

MINUTES OF THE HOMELESSNESS TASKFORCE SHOALHAVEN

Meeting Date: Monday, 4 March 2019
Location: Jervis Bay Rooms, City Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra
Time: 4.00pm

The following members were present:

Clr Patricia White - Chairperson
Clr Kaye Gartner
Clr Nina Digiglio
Clr John Levett
Penni Wildi – Community Member / Waminda
Lesley Labka - SAHSSI – Shoalhaven Women’s Homeless and DV Service
Wendi Hobbs - Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention and Awareness Network (SSPAN)
Rev Matthew Wilson – Nowra Uniting Church
Peter Dover – Salt Ministries
Ashleigh Hudson - Mobile Response Vehicle coordinator (services for homeless)
Max Zalakos – Nowra Baptist Church

Also present:

Alan Heard – Nowra Baptist Church
Gordon Clark – Manager, Strategic Planning
Colin Wood – Manager, Building & Compliance
Cathy Campbell – Senior Community Development Officer
Teagan Starr – Community Development Officer

Clr White took the Chair.

Apologies / Leave of Absence

Apologies were received from Clr Findley, Clr Gash, Patricia David, Sharlene Naismith, John Steele, and Nicky Sloan.

Confirmation of the Minutes

RESOLVED (Clr Levett / Peter Dover)

That the Minutes of the Homelessness Taskforce Shoalhaven held on Monday 24 September 2018 be confirmed.

CARRIED

Declarations of Interest

Nil.

REPORTS

HT19.1 Communications Plan

**HPERM Ref:
D18/397629**

Cathy Campbell gave an update on the status of the Communications Plan, which is now complete and finalised. Council has limited resources with which to implement so many actions, so Cathy has elected two areas she thinks could be managed: building a series of hypothetical case studies, and monthly media releases. Cathy proposed that a working group be formed, meeting every two months to facilitate the development of upcoming hypothetical case studies and media releases.

Lesley Labka raised concerns about the potential for case studies to identify individuals – maintaining confidentiality is particularly important in the context of women's homelessness and domestic violence, and in such a small community. She stressed that her cohort would not feel able to participate.

Cathy clarified the case studies are intended to be positive, good news stories to change the public perception of the negatives associated with homelessness. Wendi Hobbs agreed the Taskforce must be mindful of confidentiality, and asked if case studies could be borrowed from out of the area. For example, Belconnen in the ACT has the closest demographic to us.

Hypothetical case studies would serve the purpose. Gordon Clark cited examples of generic case studies that are used by other organisations. It was agreed to amend the recommendation to refer to hypothetical case studies.

Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That:

1. Taskforce members endorse the Homelessness Taskforce Communication Plan
2. The following actions be undertaken during the period January 2019 – June 2019:
 - a. Develop a series of case studies to explain homelessness and its impact
 - b. Compile and distribute monthly media releases to highlight the Taskforce in the media and engage the public
3. Nominations be provided from members to form a working group to support Council's Community Development Team to develop case studies and regular monthly media releases.

RESOLVED (Matthew Wilson / Cllr Digiglio)

That:

1. Taskforce members endorse the Homelessness Taskforce Communication Plan
2. The following actions be undertaken during the period January 2019 – June 2019:
 - a. Develop a series of hypothetical case studies to explain homelessness and its impact
 - b. Compile and distribute monthly media releases to highlight the Taskforce in the media and engage the public
3. A working group be established to support Council's Community Development Team to develop hypothetical case studies and regular monthly media releases, comprising: Wendi Hobbs, Peter Dover, Matt Wilson, Cllr Levett

CARRIED

HT19.2 Ongoing Actions**HPERM Ref:
D18/376227**

Item 1:

Gordon Clark provided an update on negotiations with Amoveo. There has been no activity since the Memorandum of Understanding last year, but they have forwarded an example of one of their container housing solutions, which Gordon distributed to those present. These would be acquired as modular units but not fitted out, so this would be a cost consideration. If this is the kind of solution that may be chosen Council would need to go to the market to seek tenders. It would be necessary to have the land secured first before entering an agreement with a supplier.

Clr White advised that there is a café at Batemans Bay that is built from one of these units, should members wish to view one in person.

Gordon noted this represents one example of Amoveo's products, a single occupancy unit; they produce other solutions versions. The issue remains of where units would be located. There has been no substantive response from RMS on the Marriott St site, nor from Stockland and Babcock about the vacant land near Woolworths.

Peter Dover reported he is still in discussion with the Church of Christ concerning six acres of vacant land in South Nowra. The Church of Christ remain undecided as to whether they will sell the land or allow it to be used for affordable housing; this will depend on zoning.

Lesley Labka asked about the Bomaderry affordable housing site. Gordon clarified these will be privately run boarding houses, beyond Council's control. He has observed a gratifying increase in the number of boarding houses in the Shoalhaven in the past twelve 12 months: one from Southern Cross and two privately run, where previously there was only one other.

He said the option to use Council green spaces for temporary accommodation was contentious. Council's first preference is to find land already appropriately zoned as residential; it can take a minimum of twelve months to rezone a property, with added time for community consultation which often results in negative commentary. Clr White cited the emails she had received about the boarding house at Sanctuary Point, which reveal that a perception of the old style of boarding houses persists in the community.

Clr White proposed asking Southern Cross Housing to give a presentation at the next meeting regarding their current projects.

Penni Wildi suggested that the Taskforce circulates a call for Expressions of Interest to supply suitable land. Gordon suggested that the Taskforce would need to be clear what the EOI would be seeking, and what the Taskforce is itself prepared to provide or assist with.

Gordon Clark clarified that Item 1 had started as a discussion about accommodation that could be relocated if land availability changed. The Mayor has been lobbying on this issue; two representatives from the FACS Department of Housing will be meeting with her next week, to include discussion of the Bomaderry affordable housing site, and stock transfer to Southern Cross Housing. Council is potentially purchasing more land for the Bomaderry site. It is hoped this will become an example of what a well-run boarding house looks like.

Peter Dover advised that the Shelter functions well but is always full. The people could fit into a boarding house context (non-private) but not affordable housing. He described the supported rental project, which aims to transition clients into rental occupancy over 6-12 months. A pilot program has been running for three weeks with one lady living with a mentor – this has been making a huge difference. If the program works, they will lease five to ten houses. He compared it to a fostering system for chronic homeless people. His team are working towards a model with one mentor assigned to more than one resident in each home.

The Communications working group is to look at housing strategy.

It was agreed to retain item 1 in the Action Table.

Item 2:

Clr Digiglio reported that Grand Pacific Healthcare are being very helpful. Clients in need can access five services a year but can have both a health care and a mental health care plan. The care plan can be reviewed, allowing up to 18 sessions funded by Medicare. Grand Pacific will waive fees if they know the person is struggling.

Wendi Hobbs noted that SSPAN should not be listed as not having responded. She cited the barriers faced by people without access to Medicare or the Health Care Card, especially young people. Penni Wildi added that Waminda offers free assistance.

Item 3:

Updated statistics will be available for the next meeting

Item 4:

Gordon Clark clarified the Transport for NSW proposal is linked to item 1, and was an alternate option. Again, this depends on sourcing a suitable site.

Item 5:

The Communications Strategy is complete and can be removed from the Action Table.

Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That the Homelessness Taskforce receive the Ongoing Actions report for information.

RESOLVED (Wendi Hobbs / Matthew Wilson)

That:

1. The Homelessness Taskforce receive the Ongoing Actions report for information.
2. Southern Cross Housing be asked to give a presentation at next meeting.
3. The Communications working group look at the housing strategy as a potential media release.
4. Item 5, Communications Strategy, be removed as complete.

CARRIED

GENERAL BUSINESS

HT19.3 New Item - Nowra Baptist Church - Replacement Member

The Nowra Baptist Church member of the Taskforce, Max Zalakos, is retiring. Alan Heard will be replacing him.

The Taskforce agreed to this change of representation.

Services overview

Wendi Hobbs – SSPAN is running volunteers' training course for those working at the shelter. A series of Mental Health First Aid courses is ongoing. A GP attends six hours per week.

Lesley Labka – SAHSSI has vacant rooms at the Junction St property for women escaping domestic violence. The case managers all have full caseloads. The DVRE funding has been extended to 2020.

Penni Wildi – The program at Waminda remains open to all women. They have had many applications. 115 employees work at six sites across the Shoalhaven. GPs, podiatrists, optometrists, midwives etc. operate at the Kinghorne St site.

Alan Heard – Nowra Baptist Church is now opening its store three days per week for groceries and clothing. The weekly meal on Thursdays is continuing. Max Zalakos added their clients are not primarily homeless as such at the moment, but a lot of people without resources. They try to assist anyone who presents with a need.

Matt Wilson – He is working alongside Peter Dover at the Shelter. The need has not decreased, and he warned of the impact of the wet or cold weather that is to come.

Peter Dover – The Shelter is full again following the lull at Christmas. There is a 35% rate of rehousing people. Some apartment properties are available for people from the Shelter, and workers are making sure that they are coping. The pilot program noted above will continue. Peter will be visiting the USA to investigate four different models. The aim is not just providing accommodation but bringing in programs to bring people back into society.

Peter added there has been an increase in the number of homeless people in Sydney. The favourable weather has been helpful in allowing people to emerge. She said the Shoalhaven is doing a great job in getting the messages across, and people are no longer afraid of the 'homeless'.

Clr Digiglio noted that many are still couch-surfing, particularly young people; Lesley added women are also 'living out of their bags'. Peter has noticed many more people are needing food: this past month, 300 different individuals have come in.

Lesley noted growing recognition that Newstart benefits are below the poverty line. SAHSSI is bring in training to help recipients find employment.

Clr Levett shared concerns that rising interest rates may mean more people will lose their homes.

Clr Digiglio noted Wollongong Council's empty home levy on holiday homes. It could be possible to build a symbiotic relationship with older homeowners who have capacity in their homes. Wendi asked whether Council make it easier in install granny flats. Gordon Clark confirmed that secondary dwellings can be assessed as complying development.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded, the time being 5.04pm.

Clr Patricia White
CHAIRPERSON