

Resolution of Council

8 April 2019

Item 11.6

Commemorative Plaque in Martin Place: Hank and Homelessness

Moved by Councillor Scott, seconded by Councillor Miller –

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) the City of Sydney is experiencing a homelessness crisis, with figures estimating that almost 300 people sleep rough on our City streets each night, many of whom are experiencing long-term homelessness;
- (ii) this reflects the crisis in homelessness occurring across NSW:
 - (a) homelessness has increased by 37 per cent in NSW, and by 14 per cent across Australia in the five years to 2016, according to census data;
 - (b) in the same period, spending on services for those who are homeless and those sleeping rough decreased by 14 per cent;
 - (c) 288,000 people access homelessness services every year; and
 - (d) 51,453 people in NSW are on the social housing waiting list and almost 200,000 people are on waiting lists for social housing across Australia;
- (iii) the City of Sydney has a long history of working to support and improve the living conditions of those sleeping rough on our City streets. This includes in August 2018 a reaffirmation of the 2017 commitment to support the establishment of a 24/7 safe space through a grant of \$100,000 per year for three years to the Department of Family and Community Services;

- (iv) on Christmas Eve 2018 a local man experiencing long-term homelessness named Hank sadly passed away in St Vincent's Hospital. Hank was well-known and admired amongst the community of people experiencing homelessness in the area, and to volunteers at the Wayside Chapel, the Footpath Library, Orange Sky Laundry, Vinnies Night Patrol and other local organisations providing support to those experiencing homelessness in our City;
 - (v) Hank's life experiences are representative of those of many people who experience long-term homeless in City. Like many in our homeless community, Hank had a happy childhood, was well educated and spent years employed and living in his own home. When his circumstances changed and he had nowhere to live, Hank spent many years sleeping rough, living short-term in hostels, and, in his later years, he lived in a boarding house behind the Australian Museum. His story is common, and could happen to many of us;
 - (vi) Martin Place is an important ritualistic site for the people sleeping rough or living in accommodation with no security of tenure in our City, as the imposing architecture of the financial district serves as the backdrop for the meeting place, sanctuary and sleeping zone of our most vulnerable residents. There is a rigid dichotomy between the wealth this space represents by day and the extreme hardship the night-time users are experiencing; and
 - (vii) people affected by homelessness deserve space and representation in our City;
- (B) Council endorse the installation of a commemorative plaque in the vicinity of Martin Place to Hank and the many people experiencing homelessness in our City; and
- (C) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:
- (i) investigate options for the installation of this commemorative plaque; and
 - (ii) report the findings back to Councillors via the CEO Update.

Note – the motion above was not carried. The resolution below was carried –

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note:
- (i) the City of Sydney is experiencing a homelessness crisis, with figures estimating that almost 300 people sleep rough on our City streets each night, many of whom are experiencing long-term homelessness;
 - (ii) this reflects the crisis in homelessness occurring across NSW:
 - (a) homelessness has increased by 37 per cent in NSW, and by 14 per cent across Australia in the five years to 2016, according to census data;
 - (a) in the same period, spending on services for those who are homeless and those sleeping rough decreased by 14 per cent;
 - (b) 288,000 people access homelessness services every year; and

- (c) 51,453 people in NSW are on the social housing waiting list and almost 200,000 people are on waiting lists for social housing across Australia;
 - (iii) the City of Sydney has a long history of working to support and improve the living conditions of those sleeping rough on our City streets. This includes in August 2018 a reaffirmation of the 2017 commitment to support the establishment of a 24/7 safe space through a grant of \$100,000 per year for three years to the Department of Family and Community Services;
 - (iv) on Christmas Eve 2018, a local man experiencing long-term homelessness named Hank sadly passed away in St Vincent's Hospital. Hank was well-known and admired amongst the community of people experiencing homelessness in the area, and to volunteers at the Wayside Chapel, the Footpath Library, Orange Sky Laundry, Vinnies Night Patrol and other local organisations providing support to those experiencing homelessness in our City;
 - (v) Hank's life experiences are representative of those of many people who experience long-term homeless in City. Like many in our homeless community, Hank had a happy childhood, was well educated and spent years employed and living in his own home. When his circumstances changed and he had nowhere to live, Hank spent many years sleeping rough, living short-term in hostels, and, in his later years, he lived in a boarding house behind the Australian Museum. His story is common, and could happen to many of us;
 - (vi) Martin Place is an important ritualistic site for the people sleeping rough or living in accommodation with no security of tenure in our City, as the imposing architecture of the financial district serves as the backdrop for the meeting place, sanctuary and sleeping zone of our most vulnerable residents. There is a rigid dichotomy between the wealth this space represents by day and the extreme hardship the night-time users are experiencing; and
 - (vii) people affected by homelessness deserve space and representation in our City; and
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:
- (i) work with relevant organisations and individuals to investigate creative options that recognise and commemorate the lives of the rough-sleeping community in our city, including but not limited to options such as a mural, tree or plaque; and
 - (ii) report the findings back to Councillors via the CEO Update.

Carried unanimously.

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