

## Organisational policy

### Responding to Homelessness

Corporate Plan reference	<p><b>A strong community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vibrant community places and spaces that are inclusive, accessible and adaptable</li> <li>An inclusive community, with opportunities for everyone</li> </ul> <p><b>Service excellence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respecting and valuing our customers</li> <li>Regular and relevant engagement with our community</li> </ul>
Endorsed by Chief Executive Officer	
	November 2020
Manager responsible for policy	Manager, Community Planning and Development

### Policy statement

Sunshine Coast Council (council) recognises that people experiencing homelessness are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community and will be treated with dignity and respect.

The purpose of this policy and associated guideline is to help council achieve its corporate goals and obligations under the *Human Rights Act 2019 (QLD)* by ensuring that:

- People experiencing homelessness are treated respectfully and not discriminated against
- A clear process is implemented for managing interactions between council staff and people who are experiencing homelessness
- The capacity of council employees is built to support people experiencing homelessness; and
- The role of council in responding to homelessness is clarified.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the organisational guideline *Responding to Homelessness*. The guideline provides a clear process and consistent approach to managing interactions between council staff and people who are experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping in council managed public spaces.

### Policy scope

This policy applies to all council employees (including contingent workers and volunteers) who come in contact with people who are experiencing homelessness in public spaces that are managed by council such as parks, beaches, open spaces, road reserves, libraries, council facilities and customer service centres. The associated organisational guideline provides detail about how the policy will be implemented and executed.

This policy and supporting guideline will be taken into consideration when enforcing local laws and regulations but does not override existing legislation, laws, statutory requirements or regulations; or detract from the duties and discretions of Council's Response Services (Local Laws) Officers.

Should there be any inconsistency between this Policy and a local law, regulation or statute, those instruments shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.

## **Role of Sunshine Coast Council**

Whilst it is acknowledged the State and Federal Governments are primarily responsible for the legislation, policy and service support funding for responding to homelessness, council also acknowledges that homelessness is a complex social issue that requires a whole of council and whole of community approach to address.

To complement the work of other levels of government and to foster a whole of council and community response, council's response to homelessness is to:

- Ensure people experiencing homelessness are treated respectfully and not discriminated against
- Respect all members of the community and their rights to access council services and use public spaces
- Build the capacity of council staff to be considerate of and support people experiencing homelessness
- Provide information to people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping about where they can access local support services and housing assistance
- Ensure appropriate referrals are actioned as a matter of priority where there is a reasonable belief that the health and/or safety of a person experiencing homelessness or sleeping rough, is at risk
- Work in partnership with State Government agencies, specialist homelessness services, local housing providers and community support services and take collaborative action on homelessness
- Advocate to other levels of government to prioritise action on homelessness, social and housing affordability initiatives
- Educate and raise awareness about homelessness in the community through a variety of channels including regular social messaging.

## **Role of other levels of government**

### **State Government**

Council recognises that the State Government agency responsible for housing and homelessness policy and services (currently the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW)) as the functional lead agency responsible for homelessness. This agency supports service delivery models that improve access, tenancy sustainment and service integration for people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness. This is achieved through the funding of specialist homelessness services. The agency is also responsible for the provision of social housing.

The Queensland Police Service is the lead agency for crime prevention and is responsible for working with communities to ensure the safety of all members of the community.

### **Federal Government**

Council also recognises the role of the Federal Government in responding to homelessness, which is primarily through the funding of homelessness services and social and affordable housing projects through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement with the State and Territory governments.

## Policy context

This response to homelessness will assist council to achieve its corporate objectives as outlined in the **Corporate Plan 2020-2024** by creating a strong community where people are included, treated with respect and opportunities are available to all.

This approach also delivers on a key strategic priority within the **Sunshine Coast Community Strategy 2019-2041** which is to collaborate and partner with government, local community organisations and businesses to improve access to wrap-around services for people experiencing homelessness.

## Guiding principles

The following principles provide the foundation for how council will respond to homelessness:

### 1. Acknowledge people experiencing homelessness as vulnerable people

Council recognises that people experiencing homelessness are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Council is committed to ensuring vulnerable people have access to information and are referred to appropriate support services as soon as possible and - where there is a risk to their health and/or safety - as a matter of priority.

### 2. Enable access to council services and use of public space

Council supports an approach of social inclusiveness, the efficacy of human dignity and embraces social justice principles of equity, access, and participation. Council acknowledges the rights of all community members to access council services and use public spaces.

### 3. Address community safety concerns and maintain public amenity

Council recognises that everyone has the right to live in a safe and peaceful environment. When required, council will respond appropriately and sensitively to incidences of rough sleeping to address safety concerns for people experiencing homelessness, our residents and visitors.

### 4. Provide supporting capability and capacity to enable council employees to respond effectively to people experiencing homelessness

Council is committed to the ongoing capability development of its workforce and to complying with workplace health and safety requirements to enable employees to perform their roles to the best of their abilities and as safely as possible and in a manner that seeks to be responsive to the needs of members of the community.

### 5. Advocate for safe and healthy communities

Council will capture quality data about homelessness at a local level. This data will be used for reporting purposes, training and development of Council staff and advocacy endeavours. Council will advocate for improved housing, community support and targeted health services that best address the needs of those residents who are experiencing homelessness. Likewise, Council is committed to advocating for improved social and human services and support mechanisms to meet the needs of the Sunshine Coast community generally.

### 6. Form multi-sector partnerships

Council recognises homelessness as a complex social issue and that singular, stand-alone responses do not generally solve complex social issues. Council is committed to working in partnership with State Government agencies, specialist homelessness services, local housing providers and community support services to address homelessness.

## Measurements of success

Achieving the following outcomes will be the measurement of success for this policy and associated guideline:

- Feedback from council staff and community members demonstrates a clear understanding of the role of council and its officers in responding to homelessness
- Feedback from council staff indicates that staff have gained an increased level of confidence when interacting with people experiencing homelessness
- Each person experiencing homelessness that a council employee connects with is provided with information on local community support services
- Each person experiencing homelessness, who has provided consent, is referred to appropriate services to access housing assistance and other support
- Each person experiencing homelessness and who interacts with a council employee feels valued and respected through the experience
- Data captured on homelessness is effectively used to inform council's advocacy endeavours.

## Definitions

### Council employee

Means the CEO, senior contract employees, contract employees, award employees, casual employees, part-time employees, contractors, contingent workers, agency casual and volunteers.

### Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW)

DHPW is currently the State Government department that supports people experiencing homelessness or individuals at risk of becoming homeless through funding specialist homelessness services, the provision of social housing and emergency accommodation. This Policy has been drafted in such a manner that recognises that the name and function of this department may alter over time as a result of Machinery of Government changes.

### Homelessness

As defined by [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\) statistical definition of homelessness](#) states that when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in an inadequate dwelling
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of and access to space for social relations.

Another recognised definition of homelessness is the Mackenzie and Chamberlain's cultural definition of homelessness. Mackenzie and Chamberlain's (1992) definition includes three categories in recognition of the diversity of homelessness:

- **Primary homelessness** is experienced by people without conventional accommodation (e.g. sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings)
- **Secondary homelessness** is experienced by people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another (e.g. emergency accommodation, youth refuges, "couch surfing"); and
- **Tertiary homelessness** is experienced by people staying in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards (e.g. boarding housing and caravan parks).

This definition was adopted by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness in 2001 and is widely used in the homelessness sector.

## Rough Sleeping

Is defined as living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting, staying in cars or improvised dwellings for shelter. Council does not consider someone unwilling to access a paid campsite or holiday park in their motorhome or campervan to be rough sleeping.

## Policy breaches

The intent and objectives of this policy are to be complied with by all council employees, unless otherwise authorised by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Compliance with this policy and any supporting guidelines or documents is not discretionary. However, nothing in this policy requires or authorises an employee of council to act in any way that is contrary to law. All instances of non-compliance with this policy will be elevated to the Office of the CEO and may be dealt with as a breach of the Employee Code of Conduct and managed in accordance with any relevant policies and procedures dealing with disciplinary action. All organisational policies are subject to change from time to time at the sole discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

## Related legislation, policies, strategies and documents

All individuals engaged in dealings within the scope of this policy are required to fulfil the ethical and behavioural obligations as defined in legislation. In the event of an inconsistency between any provision of this policy and any provision of the following related legislation, policies, strategies and documents, the provisions of the related legislation, policies, strategies and documents shall prevail, to the extent of the inconsistency. For further assistance please contact the Manager of Corporate Governance.

### Commonwealth Legislation

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Public Sector Ethics Act 1994
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011

### State Legislation

- Human Rights Act 2019 (QLD)
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)
- Information Privacy Act 2009 (QLD)
- Local Government Act 2009 (QLD)

### Sunshine Coast Local Laws

- Local Law No.1 (Administration) 2011 and Subordinate Local Law No.1 (Administration) 2016
- Local Law No.3 (Community Health and Environment) 2011
- Local Law No.4 (Local Government Controlled Areas, Facilities, Infrastructure and Roads) 2011

### Sunshine Coast Council Policy and Strategy

- Corporate Plan 2020-2024
- Sunshine Coast Community Strategy 2019-2041

Version control:

Version	Reason/ Trigger	Change (Y/N)	Endorsed/ Reviewed by	Date
1.0	Review			31/07/2020

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