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19 February 2025

NPDC City Centre Stakeholder Comms - Rough Sleeping action

Kia ora koutou

Given the growing challenges for the CBD over the last 18 months, we wanted to establish an avenue to keep stakeholders informed about the work we are doing to address these challenges.

While this is a priority area for us, we acknowledge we could have done more to keep everyone up to date.

We appreciate the effort many of you have made to reach out to us and this is the first of the regular updates we will provide to you going forward.

I want to assure you we hear your concerns and frustrations with the increased visibility of people sleeping rough in the CBD. I know it is confronting and the distressing behaviour of some of this community is having an impact on the everyday activities of business owners, their staff, customers, visitors, and developers.

Homelessness is a long-standing and complex issue both locally and nationally, one we cannot address alone, and is the result of a wide range of other social issues.

We have outlined some of the ways NPDC is involved in addressing these issues.

## **CIVIC LEADERSHIP**

His Worship Mayor Neil Holdom has led the way, with the support of a committed group of Councillors, in advocating to Central Government to provide funding to support the services needed to address the issues, including access to affordable housing.

People sleeping rough are drawn to highly visible public spaces for their own safety and wellbeing, and they experience a wide range of barriers to accessing support.

This advocacy complements the work our staff are doing on the ground, which has focussed on working closely with local service providers and government agencies to gather data to get a better understanding of the situation and look for opportunities to work with others on solutions.

## **WHAT CAN COUNCIL DO?**

It's important to note that sleeping rough is not illegal, so the challenge for us is to address the impacts of the activity, while still respecting the rights of a vulnerable community.

However we currently have limited powers available to us to manage the activity directly.

We can trespass people from our private property in the most serious of situations, but in accordance with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, we can't trespass someone from a public space, such as on the street.

Trespassing is a last resort, and can be distressing for the person affected, who will likely just move to another location.

We will shortly be consulting on a new Public Places Bylaw, which will include some tools for addressing the storage of belongings in a public place. This is a balance between individuals rights under the Bill of Rights Act, and the communities desire to address these issues.

### **WHAT IS COUNCIL DOING?**

We've focused our efforts on finding solutions that will create meaningful change and leave a lasting impact, instead of shifting the problem around.

We've taken an interagency approach to identify ways we could support the important work many organisations do in this space. As a result, we have put some short-term actions in place, which are summarised below.

- **Ngāmotu Street Initiative:** We have partnered with and funded the Taranaki Retreat to support phase one of the Ngāmotu Street Initiative. The aim of the initiative is building an accurate understanding of our rough sleepers' needs to inform future projects and avoid money being spent on anything that doesn't address the issue. The initiative also assists people into housing where possible, and advocates for those needing complex support.
- **City Safe Wardens:** In December we launched a two-month trial of a City Safe Wardens programme in response to advocacy from the business community. It saw wardens patrolling the CBD from Monday-Saturday, 7am-6pm to be the "eyes and ears" for the community and supporting safety and wellbeing for businesses and people in the CBD. While they don't have a disciplinary role, feedback from businesses and the public has been positive so far. As such, we are extending the trial for a further three months till mid-May, at reduced hours based on feedback from businesses. We will continue reviewing the effectiveness of this initiative and make changes as needed.
- **NPDC web page on homelessness in development:** We are in the process of developing a page on Council's website, to provide information on our role in this space, service provider contacts for those needing support and local and council initiatives.

We're also looking further ahead on:

## Medium-term actions

- **Homelessness Action Plan:** Council is among a group of organisations, including local service providers and government agencies, that have come together to develop a Homelessness Action Plan for Taranaki. A working party of providers with extensive knowledge of successful initiatives nationally and internationally has been established to drive the plan's progress.
- **Potential shelter and facilities:** We've been approached by a community organisation which has plans underway to establish a homeless shelter with support services, security, and shower/laundry facilities on the fringe of the CBD. The organisation is working with other services to ensure the proposal is robust. If the initiative gets off the ground, it will give rough sleepers access to a range of services and minimise the impacts of this activity. Our staff are in the process of preparing information for the Mayor and Councillors decision to determine what support might be possible, but without any impact on rates.

## Long-term actions

- **Housing First programme and government advocacy:** Through the Ngāmotu Street Initiative, the work of other services, and the Taranaki Housing Initiative Trust, data is being collected to support advocacy to central Government for the establishment of a Housing First Programme in Taranaki. This programme would house people long-term.

Central Government plays a critical role in addressing systemic issues such as affordable housing supply and mental health services that can lead to people experiencing homelessness, or those already homeless facing barriers to the support they need. We will continue to work with Central Government to collaboratively address these complex challenges.

## FUTURE UPDATES

Introducing Damien Clark, Manager Community and Economic Development, who has been overseeing much of this work. He will provide regular updates on this work. If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch.

Ngā mihi



Gareth Green  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**