

**ITEM 3.1 MARTIN PLACE 'TENT CITY'****FILE NO:****MINUTE BY THE LORD MAYOR**To Council:

Housing affordability and homelessness are at crisis point in Sydney and we need long-term solutions not short-term fixes.

While tents pitched outside the offices of politicians and financiers in Martin Place have finally got homelessness on the agenda, it is not the only location where people sleep rough. There are more than 400 people sleeping rough across the City of Sydney area.

In February 2017, the City's biannual street count identified 433 people sleeping rough in the City of Sydney Local Government Area and 489 people in crisis or temporary accommodation centres that are operating at 91 per cent capacity.

Many of these people are escaping domestic violence or suffer chronic mental health problems. Of the people who are homeless in the inner City, we know that 29 per cent have a brain injury, 72 per cent report substance abuse, 53 per cent report mental health issues, 64 per cent report both substance abuse and mental health issues, 49 per cent have a history of trauma and 44 per cent report being a victim of violence.

Simply putting them up in a hotel for a few nights or moving them to homes away from the support services and community they rely on does nothing to help them and often makes things worse.

**A Fair Solution for Homelessness in Martin Place**

**It is why I do not support moving homeless and vulnerable people from public spaces without certainty of necessary support and permanent housing.** Without assistance and housing, vulnerable people will be further harmed and the 'tent city' will simply return to Martin Place.

City staff asked FACS to investigate the establishment of a 24/7 service that could provide food, showers and other amenities and a safe space 24 hours a day.

City staff have also consistently worked with the Minister's department to manage safety and other risks in Martin Place, removing unauthorised items from Martin Place on seven occasions since December 2016, and coordinating and initiating all operations to remove waste and unnecessary materials.

The most recent operation on 24 June was undertaken because construction was commencing on a major development. Builder Lendlease asked people to move their belongings from under the active hoarding installed to protect construction workers and the public from demolition works. Many items were removed by negotiation with their owners.

After every clean-up operation, items have reappeared in the public space within hours. Simply repeating what we've done in the past will not solve this current crisis.

### **City Authority in Martin Place**

In the last week or so, the Premier, the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Police Commissioner have all made different statements about the City's authority to clear the 'tent city' in Martin Place.

**Last week, I met with the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Police Commissioner** and made clear that while the Local Government Act empowers the City to remove items from a public place in certain circumstances, our staff have no legal authority to move people on or to prevent people from bringing goods into the public space.

Only the NSW Police can do that and the Police Commissioner has all the power he needs to take action without approval from the City of Sydney.

Does anyone seriously believe the NSW Police need approval from the City to take action if they think there's a significant risk to public safety?

All the Council has the authority to do is clean the site and remove items. If people refuse to hand over their belongings to Council staff, we have no authority to act.

Martin Place is a Crown Reserve. Under the Crown Lands Act, "Authorised Persons" can take enforcement action. Members of the Police force are "Authorised Persons" under that Act. The only powers Council officers have under the provisions regarding the protection of public land in the Crown Lands Act is to demand someone provide a name and address.

**Last week, the Minister for Family and Community Services said about the camp: "we will move these people on. I don't care what it takes" and the Police Commissioner said "if one person puts a step out of line, I'll throw them in the back of the truck."**

But the NSW Government and the Police do not want to use the powers they already have to solve this crisis. They want the City to initiate action and I am not prepared to do that unless I am convinced that their action will not lead to the ugly violent confrontations we all saw in Melbourne earlier this year and that the Government is serious about long-term solutions.

### **Call to Action on Real Solutions**

The 'tent city' in Martin Place could be resolved today by re-opening the Sirius building and moving people in. It is incomprehensible that 77 homes are currently sitting empty in a building purpose-built for social housing while nearby in Martin Place people sleep in tents in the middle of winter.

The argument that the Government is selling Sirius to build more social housing is misleading at best. While the Government may be building housing across NSW, they have destroyed social housing communities in the inner city, the very place that many homeless people end up.

The situation at Martin Place is a direct consequence of decades of shameful inaction from successive state governments. Instead of investing in more social housing in our area, people have been evicted and relocated to other area and their homes have been sold to the highest bidder.

You can't solve homelessness without housing and we desperately need more supported and affordable housing in the inner city.

I therefore continue to seek from the State Government short and long-term commitments that could provide real solutions:

- That Family and Community Services staff **provide supported and permanent accommodation** for people sleeping rough in Martin Place.
- That the **Sirius building be reopened** to provide supported and permanent housing.
- That a **24/7 safe space is established in the Sydney CBD** that provides food, showers and laundry facilities with support and links to homelessness services.
- That **funding is provided for a new 'Common Ground'** at Marian Street Redfern as proposed by the City, Mission Australia Housing and Macquarie Corporate Holdings.
- That **planning approval is given for the extension of the City's affordable housing levy** across the entire local government area.

City staff have been working with FACS to investigate the establishment of a 24/7 service that could provide food, showers and other amenities and a safe space 24 hours a day.

#### **Agreement Today on Martin Place 'Tent City'**

Today is the start of Homelessness Week, an annual week used to raise awareness of people experiencing homelessness and the issues they face.

I have been very concerned about threats of heavy handed action to clear out vulnerable homeless people from Martin Place and our staff have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to resolve the issue.

Today I met with Lanz Priestley (on behalf of the 24-7 Street Kitchen Safe Space) to negotiate a safe and peaceful resolution and spoke again with the Premier to reach agreement on that solution.

Mr Priestly has agreed to dismantle tents in Martin Place if an immediate 24/7 communal safe space in the city centre is established while a permanent 24/7 safe space is developed.

The Minister for Family and Community Services has already given support to a 24/7 safe space. To fast track its establishment I believe the City should immediately provide one of our facilities to the Government for use as a temporary space.

The Government has also indicated that they would need \$100,000 in funding from the City to help establish a permanent facility and I believe we should support that request.

#### **City Action on Homelessness**

Even though housing and homelessness are State Government responsibilities, we contribute and do more than any other council in the country.

The City runs the only local government homelessness unit in Australia, with dedicated staff who visit people who are homeless every day of the week to link them to housing and services.

We also use every lever we can to contribute to affordable housing supply.

Through the use of development contribution schemes, subsidised land sales to community housing providers, grants, planning controls and planning agreements, we are contributing 1,800 affordable and diverse housing units into the pipeline across the city.

We've set aside approximately \$24 million for affordable housing. These measures include Council approved grants to non-government organisations Salvation Army, HammondCare and St George Community Housing for Young People at Risk Of Homelessness, as well as subsidised sale of land to City West Housing at Harold Park, Green Square and Alexandria.

Over the next three years, we will invest \$6.6 million on homeless services which includes \$3.5 million for the Minister's own Family and Community Services agency to help with the work in Martin Place and other areas.

Last year, specialist homelessness services funded by the City helped more than 320 people access housing with support and prevented more than 450 people from becoming homeless.

Last week many people spoke about how uncomfortable the tent city in Martin Place made them feel.

The truth is nothing about homelessness is comfortable.

Sleeping in a cold tent on a concrete floor in the middle of winter isn't comfortable. Needing to leave home in the middle of the night because your violent spouse has abused you isn't comfortable. Losing your job and not being able to pay the rent isn't comfortable. Growing up on the streets because you don't have a stable family isn't comfortable.

What's tragic about the situation in Martin Place isn't that it's happening – what's tragic is that this debate has dehumanised the people forced into this situation so much so that talk is about moving them on rather than on long-term solutions.

We need an end to the rhetoric and a real commitment to social and affordable housing in the inner city.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is resolved that Council:

- A. note that agreement has been reached with Lanz Priestly to dismantle tents in Martin Place if an immediate 24/7 communal safe space in the city centre is established while a permanent 24/7 safe space is developed;
- B. support the establishment of a 24/7 safe space in Central Sydney that provides food, showers and laundry facilities with support and links to homelessness services, through:
  - a. Approving a grant to the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) of up to \$100,000 (ex GST) per year for up to three years; and

- b. Providing temporary use of a Council property for an immediate interim facility subject to FAC providing necessary support services;
- C. calls on the NSW Government to provide long-term housing solutions by committing to:
  - a. re-opening the Sirius Building to provide supported and permanent housing in the inner city for vulnerable people;
  - b. funding for a new 'Common Ground' at Marian Street Redfern as proposed by the City, Mission Australia Housing and Macquarie Corporate Holdings; and
  - c. planning approval for the extension of the City's affordable housing levy across the entire local government area.
- D. endorses the CEO to direct staff to clean up and store any items left in Martin Place after people have been housed.

**COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE**  
Lord Mayor