

## **Grants and Sponsorship - Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund - St George Community Housing - Improving Access to Affordable Housing Opportunities**

**File No: X009742**

### **Summary**

The Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund was established with \$10.3M from the sale of land at Harold Park in 2015. Since its inception, the Fund has been publicly advertised and consultation undertaken with various community housing providers to promote the opportunities the Fund provides. An additional \$10M for Affordable and Diverse Housing has been budgeted for in the City's Long Term Financial Plan.

In February 2020 Council approved a grant to St George Community Housing of \$150,000 for the operation of the Aboriginal Affordable Housing Engagement Coordinator (AAHEC) project. The project has been successful in training an identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person as an Affordable Housing Manager to provide targeted and culturally appropriate housing related services in the local area, conducting a research project to understand how to improve access to affordable housing opportunities and retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and developing a 'register of interest' of local First Nations people interested in accessing affordable housing to be shared with all participating community housing providers.

The City has received an application from St George Community Housing to continue this project and engage another Aboriginal Affordable Housing Engagement Coordinator when the current Coordinator takes up a new full-time position in February 2022. The project is again a shared capacity development project with three community housing providers in the local area: St George Community Housing, Bridge Housing and City West Housing.

The grant application from St George Community Housing recommended in this report is affordable housing related and meets some, but not all the criteria of the Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund. The total value of requested funds under this application is \$195,000 over two years.

The City recognises the broad spectrum of services that are required around affordable housing, and this proposal aligns with the City's position on supporting the housing supply continuum as outlined in the City's Housing For All - Local Housing Strategy . The project seeks to improve affordable housing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Persons. Addressing homelessness and improving housing options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People has been identified as a priority within the local area. This proposal also aligns with the City's position on social sustainability to reduce homelessness, provide social and affordable housing, and support an equitable and inclusive city.

It is recommended that this grant is again funded from the Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund notwithstanding that this application does not create new affordable housing dwellings.

## **Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a \$195,000 (excluding GST) cash grant over two years to St George Community Housing Limited:
  - (i) year one totalling \$96,345 (excluding GST); and
  - (ii) year two totalling \$98,655 (excluding GST);subject to the applicant providing letters of support from partnering Community Housing Providers;
- (B) Council note that all grant amounts are exclusive of GST; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer the agreement with St George Community Housing Limited under terms consistent with this resolution and the Grants and Sponsorship Policy.

## **Attachments**

Nil.

## Background

1. On 29 June 2015, Council resolved to endorse the sale of land at Harold Park and reserve the money from the land sale for a dedicated affordable and diverse housing fund.
2. Since 2015, the City has funded a number of projects and programs through the Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund.
3. On 17 February 2020, Council approved a \$150,000 grant to St George Community Housing Limited for their initiative to increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons to access affordable housing.
4. The recommended project does not meet all the criteria of the Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund as the project will not create new affordable housing dwellings. This grant has been assessed outside of the Fund's criteria and against the City's public strategies relating to affordable housing.
5. In line with the City's Housing For All - Local Housing Strategy priority 3: 'Increasing diversity and choice in housing', the City is encouraging Community Housing Providers (CHPs) to increase the percentage of available affordable housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In planning for the types of new homes residents will need in the future, the challenge for the City is to support social and cultural diversity through increasing housing diversity and choice. This includes retaining and attracting residents on lower incomes and those who identify as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
6. The City's local housing strategy highlights that inner Sydney has strong historical and place associations relating to the patterns of urban migration of First Nations peoples and Redfern's legacy of fighting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and human rights. However, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in inner Sydney continues to decline. It now stands at just 3,509 individuals in the local area. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have expressed concern that gentrification and a lack of social and affordable housing are causing further displacement and making it difficult for members of the local community to maintain links and stay in the local area.
7. There is a clear opportunity for the City to encourage Community Housing Providers to meet a gap in the community and seek to build capacity to support improved housing outcomes for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, with the potential to expand long term beyond the local area to Sydney Metro and NSW wide.
8. The grant is recommended for support as the project will contribute towards aiding the broader affordable housing ecosystem, recognising that to enable affordable housing to be developed and accessible for those most vulnerable in our community, there must be a wide range of supporting services and housing options in place.

## St George Community Housing

9. In May 2020 Council approved a grant of \$150,000 to employ and train a dedicated Aboriginal Affordable Housing Engagement Coordinator (AAHEC) to improve access to affordable housing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the local area. The current incumbent was employed in the AAHEC role and the project has been remarkably successful in attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to new affordable housing.
10. Since October 2020, over 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have been housed in properties managed by the three providers. This includes the allocation of over 50 per cent of homes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the newly completed 162 unit building by St George Community Housing at 11 Gibbons, Redfern.
11. The current Aboriginal Affordable Housing Engagement Coordinator will transition to a full-time position in St George Community Housing at the end of March 2022. This report recommends the employment of a new dedicated Aboriginal Affordable Housing Engagement Coordinator to continue to provide targeted and culturally appropriate housing related services for two years, and to continue the collaboration by the three community housing providers St George Community Housing, Bridge Housing and City West Housing, solely focused in the City of Sydney area.
12. This new position will be based in the St George Community Housing Redfern office to continue to resource the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, stakeholders and community and public housing systems. The ongoing collaboration and opportunities provided by the first role are to be built upon and developed in partnership with the Redfern community stakeholders.
13. The proposed two year role will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take up housing opportunities in existing social and affordable housing properties managed by the three providers in the City of Sydney, as well as any newly developed properties. The role will also continue as a shared resource to the city stakeholders particularly in finding ways to sustain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenancies that may be at risk.
14. The extension of the 'Improving Access to Affordable Housing for Aboriginal people' project will build on the momentum of the original project outcomes. This new project coordinator will collaborate with the three providers and the City of Sydney on the following priorities:
  - (a) Improve the customer service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers and applicants to the three Community Housing Providers, St George Community Housing, Bridge Housing and City West Housing;
  - (b) Manage the newly developed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service partnerships and be a contact point;
  - (c) Promote strategies to sustain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenancies;
  - (d) Manage and promote the 'register of interest' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers seeking to access affordable housing;
  - (e) Support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for social housing assistance; and

- (f) Link to and support the Redfern Waterloo Affordable Housing Alliance.
15. St George Community Housing will undertake an evaluation after 20 months on the effectiveness or otherwise of the funded program to determine whether the project is meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other key stakeholders. The evaluation methodology will be determined in consultation with partner Community Housing Providers, the City of Sydney and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

## Key Implications

### Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

16. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 8 - Housing for a Diverse Population - These projects align with the City's position on affordable housing, homelessness and social sustainability, as set out in A City For All, the social sustainability strategy, as well as Housing for All, the City's housing strategy.

### Risks

17. Risks for the City in association with this project have been addressed by setting proposed conditions for the grant. If the grant is awarded, the applicant will be required to enter into an agreement governing the grant on terms satisfactory to the City.

### Social / Cultural / Community

18. A City For All is the social sustainability vision for a socially just and resilient Sydney. These grant recommendations are aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Inclusive growth and opportunities:
    - (i) Prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping through leading and participating in innovative approaches to addressing homelessness.
    - (ii) Increase supply of housing that is universally designed for people of all ages and abilities.
    - (iii) Provide improved access to facilities, programs and services for people on all incomes.
    - (iv) Enable community led solutions to local social issues.
  - (b) Connect City - diverse, cohesive communities
    - (i) Improve community safety through collaboration with government and non-government organisations to deliver improved services, programs and initiatives.

### **Financial Implications**

19. The funds for the recommendation will be drawn from the Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund (when it occurs this expenditure will further reduce the monies that have been set aside in the City's Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund, established as per Council's resolution of 29 June 2015 for the sale of the Harold Park affordable housing site).
20. An additional \$10M for Affordable and Diverse Housing has been budgeted for in the City's Long Term Financial Plan.

### **Relevant Legislation**

21. Section 356(1) of the Local Government Act 1993 states that a council may, in accordance with a resolution of the council, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for the purpose of exercising its functions.
22. St George Community Housing Limited is a registered as a public benevolent institution, and therefore public exhibition of this proposed grant is not required.

**EMMA RIGNEY**

Director City Life

Phoebe Arthur, Grants Coordinator