

ITEM 2. COMMUNITY SERVICES GRANT - REDFERN LEGAL CENTRE - EXTENSION OF MILLERS POINT TENANT SUPPORT**FILE NO: S117676****SUMMARY**

On 19 March 2014, the NSW Government announced its decision to sell 293 social housing properties in Millers Point and The Rocks over a two-year period, impacting close to 400 residents. As at October 2017, there are approximately 19 tenants still residing at Millers Point. Many of the remaining tenants have complex support needs.

Since April 2014, the City has approved funding to Redfern Legal Centre for the delivery of tenant support, advocacy and advice services to public housing tenants impacted by the sale of social housing properties in Millers Point (the Millers Point Tenancy Service). A total of \$370,000 has been approved, with the current funding agreement due to end in November 2017. In addition to the cash grant, the City has also provided regular access to space at the Harry Jensen Centre to support delivery of the service. The Millers Point Tenancy Service has assisted 169 tenants to date. The service has supported many of these clients through the process of reviewing and accepting offers of alternative housing in other areas from NSW Family and Community Services (FACS) Housing.

The service continues to demonstrate its success in advocating for the needs of vulnerable tenants. Seventeen of the remaining 19 tenants in the Millers Point area are clients of the service. The service has supported many of these clients in applications to the Housing Appeals Committee where clients believe that formal offers of housing have not been reasonable. In approximately 50 per cent of the cases where Redfern Legal Centre has assisted tenants to appeal, the offer has been found to have been unreasonable.

As tenants have relocated, the total number of clients of the service has decreased, however, the complexity and intensity of service required has increased. Redfern Legal Centre has now requested an additional cash grant of \$65,000 to continue to deliver advocacy and support services to the remaining tenants for another six months to 31 May 2018. The previous grant amount approved by Council on 15 May 2017 included \$60,000 cash support.

The funding sought would enable:

- the continued provision of a dedicated staff member three days per week (reduced from a current five days per week); and
- an independent qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the service to be conducted.

While it remains possible that tenants will continue to reside in the Millers Point area after May 2018, Redfern Legal Centre advises that it plans to absorb the remaining caseload as part of its core business, and does not intend to request further funding for the service.

The funding will also enable Redfern Legal Centre to conduct a thorough evaluation of the Millers Point Tenants Service to inform the future provision of services, and assist stakeholders, including government funding bodies and other advocacy services, to identify the strengths of the service and areas for improvement. This information will be important to:

- inform the design and provision of similar services in areas where relocation is planned in the future, particularly the Waterloo Estate; and
- provide an evidence base for the effectiveness of the service that may assist in securing funding from other sources if required in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a final extension of the current cash grant to Redfern Legal Centre for the delivery of the Millers Point Tenancy Service from 1 December 2017 to 31 May 2018 to a value of \$65,000 (excluding GST); and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer a grant agreement with Redfern Legal Centre on terms consistent with this resolution.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil.

BACKGROUND

Relocation of Tenants

1. On 19 March 2014, the NSW Government announced its decision to sell 293 properties in Millers Point and The Rocks over a two-year period, including the 89 units in the Sirius Building. The decision has impacted close to 400 residents living in properties owned by the NSW Government and managed by the NSW Land and Housing Corporation.
2. According to a NSW Government media release, a total of 136 Millers Point properties have been sold to date, generating proceeds of \$448 million.
3. The relocation process has not been completed in the original two-year timeframe and is continuing. As at September 2017, there are 19 tenants yet to be relocated from Millers Point. Many of the remaining tenants have complex support needs, including people who are ageing, experience disability and/or speak a language other than English.

Millers Point Tenancy Service

4. On 7 April 2014, Council resolved to approve the allocation of up to \$100,000 in cash to Redfern Legal Centre over a 12-month period for tenant support, advocacy and advice services to public housing tenants impacted by the sale (the Millers Point Tenancy Service).
5. This funding has continued, with Council approving several six-month extensions to the grant as follows:
 - (a) \$50,000 in April 2015;
 - (b) \$50,000 in November 2015;
 - (c) \$50,000 in May 2016;
 - (d) \$60,000 in November 2016; and
 - (e) \$60,000 in May 2017.
6. A total of \$370,000 has been approved by the City for the ongoing delivery of the legal service since April 2014. Funding is due to end in November 2017. In addition to the cash grant, the City has also approved regular access to space at the Harry Jensen Centre to support delivery of the service.
7. The Millers Point Tenancy Service has assisted 169 tenants to date and currently offers support to tenants in assessing housing offers and, where necessary, lodging appeals in relation to the offer. The service:
 - (a) provides information and legal advice to tenants who are impacted, including advice on leases and issues with property repairs to those who are relocating. Advice is provided face-to-face and over the phone;
 - (b) prepares and distributes fact sheets and other resources for tenant information;
 - (c) runs weekly advice sessions at the Harry Jensen Centre;

- (d) advocates on behalf of tenants in ongoing negotiations relating to relocation;
 - (e) assists tenants to appeal offers; and
 - (f) assists tenants in Tribunal proceedings relating to termination of tenancy.
8. Since the service commenced, the number of tenants assisted at any one time has decreased (as tenants relocate), however, there has been a corresponding increase in the complexity and intensity of advice and support required for remaining tenants. As a result, demand for a part-time service has remained.
9. In the three months from 1 June 2017 to 31 August 2017, the service has, on behalf of 24 tenants:
- (a) provided advice to tenants, 74 times face-to-face and 205 times via telephone;
 - (b) attended 27 meetings between tenants and NSW Family and Community Services (FACS);
 - (c) advocated to FACS and other Government agencies in 226 instances;
 - (d) assisted with six appeals to the Housing Appeals Committee and four Final Reviews; and
 - (e) made two appearances at NSW Tribunal and Courts.
10. Redfern Legal Centre has now requested an additional cash grant of \$65,000 to continue to deliver the service for another six months to 31 May 2018. This request would enable:
- (a) the continued provision of a dedicated staff member three days per week (reduced from a current five days per week); and
 - (b) an independent, qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the service to be conducted.
11. Redfern Legal Centre has advised that the demand for a part-time case worker for the service remains high, with 19 tenants remaining in Millers Point. Redfern Legal Centre anticipates that remaining tenants will continue to require high levels of advocacy and support in the final stages of the process, including throughout the final stages of reviews, appeals and possible termination of tenancy. In addition, tenants are expected to require advice and advocacy in the period immediately after they move to their new properties, particularly with problems related to repair work and other issues with their properties that were not apparent on inspection.
12. Redfern Legal Centre has limited capacity to absorb the service into its current functions, and has estimated that it would only be able to continue to support three to four cases, some limited phone advice and occasional advocacy (depending on availability) without additional funding.

13. In addition to providing a part-time case worker, Redfern Legal Centre seeks additional funding to carry out an evaluation of the service. The evaluation would be conducted independently and would include qualitative and quantitative components. The evaluation will involve interviewing staff, current and former clients and other stakeholders with a report to be produced at its conclusion. The evaluation report will identify the strengths and limitations of the service and inform Redfern Legal Centre and funding bodies on how tenants' advocacy services should be modelled in future social housing redevelopments.
14. This information will be important to:
 - (a) inform the design and provision of similar services in areas where tenant relocation is planned in the future, particularly the Waterloo Estate; and
 - (b) provide an evidence base for the effectiveness of the service that may assist in securing funding from other sources if required in the future.

KEY IMPLICATIONS**Social / Cultural / Community**

15. Extension of this grant will continue the support for the most vulnerable Millers Point residents affected by the relocation at the most complex stage of the relocation process and will provide for an independent evaluation.
16. The independent evaluation will provide evidence-based information on how to support social housing tenants impacted by relocation processes in future.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

17. Budget for the grant extension is available within the City's 2017/18 Grants and Sponsorship Budget.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

18. Local Government Act 1993.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

19. If funding is not extended, Redfern Legal Centre advises the service will cease in late 2017.

ANN HOBAN

Director, City Life

Natalie Niamh Wright, Grants Officer