

Local Government Homelessness Knowledge Hub Case Study



Submitted by **City of Wanneroo**
Case Study **Internal Procedure**

Background

On a weekly basis, the City of Wanneroo (the City) receives phone calls and enquiries from the public regarding people rough sleeping in the community. To ensure effectiveness and consistency a Responding to Homelessness Management Procedure (the Procedure) was developed and adopted in May 2019. The development and implementation of the Procedure aligns with an action in the [Regional Homelessness Plan](#).

Responding to Homelessness	
3.2 Local Government approaches are considerate of those experiencing homelessness	3.2b Review and implement process for responding to rough sleepers.

The intent of the Procedure is to provide guidance on how the City should respond to:

- Reports of people rough sleeping in the community;
- Enquiries requesting information on homelessness support services;
- Reports of people rough sleeping on private property; and
- Identify people rough sleeping in the City.

This response is consistent with the role of local government as a facilitator, collaborator and advocator.

Goals/objectives

The objectives of this Procedure are to:

- Ensure people rough sleeping are treated with dignity and respect and not discriminated against based on their homeless status;
- Adopt a compassionate approach to people experiencing homelessness to ensure a long-term positive outcome for any person experiencing homelessness, rather than the first action being to move people on;
- Facilitate positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness;
- Maintain the safety, as well as the perception of safety, for all parties involved, including people experiencing homelessness, City Officers and general public;
- Identify trends, incidents and statistics on homelessness and rough sleeping in the community which will support advocacy efforts and identify prevention strategies; and
- Reduce negative stigma, improve perception and educate the community on the causal factors around homelessness.

Development

To ensure development of an effective procedure the following steps were taken:

- Internal stakeholders required to use the procedure most frequently were identified:
 - Community Safety
 - Community Development
 - Library Services
 - Facilities (Operations)
 - Parks and Conservation
 - Customer and Information Service
- Workshops held with internal stakeholders to discuss ideas, scenarios and challenges; and provide feedback throughout the process.

- Research to see what other local governments are doing in this space (the City was unable to find another local government that had developed a similar procedure).
- Discussions with outreach organisations such as Anglicare and Uniting WA to seek advice.
- Risk assessment.
- Council process.

The final Procedure supported a collaborative approach between the Community Safety Team, Community Development Team and local voluntary outreach organisations.

Challenges and Issues

A recurring challenge faced by the City is a lack of funded assertive outreach services. The City relies on local volunteer not-for-profit organisations and churches. While these volunteer services are paramount to support the health and wellbeing of the community, the City recognises these groups often lack the knowledge and capacity to support people to transition into appropriate support services as opposed to just meeting their basic daily needs.

Additionally, not all people experiencing homelessness are willing to accept help. This is a challenge faced frequently and one where guidance regarding local government's role on how to respond is vague. The City would welcome an opportunity to discuss and workshop ideas with other local governments and homelessness outreach organisations on what steps could be taken to relieve these situations.

Implementation

Following executive endorsement, an internal Communications Plan was developed to inform all City employees of the procedure to ensure a coordinated response to people experiencing homelessness and people rough sleeping in the community. The procedure is scheduled for review every three years to ensure it is both effective and responsive.

Results

Since the adoption of the Responding to Homelessness Management Procedure, the City has been building relationships and working with organisations that support people rough sleeping in the community. These relationships have enhanced the City's ability to assist vulnerable rough sleepers and facilitate long-term positive outcomes as opposed to short-term temporary resolutions.

In February 2020, the City became aware of two men sleeping at the back of Girrawheen Library. The men began experiencing homelessness in early 2019 following the death of their mother, resulting in an eviction from the family home. In line with the Procedure, the City took the following steps to support a compassionate approach and facilitate a positive outcome for the men:

- The City facilitated a meeting between the Department of Communities (DoC) and the men to support their transition into housing. A discussion led to an informal agreement not to move the men on, providing they continued to work with DoC, kept the area well maintained and were respectful to the community.
- Partnerships were formed with local charity groups to ensure the men received essential items such as food and water.
- The City's Community Safety Team preformed regular welfare checks.
- Regular patrols conducted by the Community Safety Team increase the City's presence and ensure safety of the wider community.
- Increased monitoring by Waste Services to ensure the area was maintained appropriately and bins emptied regularly.
- Regular contact and updates between the City and DoC.

- Updates to the community on the City's approach through the customer relationship management process.

About six weeks after the City was first made aware of the situation, the men transitioned into appropriate housing. To ensure longevity of this arrangement DoC continued to case manage the men and assist in any referrals.

The City recognises an increase in funded assertive outreach services and crisis and transitional accommodation would support more positive outcomes for vulnerable community members.

