

Homelessness Policy

1 Purpose

This Policy establishes key principles that will support Council's work preventing and reducing homelessness and mitigating against the impacts of homelessness in our local area. The Policy identifies the role of Council in addressing homelessness.

People are considered homeless when they do not have accommodation that is safe, secure, appropriate and affordable. Homelessness can take a number of forms, including people living in:

- temporary shelters
- severely crowded dwellings
- supported accommodation
- emergency accommodation
- refuges
- people who are couch surfing or temporarily staying with others.
- people who are sleeping rough (also known as street sleeping, this includes people sleeping in vehicles).

All of these circumstances constitute homelessness and are considered in this policy.

This Policy informs Council actions aimed at:

- a) Preventing, reducing and managing homelessness;
- b) Supporting and building capacity within the community to address homelessness;
- c) Developing the equity and prosperity of the city;
- d) Designing, developing and managing public space;
- e) Encouraging collaboration, community partnerships and evidence based practices to prevent, reduce and manage homelessness.

Addressing homelessness requires collaboration within Council and with our community partners to develop sustainable pathways out of homelessness. The Policy supports the MyCoffs Community Strategic Plan. It responds to the thematic focus of Community Wellbeing and the following goals and outcomes:

A vibrant, inclusive place: We address the causes of disadvantage (A1.3).

An active, safe and healthy community: We cultivate a safe community (A2.4).

Council recognises the Federal and state governments' have the primary role in providing funding and services to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Council, as the closest tier of government to the community, is an important source of local understanding and leadership.

2 Policy

Council recognises the following:

1. That homelessness affects people and communities from different backgrounds including (but not limited to) families, young people, older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ people, humanitarian arrivals, and refugees.
2. That some members of our community may seek out alternative and less visible options of shelter. Homelessness is often hidden and efforts to officially quantify the number of people experiencing homelessness (such as through the Census or street counts) are typically an underestimate of the actual figures.
3. That the causes of homelessness are complex and varied. Council understands that homelessness is often the consequence of broad scale structural, social and economic factors that affect housing affordability, unemployment, and the provision of social services.

2.1 Council's role

Council's role in relation to homelessness includes:

1. **Design, development and management of public places:** Ensuring public places are accessible and able to be safely and peacefully enjoyed by all residents and users.
2. **Advocacy:** Advocating for state and federal government supported services and policies that impact on homelessness. This may include advocating for policies and services regarding health, domestic and family violence, housing affordability, social housing, income support, and homelessness support services.
3. **Community education:** Increasing community understanding about the complexity of homelessness and the role Council and other levels of government play.
4. **Information sharing and collaboration:** Working with community, state and federal government partners, and other stakeholders, to develop an understanding of the trends and issues that affect homelessness. Providing information to people who are experiencing homelessness (when appropriate), Council staff, and other interested residents concerning the homelessness services available in the area.
5. **Equity of participation:** Facilitating and encouraging social inclusion and community participation. Supporting community connections, including between people who are experiencing homelessness and the services that can support them.
6. **Education, training and/or awareness:** Providing education, training and/or awareness opportunities and support for staff who are in contact with people who experience homelessness through the normal course of their work.
7. **Planning:** Encouraging and facilitating the provision of affordable and diverse housing through Council's planning strategies and instruments.

2.2 Principles

Council is committed to addressing homelessness using means within its remit of responsibility. The following principles guide Council's approach to addressing homelessness:

1. Necessity of accommodation

- a. People who are experiencing homelessness represent some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society. Council acknowledges the Universal Declaration on Human Rights recognises that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their family, including access to housing (Article 25).
- b. Affordable and secure accommodation is necessary for individuals and families to meaningfully participate in education, employment, cultural and social opportunities. All people should have access to housing that is affordable, sustainable and meets their individual needs.
- c. Decisions made by Council can have an impact on homelessness.
- d. All people are entitled to receive support to ensure that they can access and maintain suitable, affordable and sustainable housing.

2. Community partnerships

- a. A wide variety of circumstances may trigger experiences of homelessness such as: domestic and family violence; drug, alcohol and gambling addiction; mental illness; family breakdown; shortage of stable and affordable housing; financial or housing stress; health issues; long term unemployment; and people leaving healthcare service, child protection and correctional facilities.
- b. Council recognises the expertise of the housing, homelessness and health sectors, and the experiences of local communities, local business, and people experiencing homelessness. Services are strengthened and better outcomes are achieved when relevant stakeholders work together to coordinate and collaborate.
- c. Working together in partnership can achieve much more than operating in isolation.

3. Public space design, development and management

- a. Public space design, development and management needs to be inclusive, compassionate, and balanced, so that the needs of all members of the community to use public space and feel safe are met.
- b. Policies and laws that regulate public space impact people who are homeless.
- c. Public land and water may hold cultural or spiritual significance to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

4. Community perceptions and inclusion

- a. People sleeping rough have limited storage options and are entitled to carry their possessions with them.
- b. People experiencing homelessness are part of our community, and should be treated with respect, having equal access to services and facilities to enable them to participate in their community.
- c. Homelessness may potentially impact on perceptions of the area.
- d. Sharing information and raising awareness in the local community on the nature, impacts and challenges of homelessness can contribute to social harmony and inclusion.

5. Evidence based advocacy

- a. Evidence based research identifies the local needs in relation to homelessness in the Coffs Harbour area.
- b. Understanding the numbers, trends and issues that affect homelessness in the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area supports advocacy at State and Federal government levels for policies and services that address local needs.

3 Definitions

Homelessness: A universally accepted definition of homelessness does not exist in Australian legislation. The most common homelessness definition identifies three types of homeless: primary, secondary and tertiary.

- a) **Primary Homelessness:** People who live in improvised dwellings. This includes people who sleep on the street, in parks, derelict buildings or cars;
- b) **Secondary Homelessness:** People who live in temporary accommodation. This includes people in emergency or short-term homeless services and people residing temporarily with friends or family;
- c) **Tertiary Homelessness:** People who live in accommodation without a lease or the private use of bathroom or kitchen facilities. This includes people in medium to long term boarding houses or caravan parks.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines homelessness as the lack of one or more of the elements that represent ‘home’. These elements may include a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control living space.

The ABS statistical definition of homelessness is ‘...when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- 1. is in a dwelling that is inadequate;
- 2. has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- 3. does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations’ (ABS 2012).

People sleeping rough (‘Rough sleeper): The term ‘rough sleeper’ relates to people without shelter and sleeping outside in places not meant for human habitation. Rough sleepers were previously defined by the ABS under the category of primary homelessness.

Affordable housing: Affordable housing is defined in Council’s Affordable Housing Policy.

4 Key Responsibilities

Position	Group/Directorate	Responsibility
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy and guidelines.
General Manager	Executive	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy and guidelines.
Directors	All directorates	To communicate, implement and comply with this policy and related guidelines.

Position	Group/Directorate	Responsibility
Group, Section, and other People Leaders	All directorates	To plan, action, communicate, implement and comply with this policy and related guidelines as it impacts your areas of responsibility.
All council officials	Council	To comply with this policy and related procedures
Group Leader Organisational Development	Organisational Development	To ensure relevant training, education and awareness is provided to relevant staff.
Group Leader	Community and Cultural Services	To maintain this policy and to support Organisational Development to offer training, education and awareness for relevant staff.

5 References (laws, standards and other Council documents)

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012. Information Paper: A Statistical Definition of Homelessness (cat. No. 4922.0)
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- Coffs Harbour City Council Affordable Housing in Coffs Harbour Issues and Options Paper 2020
- Coffs Harbour City Council Affordable Housing Policy
- Coffs Harbour City Council Homelessness Procedure – Assisting People Who Sleep Rough
- Coffs Harbour City Council Local Strategic Planning Statement
- Coffs Harbour City Council MyCoffs Community Strategic Plan 2016
- Coffs Harbour City Council Short Term Accommodation Issues and Options Paper
- Coffs Harbour City Council Sustainability Policy
- Companion Animals Act 1998
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
- Local Government Act 1993
- NSW Government’s Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2023
- NSW Government North Coast Regional Plan 2036
- NSW Premier’s Priorities to Reduce Homelessness
- NSW Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places 2012
- United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights 1948

6 Details of Approval and revision

- **Approval date:** 24/03/2022
- **Responsible Group:** Community and Cultural Services Group
- **Responsible Section:** Community Planning & Performance
- **Superseded policies/procedures:** N/A
- **Next review date:** 24/03/2026

Table of amendments

Amendment	Authoriser	Approval ref	Date