

MINUTES OF THE HOMELESSNESS TASKFORCE SHOALHAVEN

Meeting Date: Thursday, 5 April 2018
Location: Jervis Bay Rooms, City Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra
Time: 4.00pm

The following members were present:

Clr Amanda Findley (Chairperson)
Clr Patricia White
Clr Nina Cheyne
Clr Annette Alldrick
Clr Mark Kitchener
Clr Bob Proudfoot
Ms Lesley Labka – SAHSSI
Ms Wendi Hobbs – SSPAN
Rev. Matthew Wilson – Uniting Church
Ms Patricia David – Unions Shoalhaven
Mr Peter Dover – Salt Ministries
Ms Ashleigh Hudson – Mobile Response Coordinator
Mr Max Zalakos – Nowra Baptist Church
Ms Wendy Woodward – Community / Nowra Show Society
Ms Donna Brotherson – Illawarra Forum

Others present:

Anthony Body – Indigenous Services Manager Southern NSW, Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations
Graham Bradshaw - Director, Network Standards & Services, Asset Standards Authority, Transport for NSW
Lynne Dooly – Waminda
Linda Marquis – Waminda
Kathy Musico – Wellways
Kate – Community Services
Linda Lee – Aboriginal Women's Service
Jennifer Lee – Emmanuel Ministries Shoalhaven
Lesley Lane – Safe Shelter Shoalhaven
John Steele – Safe Shelter Shoalhaven
John Allison – Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – Indigenous Affairs
Melissa Andrews – Community Development Officer
Colin Wood – Section Manager, Building & Compliance
Sara McMahon – Manager, Governance Unit
Jessica Volkanovski – Strategic Planning – Team Coordinator, Strategy North

Apologies / Leave of Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Joanna Gash, Cllr John Levett, Penni Wildi, and Sharlene Naismith.

Confirmation of the Minutes

Recommendation

That the Minutes of the Homelessness Taskforce Shoalhaven held on Monday 27 November 2017 be confirmed.

Note: This item was not dealt with. The Minutes of Monday 27 November 2017 will be confirmed at the next meeting.

Declarations of Interest

Nil

GENERAL BUSINESS

Attendees introduced themselves, per the descriptions in the attendance list above.

HT18.1 Presentation - Transport for NSW - Second Life

Anthony Body, Indigenous Services Manager Southern NSW, Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations, and Graham Bradshaw, Director, Network Standards & Services, Asset Standards Authority, Transport for NSW, were welcomed to the meeting to give a presentation on repurposing transport assets as shelters.

Anthony Body has a key role within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to coordinate agencies across government to work better for communities. The 'Second Life' project looks at assets owned by the government, such as trains, buses, and accommodation, seeking better ways to use them, e.g. for social good. Anthony has sent a brief on the project to the Deputy Premier, who has expressed great interest.

He introduced Graham Bradshaw, from Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW). Graham described the background to the Second Life program which includes projects in Armidale, Queanbeyan, 'Buses to Bourke', and now Nowra. He noted that some 600 people in Sydney spend each night on the streets. In addition many people are in shelters, camps, hotels, couch surfing, or sleeping in cars. Graham had recently counted 41 people sleeping on the late-night train to Kiama. These homeless communities will continue to grow.

Meanwhile, as the city is booming, the infrastructure spend is also growing, with significant investment in new assets – rail, buses, buildings, and land. Many of the existing assets consequently are being retired. This presents an opportunity to use repurposed transport assets for communities and social support.

The idea of converting disused train carriages into shelters is being considered in Victoria. VicRoads has also set aside vacant land to build demountable homes. TfNSW is looking primarily at converting bus and rail assets into sleeping accommodation, mobile service units (e.g. health), shower buses, and storage. Buses can be retrofitted with four beds each as 'sleep buses'; the 134 old buses currently available could create 536 beds. Graham projects a further 100 buses will become available over each of the next four years. He has access to 30 buses currently.

He considers it important to find opportunities to work with groups such as this Taskforce and with

the community in Shoalhaven. Buses can be provided immediately for conversion and use. Land, however, is the element that needs to be secured, and obtaining DAs will take time. TfNSW can supply the assets but not cover the costs to convert them, and he recommended we find philanthropic assistance. Conversion can be rapid but the other processes require more time, at a minimum 3-4 months.

The meeting discussed several possible sites, including land at the rear of Flinders Lane, and behind the old gasworks. It was stressed that homeless people are a part of our community, and locations should not be too isolated: would they use the facility at Flinders Lane, and how would they get to it? Possibly a further bus could be deployed to transport people into town to feel part of the community.

The buses have the advantage that they can be driven in and out of sites as required. They can become health based, showers, washing machine etc. services on wheels able to go to smaller communities.

The group was reminded that there are just six weeks until winter starts. What can we do here and now, and have we the time and skills in the community to convert a bus over a weekend? As an interim measure, it was suggested that one or two buses could be used over the winter. The use of buses in the short term would help with security issues around vulnerable cohorts such as women and children. A more permanent solution can be developed towards the end of winter, but in the meantime we should secure enough buses for the winter period.

TfNSW are also working with RMS in Wollongong on auditing their excess land. Graham reiterated that TfNSW are not able to provide ongoing funding, only assets. He needs to fill out the proposal for Shoalhaven. Anthony is to talk to the Mayor and to meet again in the next few weeks.

The meeting thanked Anthony Body and Graham Bradshaw for bringing their presentation and sharing their vision.

Anthony Body and Graham Bradshaw left the meeting at 5.00pm.

The remaining meeting participants discussed the presentation in detail. The following points and questions were raised:

- Buses can also be used for daily transport for those who may be sheltered in sites away from the general community.
- How to address the challenge of managing the safety of different cohorts – couples, families etc. A permanent solution will need a need larger site, with multiple buses to keep the different cohorts safe.
- How to solve the issue of obtaining land and gaining DA approval. Planning can require six to 12 months.
- Could buses be considered for the existing homeless community at Nowra Showground? The suggestion should be taken back to the Showground Committee. One difficulty is that the land is currently also functioning as carpark for the hospital.
- Using buses as temporary emergency accommodation raises a potential problem of distance from central services and transport. This can make people more vulnerable if they are isolated in industrial areas. It was noted that there are existing community transport options to specialist services – the problem of distance can be overcome. Central Coast & Gosford Councils have also been working with this issue and we could contact them to find how they overcame these problems.
- There are some similarities to locating Tiny Homes with regard to zoning. Buses may be classed as moveable dwellings.
- Cllr Proudfoot advocated choosing a site that will avoid controversy, as we do not wish this to become political. Strategic planners can investigate the zoning and siting options.
- Cllr Cheyne suggested looking at Mandalay Avenue community housing; access to one of their blocks might be possible if a tenant is ready to move on. The site is already zoned

residential.

- Ulladulla could be another site. Can also consider the North Street Woolworths site.
- Conversion of the buses should include retaining their wheels so they can be driven to proposed sites to see if they will work. The vehicles remain registered, so in the short term they could be parked in a carpark and moved if a problem arises. The vehicles can continue to be registered and driveable, but would have to be signed over to the community organisation who then becomes the owner, with the resultant insurance and registration responsibilities.
- Colin Wood reported he has been looking at several sites behind the scenes. Three had been selected as suitable for accommodation, but there had been no further progress. One which functions as a nexus with a church, e.g. with meals on wheels, is looking positive. He is close to finding a site for this. This needs to be discussed with Gordon Clark and Council's approval as owner obtained.
- Other models to look at include the farm stay model that uses train carriages converted with facilities, which works well for short-term accommodation, and the KiwiBuild public housing program which aims to build a large number of affordable homes in New Zealand.
- We should look into working with youth employment services re training opportunities.
- It was suggested the project be progressed in two stages: first to operate a temporary solution to get through this winter, then a longer-term sustainable solution to offer to rough sleepers and the chronically homeless. Safe Shelters Shoalhaven need to find a property large enough to run an interim model, or could run a trial with buses that can be moved as needed.
- Cllr Proudfoot added that Council can partner not only with philanthropists but with other government partners to convert the buses – for example, Department of Community Services.
- Colin Wood said we should make a commitment to find a place to park the buses, to show the community how we can retrofit a bus, and to find a block of land to site them. We have to be proactive.

HT18.2 Transport for NSW - Second Life - Conversion of Assets

Recommendation (By Consent)

That Council contact the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Transport for NSW to:

1. Express an interest in the Second Life project for the acquisition of transport assets for homeless initiatives.
2. Request an audit of State Government land that may be available within the Shoalhaven.

CARRIED

Cllr White left the meeting at 5.15pm.

HT18.3 Shoalhaven Homelessness Hub

It was pointed out that the Homeless Hub statistics do not represent everyone, only those who present at the reporting services. Cllr Findley clarified that each service group presents data to each meeting of the Taskforce so that the data sets become part of the minutes. These can then be presented to external stakeholders and contribute to our 'pester power'. It helps in building picture of day-to-day contacts. It also provides evidence on a quarterly basis for State and Federal representatives as a constant reminder. Do we consider it to be a useful tool?

It was suggested that mining the Census data could provide more accurate homelessness data. The census did account for everyone residing in temporary accommodation, refuges etc. is

available from FACS.

Action: Statistics from the Census to be distributed with the minutes.

Kathy Musico said the feedback last year was that people were often unable to get into the shelters. Can we get at least a bus each for males and females to keep people safe at night? There were some 30 to 40 people homeless beyond the 50 available beds.

Clr Alldrick asked whether services are finding that government cuts to programs or services aimed at mental health and domestic violence are affecting numbers of people being seen. Lesley Lakba stressed that we have good services here; she considered that homelessness is due to structural problems such as housing. The structural issues are much broader. For example, difficulties in holding tenancies can be reliant on the number of mental health services available. Arranging health and mental health services that can be safely accessed requires coordinating. Services need to go to the people, not force people to travel to the services.

HT18.4 Homelessness Media Strategy

It was recommended that statistics should ideally be accompanied by cases studies and qualitative data; otherwise they risk having little impact. We need to make it evident to local Members that we are doing as much as possible but cannot provide full services, and we need their help – and that they are also accountable. It will help if we can put a face to the stories and statistics.

Clr Findley proposed collecting people's stories over the winter period. An independent consultant could be contracted to collect stories on our behalf. Telling the stories of the homeless will require a campaign and media strategy.

Clr Proudfoot noted the churches are continually raising the issue of homelessness in the media. We should harness the power of photographs, and keep beating the drum. We must keep sending the message to politicians to get a response; they eventually have to start listening.

RESOLVED (By Consent)

That

1. The Taskforce continue an ongoing dialogue with the State and Federal members and the local media as well as explaining to the local media the activities of the Homelessness task Force and the plight of the homeless.
2. A small working group be formed to advance a media strategy.
3. Membership of this group to comprise:
 - a. Melissa Andrews
 - b. John Steele
 - c. Ashleigh Hudson
 - d. Wendy Woodward
 - e. Peter Dover
 - f. Kathy Musico
 - g. Max Zalakos.

CARRIED

.HT18.5 Nowra Neighbourhood Centre - Proposal to Use for Shelter

Regarding practical options for shelters, Clr Cheyne raised the three houses in Bomaderry that

Council has purchased for the 50m pool. Clr Findley clarified that these are currently tenanted – but one may be demolished and the site could be made available..

The shelter used last year will be reopened but the issues experienced previously need to be addressed. As a last resort the shelters can be operated in a modified version of last year. However, even to go back to that model will require probably six weeks of direction to get it up and running. Hence a decision will be needed by next week.

Clr Findley reported the Nowra Neighbourhood Centre is vacant, and is a possibility. She is working on a motion that it be leased to Salt Ministries. However, the building needs to be checked for utility. It does have doors and multiple rooms, but it would be a shelter rather than a permanent home.

RESOLVED (By Consent)

That the Task Force supports the Nowra Neighbourhood Centre being used for homeless services for the next two years subject to suitability

CARRIED

HT18.6 Outstanding Actions Table

Item 6: Permanent Shelter, FABCOT land: we still need a response.

Action: Clr Findley to follow up with FABCOT in relation to this land.

There were no questions about any items. Questions should be sent by email and Council will direct them to suitable respondents.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded, the time being 6.06pm.

Clr Findley
CHAIRPERSON