



# HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH REPORT

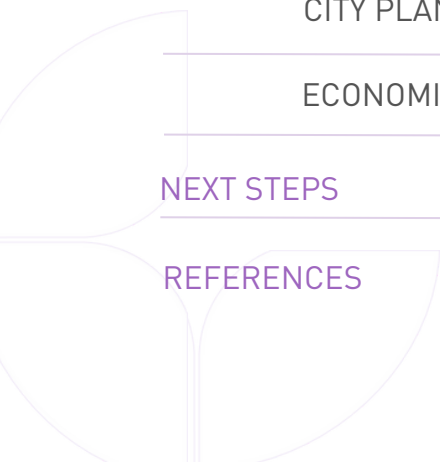
2024



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# INTRODUCTION

The City developed its first dedicated Homelessness Plan (**the Plan**) in 2021. The Plan was developed to support the release of the State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness - All Paths Lead to a Home - and in response to the growing complexity of homelessness throughout Western Australia and the **City of Canning**.

The Plan aims to align with the State Strategy and work collaboratively with all tiers of Government, community services, and the local community to provide those at risk of/experiencing homelessness with every opportunity to improve their circumstances.

In addition to anecdotal local data, the City relies heavily on data collected via the **Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census**; the primary tool for gauging trends in homelessness.

It should be noted that during the **2021 Census**, all States and Territories were under varying degrees of **COVID-19** restrictions. These included travel restrictions, limits on gatherings, and social distancing. Several state/territory governments also assisted in providing temporary accommodation to rough sleepers.

Whilst the Census seeks to account for each person and household in Australia, the 2021 data set is unique given the circumstances experienced during the pandemic.

This research report was prepared in response to objectives outlined in the City's **Homelessness Plan**:

3.1(a) Research and understand causal factors, impacts, and opportunities for those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

3.3(a) Research and understand latest trends and opportunities in the social housing space.

# DEFINITIONS

## Common Phrases:

### Homelessness



Whilst there is no universally agreed definition of homelessness, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines homelessness as the lack of one or more of the elements that represent 'home.' A person is considered **homeless** when they do not have suitable alternatives to their current living arrangement, which may:

- ✦ Be an inadequate dwelling
- ✦ Have no tenure (or tenure that is short and not extendable)
- ✦ Not allow them to have control of/access to the space for social relations

### Sleeping Rough



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare defines **sleeping rough** as 'living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting, staying in cars or railway carriages, living in impoverished dwellings, or living in the long grass.' This is often culturally misunderstood as homelessness.

### Chronic Homelessness



Is continuous homelessness for one year or more, or four or more episodes of homelessness amounting to at least **12 months** across the **last three years**.

In addition to anecdotal reports from the local community and the City's 24/7 Ranger and Community Safety Service, the City relies heavily on **ABS Census** data to identify trends in homelessness across the district. The ABS has developed a statistical definition of homelessness, in which there are **six** operational groups of homelessness recognised in the Census:

1. Living in improvised dwellings/tents/outdoors, i.e. rough sleeping
2. Living in supported accommodation
3. Living temporarily in other households
4. Living in boarding houses
5. Living in temporary lodgings
6. Living in 'severely' crowded dwellings

# SNAPSHOT: WESTERN AUSTRALIA

There were **9,729** people experiencing homelessness in **Western Australia** on Census night in 2021.

Trend compared to 2016 Census:

**1,614**

People living in accommodation for the homeless



**559**

**2,935**

People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings



**936**

**631**

People living in boarding houses



**369**

Over the course of a census year, WA's dedicated homelessness services assisted over

**24,000**

people, with significant over-representation of Aboriginal people:

**41%**

**24,466**

people in Western Australia received homelessness assistance, with family and domestic violence being the top reason for people accessing services.



# SNAPSHOT: CITY OF CANNING

**Unemployment rate** reduced between 2016 and 2021  
Census from

**10.2% → 5.9%**



**2,548**

**Jobseeker and youth allowance** recipients as of November 2023, a **15% decrease** from 2020.



**23.1%**

of households earned a **high income** (\$3,000 per week or more) in 2021, compared with **24.2%** for Greater Perth.



**15%**

Decrease in **low-income** households from 2016-2021.



**19.5%**

of households were **low-income** households (less than \$800 per week) in 2021, consistent with Greater Perth.



The **total number** of people experiencing homelessness is

**less than 0.3%**

of the City of Canning's **total population**.

## Trend compared to 2016 Census:

**52**

People living in accommodation for the homeless



**19**

**85**

People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings



**167**

**58**

People living in boarding houses



**96**

Canning's homelessness trends match those seen across Western Australia.

# SNAPSHOT: SOUTH-EAST CORRIDOR

The **South East Corridor Council Alliance (SECCA)** was formed in 2020 via a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Canning, City of Armadale, City of Gosnells, and Town of Victoria Park.

Understanding the unique experiences and response to homelessness within each Local Government is important to gaining a holistic understanding of the issue across the south-east corridor.

## CITY OF ARMADALE

In addition to the City of Armadale's **Policy - Homelessness**, the City aims to support residents to ensure access to essential health and welfare services through information sharing and promotion - including a **Hardship Resource Directory** - sector support, community education, and advocacy.

In 2023, the City of Armadale reviewed the community's social priorities, and found that **affordable housing** is an increasing concern. An **increase in homelessness** was also identified; specifically, people sleeping rough is becoming more apparent. Rough sleeping, insecure housing, the risk of homelessness due to financial stress, and people living in cars and tents was identified across **all** suburbs.

## CITY OF GOSNELLS

The City of Gosnells' approach to homelessness is outlined in their **Position Statement: Addressing Homelessness and Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing**.

Whilst the City is committed to supporting efforts to address homelessness - such as developing appropriately located City-owned land for affordable housing, and providing information and referral to support services - it considers homelessness primarily the responsibility of the State Government and thus the City adopts an advocacy approach in this space.

Anecdotal feedback shows there has been an **increase** in the number of people rough sleeping in the district.





## TOWN OF VICTORIA PARK

The Town of Victoria Park (The Town) aims to facilitate connections, advocate to other tiers of government, deliver awareness-raising and helpful resources, and partner with other stakeholders to meet the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.

The Town has a homelessness policy and internal management practice to support cases of homelessness in a humanistic and respectful manner. The Town's [Homelessness Implementation Plan](#) details the actions that will be undertaken by the Town to operationalise [Policy 113 Homelessness - The Town's role](#).

The Town works closely with several key stakeholders, including the Department of Communities (DOC), and is a part of numerous homelessness working groups to provide holistic and supportive responses that work within the overall homelessness response throughout Perth. The Town regularly engages with the DOC's Homeless Engagement Assessment Response Team (HEART). The HEART team provides outreach and intensive support for chronic rough sleepers in collaboration with sector partners including St Patrick's Community Support Centre, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and Uniting WA.

The Town also contracts a [Community Outreach Service](#) to patrol hotspot areas of the Town to provide appropriate assistance to those experiencing homelessness or hardship and connect them with appropriate services.

Over the past year, the Town has noted a significant increase in the number of reports of individuals experiencing homelessness. The Town has also experienced an increase in phone calls from community members seeking support. There is a need for greater coordination of Perth metro outreach services beyond the City of Perth to account for spread across local government.



# CAUSAL FACTORS

## AGE

There are countless risk factors that can lead to homelessness, including rent increases, insecure tenure, financial difficulty, health issues, and family and relationship breakdown. These risk factors are often exacerbated for more vulnerable members of the community, including youth and older populations.



Between the 2016–2021 census there was a **24%** increase in homelessness in WA for those aged **55+**.



Over **12,000** people aged **65+** in housing stress are paying more than **30%** of their income in rent.



The 2021 Census reported people aged **55+** represented **19%** of those experiencing homelessness in WA, and **16%** nationally.



**1,186** people aged **55+** are marginally housed without basic facilities in boarding houses, caravan parks, hotels, and other temporary dwellings.



**1,500** people aged **55+** and **716** aged **65+** are homeless in WA.

The Australian retirement system assumes that older people will own a home by retirement age, yet the number of people living in homes they own is declining.

Additionally, almost 700,000 people aged 55+ were renting from a private landlord.

Older renters in the private rental market often receive income support payments and/or are less likely to find alternative income streams due to their age, and often live in a state of worry about their tenancy.

The City of Canning currently owns and operates independent living units for people aged 55+:

- Rossmoyne Retirement Village
- Wilson Retirement Village
- Caprice Place Independent Living Units (originally a joint venture between the City of Canning and Department of Housing)

With the exception of Rossmoyne retirement village, these units are considered 'affordable living' and are available for low income earners aged 55+. The demand for these affordable homes is profound, given their affordability and close proximity to facilities, transport, shops, Doctors, etc.



Older tenants often face mobility issues and require accessible housing. Whilst the **National Construction Code** outlines minimum accessibility standards for new housing, the private rental market continues to fall short of suitable, accessible housing. Given the current demand for a limited number of available rental properties, landlords have no incentive to upgrade/install ramps and handrails to improve accessibility.

Those **under 25** represented **37%** of those experiencing homelessness in Australia on Census night in 2021, and over **32%** in WA. In June 2023, **11,744** children and young people were on the public housing waiting list (**2.5% increase** from 2022).

Despite a marginal drop in youth homelessness rates from 2016–2021 (73 to 71 per 10,000 people), they are classed as a national priority homelessness cohort in the **National Housing and Homelessness Agreement**.

Homelessness can have a profound effect on young people, often impacting their education, social connections, financial and professional development.

**56%**

of youth homelessness cases are linked to family and domestic violence.

**2 in 5**

people considered homeless are children or people under 25.

The City of Canning has dedicated Youth Spaces in Willetton and Lynwood, and a pop-up space in Cannington. Young people often present to the City’s Youth Services while experiencing some aspect/or risk of homelessness; namely, couch surfing or at risk of being kicked out of home.

A staff member from **Youth Futures Youth Accomodation and Support Service (YASS)** is based at Lynwood Youth Hub, meaning young people experiencing/at risk of homelessness are able to be connected directly to the support they need.



# CAUSAL FACTORS

## REINTEGRATION



Transitioning from institutional settings – prison, juvenile detention, child protection, hospital, or mental health facilities – back into the community, places people at higher risk of homelessness.

**The WA Homelessness Strategy** ‘All paths lead to a Home’ reinforces the importance of having adequate holistic approaches to reintegration. Having cohesive systems and services can help improve the wrap-around support available for those making the transition back into the community and reduce their risk of experiencing homelessness.

## HOUSING CRISIS

Financial stress is a common entry point into homelessness. A large proportion of people experiencing homelessness find themselves unable to pay for housing due to high housing costs and low income and/or lack of employment.

Perth’s rental vacancy rate was **0.7%** in March 2023 – which remains unchanged since 2021- with a median rental rate of **\$550** per week. Since 2021, **housing affordability stress** has become the third most common factor (**25%**) for WA clients seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services, replacing ‘lack of family and/or community support.’

In 2023, City of Canning residents reported **Inflation/Cost of living (59%)** as the number one issue facing the area, followed secondly by **Housing/Price of Housing (43%)**.



# CAUSAL FACTORS

## GENDER

Generally, there is a higher proportion of males experiencing homelessness than females. Yet, growth in Australia's homelessness among females (**10.1% ↑**) was significantly greater than males (**1.6% ↑**). Nationally, females accounted for **81.7%** of the total increase in people experiencing homelessness between the **2016 - 2021 censuses**. Similarly, older women were the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness in Australia, with an approximate 10% increase since 2016. In Western Australia, males accounted for **55%** of those experiencing homelessness on census night, 2021.



The **LGBTI Housing & Homelessness Project** found that LGBTI people were at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness than people who are cisgender and/or heterosexual. Although minimal funding into researching causal factors for this difference, current research suggests that family rejection is a major contributing factor, especially in younger people.



## FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (FDV)

**FDV** often forces women and children to flee the family home, and as such is one of the largest contributing factors of homelessness for women and children in WA.

Given the concurrence of FDV and homelessness, Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness aligns with the **10-Year Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence**. The Strategy highlights the **\$51.9 million** cost to WA Health that resulted from assault related injuries caused by a domestic partner or family member.

The **Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022/23** revealed that **24,466** people in Western Australia received homelessness assistance, with family and domestic violence being the top reason for people accessing services.

# CAUSAL FACTORS

## CULTURE

Despite a **15%** decrease in national Indigenous homelessness rates between **2016-2021**, rates remain significantly higher than non-Indigenous homelessness rates. Western Australia had the highest indigenous homelessness rate, at **381 people per 10,000**.

Over the course of a year, WA's dedicated homelessness services are assisting over **24,000** people, with significant over-representation of Aboriginal people (**41%**).

Although CaLD communities may have increased social vulnerability, there is no data to suggest Canning's high CaLD demography (**50.9%**) has any effect on those experiencing homelessness within the district.



# IMPACTS

Homelessness can have a profound effect on a person's physical and mental health and can sometimes result in depression, poor nutrition, poor dental health, and substance abuse. This can even lead to significantly higher rates of death, disability, and chronic illness than the general population, which has follow-on impacts on our healthcare system (Australian Human Rights Commission 2008).

People experiencing homelessness – specifically rough sleeping – may be required to prioritise basic needs such as **food, water, and shelter**, and do not focus on their healthcare until an emergency arises (Wise & Phillips 2013). This results in a higher utilisation of emergency healthcare, which comes at a much higher cost than primary and preventative care.

Those living in severely overcrowded dwellings face less obvious health concerns but may be faced with psychological stress and the transmission of infectious diseases from lack of safe food preparation areas, bathrooms, and adequate sewerage systems and laundry facilities.



## 107

people estimated to have died while experiencing homelessness in Perth in 2022.

## 30 YEARS

Is the life expectancy someone experiencing homelessness can be reduced to.

### CITY OF CANNING

The City's Ranger and Community Safety Service (RCSS) have engaged with **13** people rough sleeping in the last **12 months**. This is a **48%** decrease from the previous year (25).

RCSS Officers identified **two** of these individuals in the course of their 24/7 patrols, and **11** individuals were approached as the result of a public report.

Where possible, individuals were offered assistance and provided with a copy of the [City's Directory of Support Providers](#).

# OPPORTUNITIES

The WA Strategy to End Homelessness identifies opportunities for local governments to contribute to the vision of the Strategy.

## STATE PLAN

- ✦ Making information on local services and supports available and accessible.
- ✦ Ensuring Rangers and front-line staff are informed and supported to interact with people experiencing homelessness and, where appropriate, refer them to local services.
- ✦ Working with Police to support and refer people experiencing homelessness to local services and supports.
- ✦ Coordinating volunteer and charity groups through a place-based approach that better meets the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- ✦ Utilising land and assets to create places that are inclusive and can support vulnerable people.

## IMPLEMENTED BY THE CITY OF CANNING?

- ✓ Over 9,000 Support Provider Directories distributed.
- ✓ Training provided and Support Provider Directories issued to all frontline staff.
- ✓ Monthly meetings with local police to discuss concerns/trends.
- ✓ Liaising with local support providers to better understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- ✓ Partnership agreement with Multicultural Futures to offer inclusive programming at City libraries.
- ✓ Provision of affordable over 55's accommodation at Wilson Retirement Village and Caprice Place Independent Living Units



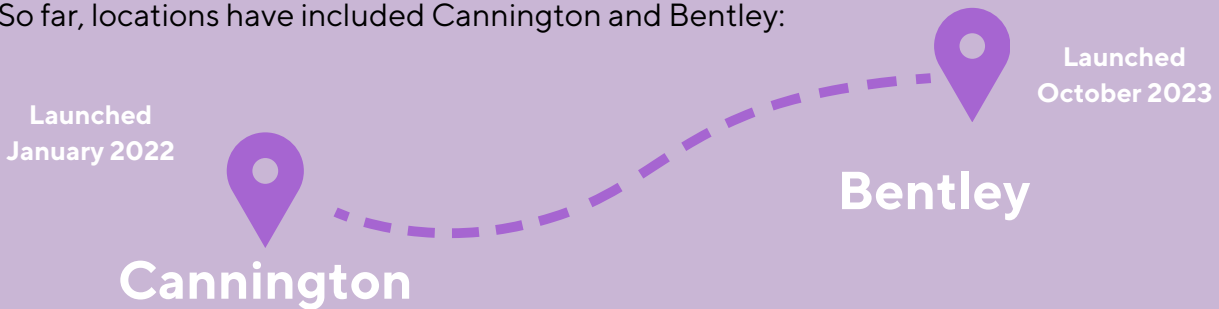
More information can be found in the Homelessness Plan 2021-2024 Report Card, available on the City's Homelessness and Crisis Support webpage.



## LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES

The City of Canning recognises that homelessness is a complex and growing social issue; the effects of which can be seen in Canning. The City's **Homelessness Plan (2021-2024)** outlines our approach to addressing homelessness throughout the district.

The City is committed to working in partnership with local service providers and community groups to prevent and respond to the challenges of homelessness. In doing so, the City has assisted in the establishment of local support hubs in strategic locations. So far, locations have included Cannington and Bentley:



These hubs offer front line support to those experiencing - or at risk of - homelessness, including Orange Sky Mobile Laundry service, warm meals and food parcels from The Shopfront (Bentley) and Cannington Community Support Centre.

Collectively, the Cannington and Bentley hubs offer approximately **300+ meals** and **12+ laundry washes** each week to those in need.

**Stream One** (Equity) of the WA Homeless Health Action Plan (2022-2025) outlines 'supporting access to primary and preventative health care' as a key focus.

In line with this, the City of Canning has partnered with **Black Swan Health** to bring **Freo Street Doctor** (FSD) to Canning. FSD offer free, quality primary healthcare each week at The Shopfront (Bentley).

Freo Street Doctor clinics in both Cannington and Bentley have provided **100+** consultations to date, with the Bentley clinic only opening in October 2023.



## LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES

The City's Directory of Support Providers collates over 50 local emergency relief and support providers.

These are carried by all frontline staff, and are available online and at the City's Libraries, Leisureplexes, and Civic and Administration Centre. Over **3,500** directories have been distributed to the community in the last 12 months, and approximately **10,000** have been distributed in total.

Engagement with local support providers is essential to understand trends in homelessness in our own local context, i.e. the demand for financial support, food relief, and homelessness services.

The **Church of St Michael and All Angels (Anglican Parish of Canning)** – a local support provider based in Cannington – has reported a substantial increase in people asking for help. Between **May 2022** and **April 2023**, they issued approximately **39** bags of groceries, and an additional **79** bags from **May 2023** to **February 2024**. It was estimated that the majority of those supported by this service had some form of accommodation, while others were living in their cars or on the street.





# HOUSING: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There has been a significant shift away from growth in public housing; from an average of **9%** in the 1980s, to around **1.6%** in the last five years. Whilst the stock of available social housing has declined - just **3.8%** - approximately **164,000** people were on public and community housing wait lists across the country in 2021.

Rising inflation costs have had a profound effect on the construction of new dwellings, subsequently impacting the housing market:



**Construction materials** have become more expensive and difficult to source



**Tight labour markets** resulting in difficulty sourcing construction workers



**High interest rates** deter developers from securing finance on building projects.

The increasing popularity of short stay accommodation has resulted in a decrease in available long-term rental properties (particularly in popular tourist destinations). International evidence suggests that government regulation of short-term accommodation can positively impact the affordability and number of long-term rental properties.

The [WA Housing Strategy \[2020-2030\]](#) outlines the \$444 million housing stimulus package designed to kick-start WA's economic recovery post-pandemic. Of this, \$319 million is committed to be used to build, buy, renovate, and maintain social housing across the state.

## Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS)

Governments across Australia fund a range of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) to provide support to those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. SHS are delivered by non-government organisations and offer dedicated, tailored support services for specific groups (i.e. those experiencing family and domestic violence), acting in accordance with the **Specialist Homelessness Services Standards (2016)**.

In 202-23 in WA, **one in 114** people received homelessness assistance (the national rate is **one in 95**), with the top three reasons for seeking assistance being:

### Trend since 2021-22:

- Family and domestic violence (42%)
- Financial difficulties (34%)
- Housing affordability stress (25%)



In 2020-21, **24,500** clients in WA were assisted by SHS, of which:

✦ **42%** were homeless on first presentation

✦ **91%** who were at risk of homelessness were assisted to maintain housing

✦ **28%** who were homeless were assisted into housing



Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) is a member-based, community organisation specialising in the housing needs of older people throughout the country, and actively campaigns for housing justice.

During the 2022-23 financial year, **HAAG** supported over **1,000** older people, and assisted about **170** older people into long term, affordable housing throughout Australia.

## PUBLIC TENANCY SUPPORT

Public tenancy support - via **Anglicare WA** - is available to people living in public housing and are in danger of losing their tenancy.

The service supports residents to address issues including housing conditions/cleanliness and anti-social behaviour. They also provide support workers who can negotiate and advocate on the tenant's behalf.



The City's **Directory of Support Providers** highlights key local crisis and emergency accommodation providers, including **Tranby Hub**, **Zonta House**, **Entrypoint** and **Crisis Care**. These services are designed to assist those who do not have access to social housing, given the shortage of available stock.



# CITY PLANNING

The City has made efforts to make planning decisions that address the housing shortage; specifically, allowing higher density development and subdivisions.

Originally a joint venture between the City of Canning and Department of Housing, Caprice Place Independent Living Units provides an age-friendly, affordable rental option.

In **2020** the City's **Local Planning Scheme No. 42** was gazetted. This Scheme introduced increases in residential density within close proximity to commercial and activity centres, and along transport corridors, creating opportunities for more diverse and affordable housing.

These changes deliver more opportunities for increased and more diverse housing stock, and will assist the City in meeting its infill dwelling targets set down by the State Government under Directions 2031.

The City has been advocating for the State Government to develop its strategic landholdings within the **Canning City Centre** and **Bentley (Bentley 360)** to provide additional housing and support the regeneration of these areas. The **Bentley 360** area covers over **26 hectares** and is only **9km** from the **Perth City Centre**. Additionally, the City also considers proposals on City owned land that could accommodate affordable housing.

The site has the ability to cater for over **1,000** dwellings. Development WA is seeking to establish a Redevelopment Area for the Bentley 360 site and will create a revised planning framework to facilitate development on the site. The City has continued to work with Development WA to advocate for the commencement of works on the site, which is estimated to commence in late 2025.

Recent changes to the State Planning Framework also include the provision to construct ancillary dwellings on all single house and grouped dwelling/strata lots within Canning. This will enable much needed ancillary accommodation to be provided in many instances without the need for development approval where it they meet the Deemed-to-Comply requirements of the Residential Design Codes.



# ECONOMIC TRENDS

Economic changes, such as COVID-19 induced inflation, can have a profound impact on those experiencing homelessness. Increased inflation and cost of living expenses have caused **housing affordability** to become the most rapidly growing cause of homelessness (Australian Homelessness Monitor Executive Summary 2022).

As was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments were prompted to take action to utilise existing structures (such as hotels) to support those experiencing rough sleeping and aid the homelessness crisis.

In December 2023, the WA state government reaffirmed their decision to providing **\$3.1 million** to Ruah's Safe Night Space in Northbridge, with an immediate **\$210,000** provided to support ongoing critical needs of vulnerable women, i.e. food and clothing, across the Christmas period.

The State government also confirmed they are considering Uniting WA's proposal to transform the Tranby Hub site in Perth into a multi-purpose engagement hub for those experiencing homelessness.



# NEXT STEPS

## Homelessness Plan Report Card



A review of the actions outlined in The City's Homelessness Plan was completed. A report card was prepared and is publicly available on our Homelessness and Crisis Support webpage.

## Development of New Homelessness Plan



A new Plan will be drafted in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

## Consultation



Prior to endorsement, the draft Plan will be opened for community consultation and feedback via the City's Your Say page.





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