 of the *Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter 2020* [the Charter] comprised of 13 Councils and representing two million residents. The *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025*, the *Charter* and the *Draft Monash Affordable Housing Strategy* will be used as platforms in Council's planned response to the Victorian State Government's recently announced 'Big Housing Build' \$5.3 billion investment.

The *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025* will align to Council's next legislated municipal public health and wellbeing plan 2021 – 2025, where dedicated social housing and related homelessness actions will be proposed.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council endorse the *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025*.

MONASH SOCIAL HOUSING FRAMEWORK 2020 – 2025

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present Council's new *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 - 2025* following its endorsement as a draft at the 28 July Council meeting and subsequent four week public exhibition period [Attachment 1 – Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025].

During the four week period that the draft Framework was available online for community consultation throughout August 2020, the Council *Have Your Say* page received 215 webpage views and 19 detailed responses. This highlights the significance of the human rights and public health issue of homelessness and the housing affordability crisis and the need for timely, safe, appropriate and long-term housing. The global COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded the existing adversity of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It has also created a 'new vulnerable' of people who are at risk of homelessness in an uncertain economic and social climate.

The *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025* [the Framework] is part of a suite of three key documents which detail Council's commitment to addressing homelessness, the housing affordability crisis and advocacy for social housing as a solution to ending homelessness. The framework sits alongside the *Regional Local Government Charter Homelessness & Social Housing* (endorsed at July Council 2020 – Attachment 2) and the *Draft Monash Affordable Housing Strategy* due to Council in 2021. All three documents can be found on Council's webpage.

This is the first social housing framework for Monash. It is also one of Council's first frameworks that has applied the Victorian Gender Equality Bill's gender impact analysis tool through its development, consultation and design phases.

The image chosen for the front cover of the Framework is by Australian photographer Ponch Hawkes who exhibited a series titled 'Lay Down Your Head' in the 2020 Monash Gallery of Art [MGA] 30th anniversary exhibition 'Portrait of Monash: the ties that bind.' The MGA commissioned four leading Australian photographers, including Ponch Hawkes, to explore the City of Monash by responding to key issues facing the community. The 'Lay Down Your Head' series conveyed the experiences of homelessness in the Monash community. The Framework's front cover image is titled 'Untitled VII' '© Ponch Hawkes 2020, with accompanying quote 'They said I could stay there for a few weeks until I found a place. At least I knew where my things were, I felt safe.'" The Framework also features imagery of a local Monash man with lived

experience of homelessness, taken with permission by Council's former homelessness outreach support officer, Bill Kendall.

The *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025*, the *Charter* and the *Draft Monash Affordable Housing Strategy* will be used as key policy platforms in Council's response to the Victorian State Government's 'Big Housing Build' \$5.3 billion investment announced in November 2020.

The *Monash Social Housing Framework* will align to Council's next legislated municipal public health and wellbeing plan 2021 – 2025, where dedicated homelessness and social housing actions will be proposed.

BACKGROUND

Victoria has a homelessness and housing affordability crisis, made more acute by COVID-19 and the 2019/20 bushfires.

In Victoria 44,152 households are waiting for social housing. In south east and east Melbourne, the situation is dire as 32% of Victorians experiencing homelessness and 40% of people on the social housing waiting list live in this region.¹

At the time of the 2016 census, Monash had 755 people recorded as homeless. This was the highest number of people recorded in the eastern metropolitan region.²

In September 2020, the Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter Group, representing 13 East and South-East Councils and two million residents and led by Monash Council, made a joint submission to the Federal Inquiry into Homelessness [Attachment 3]. The joint submission detailed the complex challenges of homelessness and alarming lack of housing options in the east and south-east region of metropolitan Melbourne.

Findings from the experience of homelessness in the east and south-east region as documented by the submission include:

- There are 7,196 people experiencing homelessness, representing one-third of all homelessness in Victoria (p.4).
- 40% of people in Victoria on the social housing waiting list are from this region (p.4).
- Early intervention is almost impossible in the region as there is only *one* emergency accommodation service that supports 2 million residents and the estimated 7,916 experiencing homelessness.
- Domestic and family violence rates in the region are among Melbourne's highest (p.9) and has increased by 40% since COVID-19 lockdowns (p.9).
- Women and children experiencing homelessness are over-represented in the region with the causal factor of family violence. 61% of people accessing specialist housing support services were women and children (p.5).
- First-time homelessness is also a gendered issue in this region with large numbers of women and children contacting homelessness services for the first time, entering a highly traumatising 'homelessness system' (p.5).

- Patterns of homelessness differ across the region with variances including people sleeping rough, people living in severely overcrowded dwellings, couch surfing and boarding houses (pp.4-5).
- 20% of rough sleeping in Victoria is in this region and is on the rise (p.6).
- The region lacks suitable forms of housing and shelter for single person households (p.6).
- The reliance on rooming houses as a form of accommodation is dominant in the region. Rooming houses can be unsafe, traumatising and do not represent a long-term option for people to break the cycle of homelessness (p.7).

In response to this regional context, over the last 12 months, Monash Council has been leading the local government sector in the east & south-east region, through the Regional Charter Group, in advocating for the prevention of homelessness and the increased provision of social housing.

The Victorian State Government's announcement on 15 November 2020 of the \$5.3 billion 'Big Housing Build' in Victoria, deemed the "single biggest investment in social housing in Australian history" (The Hon. Richard Wynne, Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing) is a welcome response to a critical need for increased social housing supply across Victoria.

PURPOSE/DISCUSSION

The Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025 guides Council's efforts to address homelessness and to influence an increase to the supply of social housing, primarily through outreach and advocacy. Throughout this Framework, Monash endorses the evidence that the most powerful action 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.

Definition of Social Housing

Social housing refers to housing owned either by the State government or by non-profit community housing providers that is rented to low income households at either 25% (public housing) or 30% (community housing) of household income. Social housing does not generally include crisis or rooming houses.³

COVID-19

Social housing provision will become more important in the coming months and years, in the wake of COVID-19 with the anticipated economic impact and effect on unemployment rates.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025 is part of a suite of three key documents which detail Council's commitment to addressing homelessness, the housing affordability crisis and advocacy for social housing as a solution to ending homelessness. The framework sits alongside the *Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter* and the *Draft Monash Affordable Housing Strategy*. All three documents can be found on Monash Council's webpage.

The Framework's priorities align to Council's next legislated municipal public health and wellbeing plan 2021 – 2025, where dedicated social housing and related homelessness actions will be proposed.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this framework is to guide Council's approach to addressing the significant shortfall of social housing in the community and contribute to improving the health, wellbeing and safety of people experiencing homelessness in Monash.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

Housing is a basic human right. The lack of access to appropriate housing may impinge on many human rights that are protected under several international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights include the right to: an adequate standard of living; privacy; social security; education; freedom from discrimination; the vote; liberty and security.

The following principles provide a strong human rights framework to guide Council to implement this framework.

Equity: We provide or enable services and supports to everyone, but especially for those who are most vulnerable.

Access & Inclusion: We will remove or reduce barriers to participation by ensuring that information, services and facilities are accessible to people of all abilities and circumstances.

Intersectionality: We recognise that people's lives are multi-dimensional and complex and therefore our response to community issues cannot be developed through a singular lens.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025 will be implemented within existing Council resources.

CONSULTATION

Phase One Consultation; Development of Framework, April – May 2020 [Attachment 4]

During the development of this framework (phase one), Council undertook consultation both in-person and online due to COVID-19 adjustments.

Consultation took place with stakeholders, including members of Council's Advisory Committees and Reference Groups, stakeholder organisations, including community, housing and emergency relief agencies, and people who have current or prior lived experience of homelessness.

With the recent introduction of the Victorian Gender Equality Bill, Council applied the gender impact analysis tool to the consultation process, to ensure an intersectional approach to the development of the Framework.

For a summary of the phase one consultation, please refer to Attachment 4.

Phase Two Consultation; Public Exhibition Period 'Have Your Say' online, 30 July – 31 August 2020 [Attachment 5]

The Draft Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025 was endorsed at the Monash Council meeting of 28 July 2020. It then opened for public exhibition for a period of four weeks from 30 July – 31 August 2020 through Council's 'Have Your Say' webpage.

Through the public exhibition process, members of the public were invited to consider and respond to the Framework. Two key questions were asked along with a request for optional demographic information.

The two questions asked were:

- 1) Do you think this Framework hits the mark?
- 2) Is there anything else that Council should consider about homelessness and social housing, that should be included in the final Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025

Feedback – overall themes

Of the 215 unique page views, Council received a total of 19 detailed feedback responses to the draft Framework.

The overall themes provided to Council were -

- the 'exorbitant' cost of rental properties;
- the need for a pathway to prevent homelessness;
- mandatory allocation of social housing with any major development;
- Council needs to continue its commitment to consulting with people with lived experience of homelessness;
- the importance of educating the community about the important role of social housing across all communities; and
- the importance of putting 'frameworks' and 'plans' into action.

This feedback has been considered and informed the final version of the Framework. Respondents who provided their contact details will receive a final copy of the Framework.

A table of the full feedback and Council's response is attached [Attachment 5– Public Exhibition Feedback and Council Response Summary Table].

CONCLUSION

Housing is a basic human right. Across Victoria there is a presently a significant undersupply of affordable rental accommodation and social housing, including in the City of Monash, resulting in long waiting lists for social housing. One solution to reducing homelessness is to increase the supply of social housing.

Monash Council is a leader in the local government sector at championing the rights and needs of people with lived experience of homelessness and advocating for a greater supply of social housing across the Victorian state. This is demonstrated through Council's leadership of the *Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter 2020* [the Charter] comprised of 13 Councils and representing two million residents.

The *Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025*, the *Charter* and the *Draft Monash Affordable Housing Strategy* will be used as platforms in Council's response to the Victorian State Government's recently announced 'Big Housing Build' \$5.3 billion investment.

It is recommended that Council endorse this framework.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 – 2025

Attachment 2 – Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter 2020

Attachment 3 – Federal Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia - Joint Submission

Attachment 4 – Phase One Consultation – Development of Monash Social Housing Framework 2020 - 2025

Attachment 5 – Public Exhibition Feedback and Council Response Summary Table

Reference List

¹ Monash Council 2020, 'Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter 2020', date retrieved 18 November 2020, <https://www.monash.vic.gov.au/Services/Health-Safety/13-Councils-2million-plus-residents-a-unified-voice-to-tackle-homelessness>, p.2

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.