

Responding to housing stress

A Local Action Plan for Darebin



September 2010

Mayor's Foreword (draft only)

Housing is everyone's business.

Council has undertaken this work at an important time in our history. Housing is a scarce resource everywhere, the lack of affordable housing and homelessness are issues that need to be addressed at a local level. It is unacceptable that there are approximately 500 people in Darebin who are sleeping rough every night.

Darebin will experience twelve percent growth over the next fifteen years and our Council is concerned that the cost of housing will make our community exclusive.

We believe that not only does everyone deserve the right to a safe place to call home but everyone deserves the right to a chance to belong and to be included. This council is absolutely committed to making sure that those who are struggling have a chance to have a home in Darebin.

We believe that is no more basic test of fairness than whether the poorest can afford to live in our community

A lack of affordable housing has wide reaching consequences for individuals and communities. It affects the mix of our community and impacts on personal and family health, wellbeing and opportunities to participate in community life.

Commonwealth and State governments are responsible for providing public and social housing however we recognise that this is a critical issue for our community at a local level.

So we have developed this Local Action Plan as part of Councils promise to "*strive in all that we do to achieve fairness, through innovative and progressive leadership that reflects and respects our diverse community.*" (Council Plan 2009-2013)

This Action Plan takes that promise seriously and puts Darebin at the forefront of local governments in Victoria who are struggling with this issue.

Under the Plan, Council will set targets for the inclusion of social housing in major developments and we will work with the state to have these included in our local planning scheme.

We will also seek practical outcomes on the ground to address this issue by pursuing a community based, fully self contained rooming house in Darebin and a crisis support centre. We will look at the way we use council land and will work with our community to seek better use of other government land for housing.

Our goal is a city that is affordable for all, that is diverse and inclusive. This plan is an important step towards that goal.

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Definitions

Affordable Housing.

Affordable housing is defined as that which costs no more than 30% of the income of households who earn less than 80% of the median. This commonly accepted definition provides a relative benchmark that allows for comparison across time and geographies. The definition relates to housing costs irrespective of whether they are derived from home ownership, rental or social housing provision.

Homelessness.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics recognises three levels of homelessness.

1. Primary homelessness: people living on the streets, in deserted buildings, railway carriages, under bridges, in parks and similar situations.
2. Secondary homelessness: people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends, emergency accommodation, refuges, hostels and boarding houses (i.e. rooming houses).
3. Tertiary homelessness: people living in single rooms in private rooming houses without their own bathroom or kitchen and without security of tenure. They are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard.

It is recognised that not all people in tertiary homelessness consider themselves to be homeless as they chose to live in this form of accommodation and some consider this housing as their home. However, they can still experience insecurity of housing tenure.

Inclusionary Zoning

This is where all designated residential, commercial, industrial and other development within a district or region would be required to incorporate a given proportion of affordable housing, or pay the cash equivalent to a designated affordable housing provider in the area.

Public Housing.

Public housing comprises a form of housing where the dwellings are, owned and managed by the State housing authority.

Social Housing

Social housing comprises various forms of rental housing which are owned and/or managed by community organisations such as housing associations, co-operatives, housing trusts, local government or a not-for-profit company.¹ There are two types of social housing:

1. Housing that is managed by community organisations but financed, developed and owned by State housing authorities.
2. Housing that is financed, developed and owned by community organisations either on their own or under joint ventures with State housing authorities, local government or other sources, where the costs are shared.

Housing and wellbeing

Article 25 (1) of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, and housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Housing is fundamental to our standard of living and quality of life. An absence of housing has far reaching social and economic effects including social exclusion, homelessness, mental health, income insecurity, family breakdown and families and individuals experiencing housing stress. Anyone can experience insecure housing however individuals and families on low and moderate incomes are the most vulnerable.

Some health problems precede and causally contribute to homelessness. Some health problems are the consequence of or are exacerbated by homelessness; and homelessness complicates the treatment of many illnesses

For families and individuals an absence of secure housing can lead to;

- instability
- constant moving and disruption
- anxiety
- disconnection from family, friends, community, social networks
- less opportunity for building trust, neighbourhood/community relationships
- interrupted engagement with institutions and support services such as schools, doctors, family services, social supports
- difficulty accessing services
- their standard of living determined on a day to day basis
- experiences of stigma and low self esteem
- little control over the place where they live

Insecure housing means;

- higher occurrences of mental illness
- higher occurrences of domestic violence
- higher occurrences of drug and alcohol use
- higher vulnerabilities to ill health

Long term consequences include;

- intergenerational disadvantage
- entrenched social disadvantage
- social exclusion
- mental, physical/ health needs go untreated
- poverty

Problems making housing payment or going into arrears have significant psychological costs similar to those experienced as a result of marital breakdown or unemployment, and threats to housing represent a major life event affecting mental health

Housing affordability, housing stress and homelessness

Affordable housing is defined as that which costs no more than 30% of the income of households who earn less than 80% of the median. This commonly accepted definition provides a relative benchmark that allows for comparison across time and geographies. The definition relates to housing costs irrespective of whether they are derived from home ownership, rental or social housing provision.

Individuals and households who earn less than 80% of median income and who pay more than 30% of income are said to be in **housing stress**.

Affordability is essentially a result of the gap between household income and the prevailing market conditions affecting house prices.²

Affordable housing has emerged as a key issue for Federal, State and Local Governments because, among other factors;

- housing is now less affordable than any other time in our recent history,
- Building of new houses is not able to keep up with demand/population growth and there is therefore an increasing gap between housing supply and housing demand.
- the private rental market is becoming increasingly inaccessible to low income households, and
- Housing costs are rising faster than incomes.

The lack of affordable housing is also clearly linked to supply –acting to both reduce the range of housing options available on the market and to drive up prices in response to increasing demand. The longer term affect of this dynamic is that more people are precluded from housing purchase and locked in to private rental. When this option also fails, pressure is put on the range of social and even more impermanent housing options – including rooming houses and boarding houses. Risk of homelessness becomes more likely as these options also become less available and individuals and households are forced into transient and precarious lifestyles.

Recent research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has confirmed the link between housing insecurity, lack of personal safety, lack of supportive relationships, lack of connection to the local community and mental and physical health issues.³

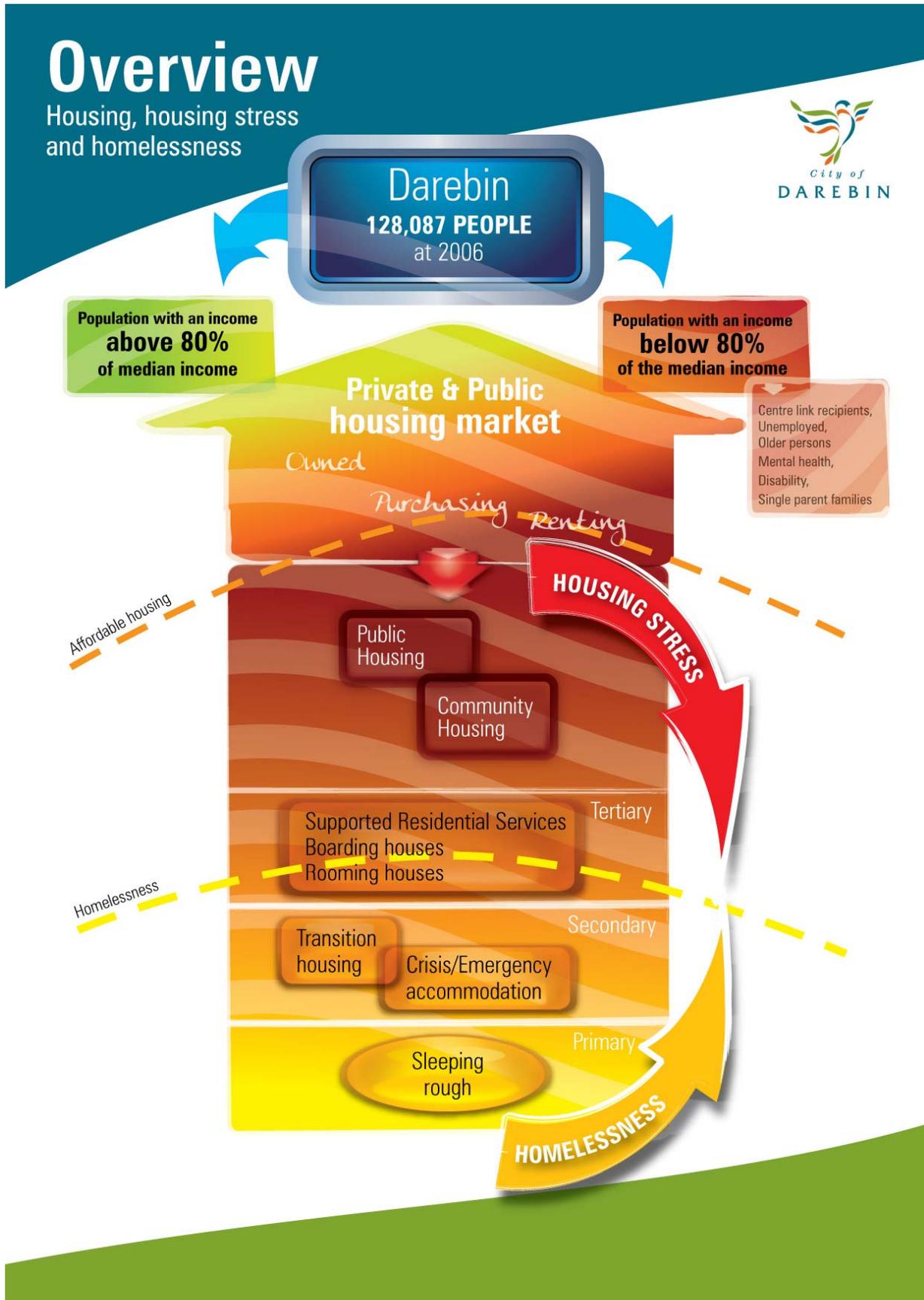
Council plays an important role in improving tenant safety and linking low income renters and people in insecure housing to community. Alongside efforts to increase affordable housing, activities that support people in housing stress and insecure housing and build community capacity and resilience are vital.

The affordable housing crisis has escalated as house prices and interest rates continue to rise, market rents increase and vacancy rates decline and social housing waiting lists grow. Housing affordability is a problem across tenures: for first home buyers, private and social renters.

² Australian Housing Institute Bulletin No.1 Bulletin 1: National Affordable Housing Policy 2006

³ AHURI (2009) *Housing Insecurity and its link to the social inclusion agenda*

Figure 1: Dynamics of Housing Stress

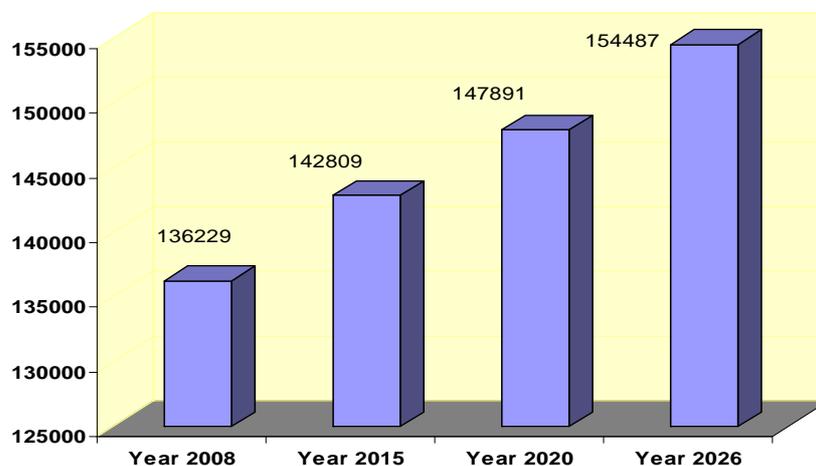


Population and Housing

At the 2006 census Darebin had a population of 128,087 living in 51,471 dwellings. The median weekly rent was \$185 and the median monthly housing loan repayment was \$1,350. Eighty percent of households had been at the same address for at least one year and fifty seven percent for at least five years.

At 30th June 2010 the estimated Darebin population was 139,608. This is an increase of 11,521 people since the 2006 census.⁴ The population projections to 2026 estimated Darebin will have a steady population increase reaching an estimated 154,487 people in 2026. This is an increase of around 20,000 people in the period, and will drive a requirement for around 16,000 more dwellings.

Figure 2: Population estimates for Darebin



Much of the growth will occur in the over 70 year old age group followed by the 25 to 69 years group. Lone person households will continue to be those in greatest housing stress in Darebin.

Estimates of affordable rental housing need were developed for Darebin by SGS Economics as part of the LAAH project. These indicate that at least 3,280 additional housing units are currently needed to meet housing need.

Table 1: Affordable rental housing estimates for Darebin

Household Type	Dwelling Type	Current Estimated Need
Young singles and couples	1-2 bedroom units	1400 -1800
Older people and people with disabilities	1-2 bedroom accessible units	880-1050
Small families – including single parents	2 bedroom units or houses	700-900
Larger families	3-4 bedroom units or houses	300-400

⁴ Regional population growth Australia 2007-08

Housing Affordability in Darebin

In line with similar municipalities, housing in Darebin is becoming increasingly less accessible to people on low incomes and is likely to remain so without significant intervention from all levels of government.

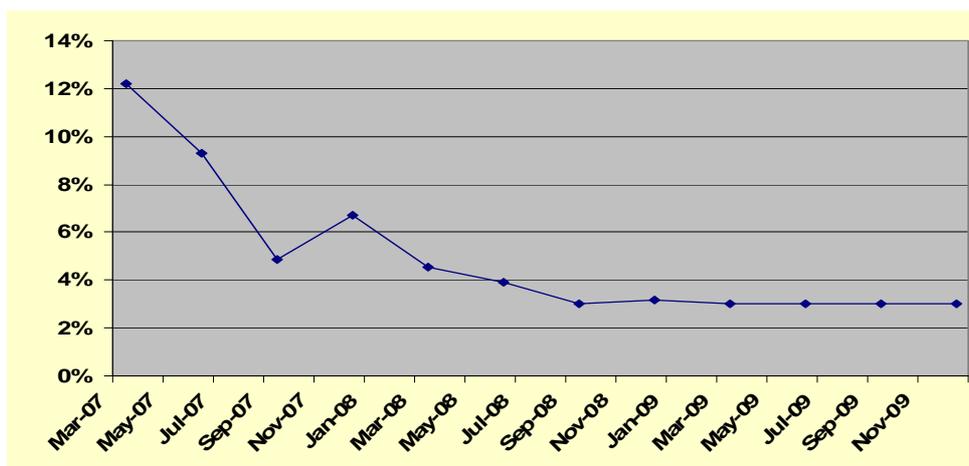
Table two shows housing costs as a proportion of low household and individual incomes. Even rental costs for one bedroom units exceed 30% of household incomes, while individual incomes are well below what is needed to rent in Darebin.

Table 2: Housing affordability for low income individuals and households

Average Housing costs	As percentage of Average household low income (\$724)	As percentage of Average Individual low Income (\$319)
Weekly rent \$240 – one bedroom \$310 – two bedroom	33% 43%	75% 97%
Mortgage - \$375 per week	51%	117%

In Darebin, housing affordability is decreasing rapidly and the greatest immediate impact is on individual and families on low and moderate incomes, many of whom are already marginalised and vulnerable in terms of participating in the community life. The number of affordable lettings has reduced for all types of housing and flats.

Figure 3: Darebin all lettings - % affordable March 07 - December 09



The Office of Housing has calculated that around three percent of lettings in Darebin – or 32 properties in total - were affordable for people on low incomes in the March quarter 2009.⁵ The percentage of affordable rental properties has fallen from 12% in 2001 to 3% in 2009.

⁵ OOH March quarter rental report

Who is in housing stress in Darebin?

Darebin data from the 2006 census shows that there are some 41,000 individuals over 15 years of age with a weekly income which is below \$319 or below 80% of the median income. There are some 18,000 households in Darebin who receive less than \$724 or less than 80% of the median household weekly income. These individuals and or households are vulnerable to housing stress if they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

Available census data reports an estimated 4,700 households in Darebin are in rental housing stress. This is considered an underestimation of households in Darebin experiencing housing stress as the number of low income households in housing stress through mortgage payments is unknown.

In addition in the order of 9,700 households are at risk of housing stress as, while they may not be low income earners, they are paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

Data developed through the Local Action on Affordable Housing (LAAH) project show that key groups who are more likely fall into housing stress are:

Lone-person households

Small families and single-parent families.

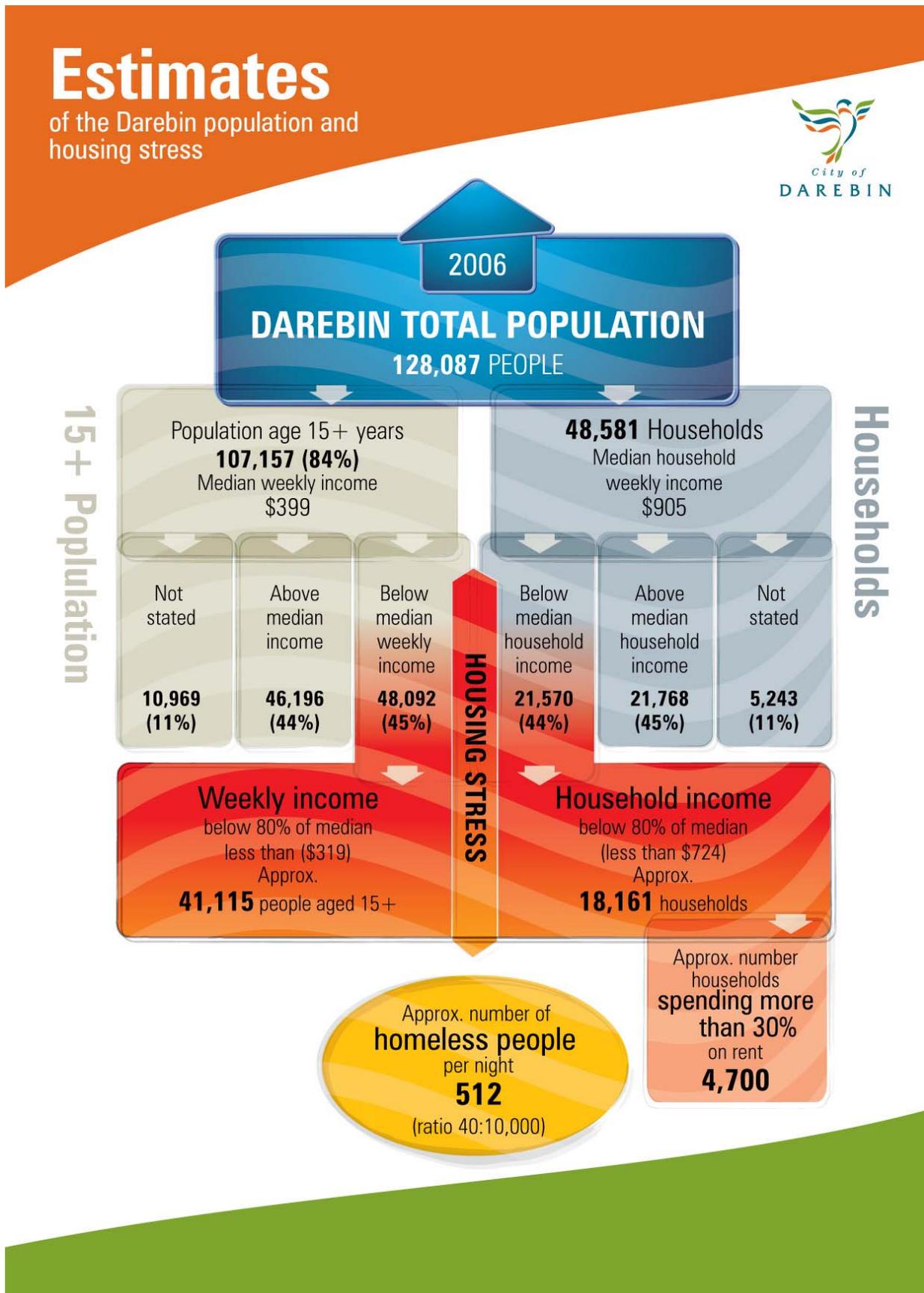
Key workers who may pay high housing costs as a result of relocation

High-need households. Very low income households in housing stress are likely to be high need households requiring a highly subsidised form of housing or social housing.

Darebin has the largest Indigenous population in metropolitan Melbourne and Indigenous people are overrepresented in the homeless population. In Victoria, the rate of homelessness for Indigenous people was 146 per 10,000 compared with 40 per 10,000 for the non Indigenous population. Aboriginal people are more likely to rent than non Indigenous people and are also more likely to be public or social housing tenants.

Accurate data on homelessness is difficult to obtain due the transient and hidden nature of the problem. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reckons that the rate of homelessness in Darebin is around 40 in every 10,000 residents. On this basis it is likely that over 500 people are homeless on any given night in Darebin

Figure 4: Housing stress estimates for Darebin



Key Housing Policies

Neighbourhood renewal (2001)

The program is a whole-of-government, place-based initiative that targets employment, enterprise creation and learning, health and wellbeing and crime prevention initiatives to reduce the gap between areas with a high concentration of public housing and the rest of Victoria. Darebin currently has a Neighbourhood Renewal Program in Preston. www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au

Melbourne 2030 (2001)

Under the *Fairer City Direction* in Melbourne 2030 planning policy is a specific intent to “increase the supply of well located affordable housing. The policy has seven initiatives. Regional Housing Working groups have been set up as part of Melbourne 2030 and Darebin are members of the Northern Regional Housing Working group. www.melbourne2030.vic.gov.au

A Fairer Victoria 2010 (2005)

A Fairer Victoria is the key policy document of the Victorian government which sets out strategies and actions to create opportunities and address disadvantage. ‘Boosting access to affordable housing’ is one of A Fairer Victoria’s strategies. www.dpced.vic.gov.au

Northern Region Housing Statement September (2006)

The Northern Regional Housing Statement provides a regional strategic framework to plan for the housing needs of the projected population and households in the Northern region to 2031. www.darebin.vic.gov.au

“The Road Home”: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness- Commonwealth White Paper on Homelessness (2008)

This paper provides a vision for tackling homelessness and looking beyond housing with strategies that address the broader needs of the homeless population, including employment, education, health and social support. www.fahcsia.gov.au

Melbourne @ 5 million (2008)

Melbourne @ 5 million provides policy initiatives that are complementary to the directions of *Melbourne 2030*. Melbourne @ 5 million reports that more intensive development will occur along major public transport services in the inner Melbourne area, like the tram network. www.dpi.vic.gov.au

The Framework for National Action on Affordable Housing (NAAH) (2009.)

The National Framework for Action on Affordable Housing aims to create a strategic, long-term vision for affordable housing, to which all jurisdictions can commit. The vision encompasses an integrated policy to ameliorate affordability problems for low and moderate income households across home ownership, private rental and public rental tenures. www.alqa.asn.au.

The Victorian Integrated Housing Strategy, March (2010.)

The Victorian Housing Strategy provides an important focus for Government agencies and key stakeholders to work together to address our future housing challenges. In doing so, we will improve the efficiency of the housing market, create greater housing diversity and deliver new social housing opportunities for all Victorians. www.housing.vic.gov.au

The Role of Local Government

The capacity of local government to easily generate positive housing outcomes is very limited. Key economic policy drivers are generally established at the federal level and planning policy at the state level. Local governments manage a range of functions, however, that can influence local housing outcomes. These roles include:

- facilitate provision of housing appropriate to local needs through urban planning
- regulating development including planning schemes, infrastructure planning and charging, building codes;
- Local Laws regulating amenity, health, safety, streets and parking, waste management;
- Initiating and supporting urban and neighbourhood renewal projects;
- property rating and levying;
- Collecting and analysing housing related information (e.g. building approvals and commencements, demographic projections);
- Community Grants (e.g. to community services organisations, property owners); and
- Providing funding and land for affordable housing.

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987 (PEA 1987)*, which governs the planning system in Victoria, makes no specific provisions for affordable housing. It allows planning authorities to consider “any significant social and economic effects of the use or development”, “if the circumstances appear to so require” (s60b). This may be interpreted to include the impacts of developments on affordable housing, but provision is open to some interpretation. The *PEA* enables planning authorities to pursue voluntary agreements with developers and it is this provision that has been used to secure some contributions for affordable housing within isolated developments in Melbourne.

Within the limits of these roles, different local governments will develop different approaches to affordable housing, depending on the needs and aspirations of their local communities. Approaches vary; for example Port Phillip Housing owns and manages 389 units and has received \$26.9M from the State and \$22M from the Port Phillip Council since 1985. As well as being a direct provider of community housing, the City of Port Phillip coordinates the provision of community housing in Port Phillip for the state government's Office of Housing and other community housing organisations.

In addition, local government can play an important role in supporting people to deal with the consequences of housing stress and financial disadvantage. Councils are major providers of services to older people, to people in financial hardship and to young people in particular.

Figure four depicts the range of roles that Councils might play in the development of affordable housing and responses to housing stress

Figure 5: Local government influence on housing stress

PRIVATE MARKET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Diversity of housing mix Partnerships with developers Regulation of Rooming houses Rooming house standards Public consultation
HOUSING STRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Project development Fast track applications Incentives Community education Partnerships with housing associations Research and data collection Liaison between developer and planning Facilitate redevelopment of vacant nursing homes Sponsorship housing program for aged Advocacy Facilitate support coordination Research and data collection Linking to human services
HOMELESSNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy Emergency relief- facilitate coordination Research data Some direct services Linking to Council services Social Inclusion programs and projects

Darebin's actions on housing stress

Council has been concerned about housing stress since amalgamation. Northcote Council was an active provider of affordable housing and Darebin continues this in liaison with the Office of Housing.

Darebin has been developing an increasingly clear policy approach to affordable housing since the issue was identified as a part of the 2001 Poverty Inquiry. Table two below outlines some of the key activities undertaken by Darebin since that time.

Table 3: Darebin's Actions on Housing Stress

Timing	Activity	Outcome
Pre 2002	City of Darebin Housing Issues Paper	Issues identified from consultation informed the Integrated housing Strategy
2002	Integrated Housing Strategy 2002	Engagement with community to determine housing affordability needs. Council to work with private and public sector housing stakeholders to improve affordable housing investment opportunities.
2004 May	Council endorse establishment of Darebin Housing Advisory Committee	Primary role to inform Council on its advocacy role, monitor trends, refine priority areas, and network.
2004 August	Internal Council Officer Housing group established	Ensuring a coordinated response to housing issues
2004 September	Housing Forum conducted with housing and support agencies	Seeking nominations for Housing Advisory Committee
2004 December	Briefing Paper "Darebin Housing Advisory Committee" to Council	Proposing membership, role and terms of reference of Housing Advisory Committee
2005 February	Inaugural meeting of the Housing Advisory Committee	Terms of reference confirmed Establishment of working parties
2005 October	Darebin Housing Indicators Profile Draft Discussion Paper	Development of Housing Indicators Profile (HIP) that will respond to objectives of the Integrated Housing Strategy and assess the impact of housing trends locally.
2006 June	"Affordable Housing and Preston Central Activity Centre Planning Discussion paper	Seeking mechanisms to stimulate the development of Affordable housing
2007 & current	Local Action of Affordable Housing (LAAH) Darebin is one of six Councils to receive \$50,000 from D.H.S.	Affordable Housing Needs Analysis for the Darebin LGA (DHS) Development of a Darebin Affordable Housing Action Plan
2007	Mary Street Development	
2009	Planning Department/ Social Inclusion branch	Compiling data base of possible opportunities from current planning permits

Strategic Actions

The following suggested actions have been developed after consideration of the data and issues associated with the development of better affordable housing outcomes in Darebin. They are intended to provide a way forward by stimulating discussion and debate among our key stakeholders, helping Council sharpen and focus our approach to this important issue.

Our Strategic Actions are focussed on achieving ten key objectives:

1. Increase the supply of public housing.
2. Encourage the inclusion of an appropriate proportion of social housing in targeted developments.
3. Develop Projects to respond to gaps in housing supply for people in housing stress in Darebin.
4. Maximise the use of government land for social housing.
5. Continue to provide direct services to people in housing stress.
6. Help to grow a viable social housing sector.
7. Advocate on behalf of people in housing stress.
8. Monitor the extent and nature of housing stress in Darebin.
9. Provide high quality information for developers and residents about housing needs and solutions.
10. Ensure that all social housing in Darebin maximises environmentally sustainable principles and guidelines.

Objective: 1. Increase the supply of public housing

Just over 2,500 households live in public housing in Darebin, representing around 5% of all Darebin households, compared to the average across the Melbourne Statistical District of about 3%.

As at June 2008 there were 3,301 public housing units in Darebin – mostly separate houses and medium density units.

Public housing stock in Darebin is managed by three different area offices: Broadmeadows, Preston and Richmond/Collingwood/Fitzroy. Each area office manages a separate waiting list for public housing. This can make it difficult to determine the exact number of people waiting for public housing in Darebin at any particular time. The total number on the three waiting lists in March 2010 was 7,697 and the total number in the North-West region was 15,438. The majority of public housing stock in Darebin is located in the north of the City, with some large units in the South.

The Office of Housing is currently undertaking a significant program of renewal and redevelopment of public housing stock in Darebin, strongly supported by Council. The Cheddar McMahon Housing Redevelopment⁶ is an example of good planning and state/local partnerships. These fifty year old walk-ups in Reservoir have been replaced by fifty-three new dwellings, providing medium density living for people with a variety of needs, including people with disabilities, singles and older people. Similar projects are underway or are being planned around Darebin. Council is concerned to ensure that, when these developments take place, the number and quality of public housing in Darebin is extended.

While Council welcomes these projects while remaining very clear that they do not represent the increase in public housing stock required to reduce housing stress in Darebin.

Council supports a continuous increase in public housing stock through spot purchase and larger programs to a level sufficient to meet rental housing demand for low income earners.

Through the Neighbourhood Renewal program, our Aged and Disability and Family and Youth Services, Council is regularly in touch with public housing tenants. In order to better advocate for improved public housing, improved consultation and research methods will be established.

Strategies

1.1 Establish a cooperative process with the local area office to develop new forms of public housing and plan for the future provision of it in Darebin, and to ensure that whenever possible yield will be increased.

1.2 Monitor the housing needs of public housing tenants and the number of people on the waiting list for public housing.

⁶ For further information see <http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/buildings-projects/current/cheddar-mcmahon>

Objective: 2. Encourage the inclusion of an appropriate proportion of social housing in targeted developments

State and federal policies support Social Housing – subsidised rental housing managed by Registered Housing Agencies – as the main vehicle for housing growth in response for those in severe housing stress in Victoria⁷. There are nine registered housing associations and thirty registered housing providers in Victoria who are able to source state and federal funds to purchase properties and invest in developments on behalf of their tenants.

Council will work with registered housing agencies (associations and providers) to encourage private developers to include social housing in new developments in key areas – close to transport, services and employment.

Council will set targets for developments in these areas as a transparent measure of progress. While Council cannot require developers to achieve targets, Council will use all measures possible to encourage developers to do so.

The level of housing stress varies subject to conditions in our community – employment, house prices, and social support and so on – so targets will also need to vary within a range. Data developed by SGS Economics for the Local Action on Affordable Housing (LAAH) project shows that between 3,280 and 4,150 new units will be required to significantly reduce housing stress⁸. This would require a minimum of 110 new social or public housing units each year for the next 30 years.

Two thousand three hundred planning permits have been provided for the Urban Development Program over the next three years. A target of fifteen percent in these areas would provide 345 new units. To achieve targets, Council will identify and provide a range of incentives for developers, proactively link developers with Registered Housing Agencies and provide high quality information to support partnership developments.

Strategies

2.1 Encourage the development of an additional 110 Social or Public Housing units each year in appropriate locations.

2.2 Encourage the inclusion of 15% social housing in all Urban Development Program and related projects.

2.3 Investigate mechanisms to levy developer contributions towards a social housing trust in lieu of inclusion of social housing.

2.4 Provide a range of incentives to assist developers to include social housing.

2.5 Continue to develop productive relationships with Registered Housing Agencies and developers

⁷ Office of Housing (2010) Affordable, Accessible and Sustainable Homes: *The Victorian Integrated Housing Strategy (Direction 3)*

⁸ SGS Economics (2010) *Housing Stress and affordable housing potential in Darebin – Local Action on Affordable Housing – Foundation Paper number 3*

Objective 3: Develop projects to respond to gaps in housing supply for people who are homeless

Alongside the introduction of local policies and advocacy for policy shifts at the state level, Council will seek opportunities to develop projects to respond to particular needs. Council has identified the need to develop projects to create housing for people with mental illnesses, for older single homeless and low income earners and for women and children in housing stress. Council will act as broker and facilitator to develop these projects. In addition, consultations have identified two clear gaps in the housing stress support system.

Community Managed Rooming Houses

Rooming houses generally provide housing for single people who may find it difficult to access other types of housing. Rooming house accommodation traditionally involves residents renting a room and then using shared facilities such as bathrooms and kitchens, laundries and lounge rooms.

There is a large, growing private sector rooming house industry in Darebin and Council is responsible for monitoring the health and building requirements associated with these properties. An ongoing effort is required to ensure the safety of people in many of these places. Lack of community managed alternatives can force people in housing stress into unsafe and expensive alternatives.

Community managed rooming houses operate on a not for profit basis. They generally focus on providing long term housing and are careful with tenant mix. They usually provide specialist support for tenants. There is currently one community based rooming house in the City of Darebin. There is a need for more of this type of housing to be provided to house singles in housing stress.

Crisis Support Centre.

There are approximately 500 people sleeping rough in Darebin on any given night. A crisis support service that includes accommodation and responses for social isolation, insecurity and vulnerability is needed in Darebin. The facility should provide a broad range of integrated services and support including family reconciliation and mediation, health care, addiction support and legal aid.

While a number of local agencies provide meals, emergency relief or drop in facilities, there is no coordinated and properly resourced crisis support centre for homeless people in the City.

Strategies

3.1. Actively pursue an increase in the number of community managed rooming houses

3.2. Adopt a protocol for council to follow in the event of a private rooming house closure.

3.3 Actively pursue the development of a Crisis Accommodation Centre in Darebin.

Objective: 4. Maximise the use of government land for social housing

As a significant landholder, local governments are faced with particular choices with regard to the development of affordable housing. The availability of suitable land is a key driver of housing costs, particularly in built up municipalities like Darebin, and Council has the capacity to preference affordable housing in terms of the disposal of land. Councils can leverage land, including air space above Council land, to support affordable housing outcomes in a number of ways, but each has implications for Council and the community we serve.

- *Granting of land* – local governments can gift land for charitable and socially beneficial purposes. This approach provides considerable benefits to housing agencies, but the cost to Council and the community is significant.
- *Sale at a reduced price*– Council may also choose to sell land to developers or community organisations at a reduced price to reduce the cost of development and therefore the price of the housing at market. This approach benefits to the receiving organisation by providing an asset to leverage for equity or count as a co-contribution, but also provides some return for Council and the community.
- *Lease of land* – this option retains the asset in community control, but also raises some issues that need to be considered including statutory restrictions, use of the asset and opportunity cost to the community.

A clear and transparent process is required to assist Council to make these decisions.

Council is a strong advocate for transparent land disposal processes, convening a meeting of Mayors on the issue of best use of government land in early 2010 and joining with the Preston, Reservoir Progress Association in support of the Community First campaign.

The Council position on surplus state and federal land is that when land is identified as surplus, a full community needs assessment needs to be undertaken (across departments and with councils) to determine whether it can be used to implement whole of government policies such as *Melbourne 2030* and *A Fairer Victoria*. Council has commended the Victorian government on the Best Use of Government Land policy, which provides a significant step in this direction.

Strategies

4.1 Work with the State Government in the implementation of the Best Use of Government Land policy.

4.2 Ensure that all available council land is as a priority considered for social housing.

4.3 Assess the viability of developments over council owned car parks through air rights leases.

Objective: 5. Continue to provide direct services to people in housing stress

The Darebin Council Plan states that, “planning and delivery of many of council’s services considers the challenges faced by Darebin’s most disadvantaged. Whether this disadvantage is manifested in a low disposable income, aboriginality, a high level of disability, poor literacy, or another complicating factor, we make a clear commitment to total inclusiveness in service provision. “

Contemporary social theory focussed on social inclusion and social cohesion emphasises the need to provide housing as part of a set of integrated policies to create a sustainable system of measures the provide overall cohesion.⁹

To this end there are numerous support services that are provided or funded by council to address the needs of the most marginalised. Services include supported access to public housing for people aged over fifty five years, home help, home maintenance, meals on wheels, personal care and respite care.

Support to families includes financial counselling, individual and family counselling, and parent education programs. A wide range of programs and activities are provided for young people, including young people who are at risk of homelessness. The Yute Program provides outreach support to young people in public spaces around Darebin.

Council is committed to continue providing a range of services targeted to the most vulnerable in Darebin.

Strategies

5.1. Provide access to older peoples public housing estates through sponsorship and nomination rights.

5.2. Provide linkages to housing support services for older people living on council sponsored public housing estates.

5.3. Provide financial counselling and family support services to people in housing stress and those who are living in insecure accommodation.

5.4. Provide home and community care services for the older people are in housing stress.

5.5. Provide outreach and centre based youth support services to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

⁹E.g.: Council of Europe (2009) *Review of the Council of Europe Strategy for Social Cohesion*

Objective: 6. Help to grow a viable social housing sector.

Many local governments in Victoria provide financial and/or other support to Registered Housing Agencies. The City of Port Phillip, City of Yarra, City of Brimbank, City of Boorondara, and the City of Moreland, among others, have all allowed rate exemptions in one form or another to Registered Housing Agencies.

Council will investigate ways to assist Registered Housing Agencies, including investigation of rate exemptions and provision of special grants. At the same time, it is clear that Registered Housing Agencies, Homelessness Service Providers and similar agencies are the responsibility of the state government. Council is concerned to ensure that costs that should properly be attributed to the state do not become an additional burden on citizens of Darebin.

Accordingly, Council will pursue the provision of supports for Registered Housing Agencies in such a way that a direct benefit is provided to tenants, residents of Darebin. Benefit may take the form of a rent reduction, improvements to the properties, a community development program or similar.

Council will work closely with Registered Housing Associations in the development of the support program.

In order to establish strong links and working relationships with the providers of housing we will provide through the Darebin Housing Advisory Committee opportunities for the housing providers in Darebin to network, to be supported and to have a voice on issues that are affecting people in Darebin in Housing stress.

Strategies

6.1. Investigate mechanisms for council to provide financial support to Registered Housing Agencies.

6.2 Provide regular opportunities for local social housing and homelessness service providers to network

Objective: 7. Advocate on behalf of people in housing stress

There are various Non Government Organisations who are working with people we have identified as potentially falling into housing stress in Darebin throughout this strategy. These organisations are dealing on a daily basis with the ramifications of people not having enough money to pay for essential items once they have paid their rent.

The Darebin Housing Advisory Committee is the key mechanism established to support an ongoing and proactive partnership between Council and local housing providers. The Advisory Committee is a formal Committee of Council, nominated at the Council Special Meeting each year. Membership of the Committee is open to all housing providers and service providers for homeless people and people in housing stress in Darebin. The Housing Advisory Committee meets at least five times each year and is chaired by the Mayor of Darebin, or their delegate. The Committee is the primary vehicle through which Council will identify emerging priority housing issues.

Over the period of this Strategy, Council will advocate strongly for adoption of a policy of Inclusionary Zoning in the Victorian Planning Scheme. Council will make regular representation, through whatever means possible, to the State to seek a state wide policy to enable Council to pursue inclusion of fifteen percent social housing in targeted residential developments.

As a part of Council's commitment to participation, and to ensure that Council advocacy is grounded in reality, a series of programs and activities that increase the civic participation of people affected by housing stress will be developed. Building on projects such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Program, and through our strong network of services, Council will actively seek ways to hear the voice of people in housing stress.

Strategies

7.1. Through the Darebin Housing Advisory Committee we will advocate on behalf of services and service users with stakeholders on relevant issues as identified through the group.

7.2. Actively pursue the adoption of a State wide Inclusionary zoning policy to ensure adequate supplies of social and affordable housing in all local government areas.

7.3. Develop programs and activities to increase civic and community participation among people affected by housing stress and in insecure housing.

Objective: 8. Monitor the extent and nature of housing stress in Darebin.

Council is committed to the development of a set of Social Inclusion Indicators under the Darebin Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2009-2013, and a process for the development of these is currently underway. Housing Stress Indicators will form an important part of this indicator set.

There are various ways to continually measure housing stress and a number of measures could be selected including:

1. The number of people on the Office of Housing waiting list.
2. The number of people receiving rental assistance.
3. The affordable lettings information in the Office of Housing Rental report.
4. The numbers of low income earners paying more than 30% of their income on housing.

A draft set of indicators will be developed by early 2011 for consideration by the Housing Advisory Committee. In addition to these, Council will collect data on the supply of social and affordable housing in Darebin, including the number of units developed in line with Darebin's Social Housing targets.

As well as forming part of our Social Inclusion Indicators, data on housing stress will be used on an ongoing basis to inform Council's decisions and policies, to monitor trends, inform the community and identify target housing outcomes. The data will also be used to review this Action Plan and as a basis for annual reporting on progress.

Strategies

8.1. Develop a comprehensive list of housing stress indicators.

8.2. Ensure that the housing needs of the most vulnerable people are considered in the context of Council policy

8.3 Provide annual reports on progress against this Action Plan and a review of the Action Plan by mid 2012.

Objective: 9. Provide high quality information for developers and residents about housing needs and solutions.

Housing stress is an issue for the whole Darebin community.

Council will produce a Community Education program to change community perceptions about social housing. Council is particularly keen to pursue projects that provide high quality information to residents who may lodge objections to social housing developments in their local areas. The aim is to engage local residents in discussion about the need for social housing and the potential community benefits that social housing provides.

Council will also actively participate in homelessness week, housing week, and other events and activities and encourage our community to also participate, to better engage in and understand housing stress and homelessness in our community.

Information will be provided for developers to assist them to make informed decisions about the value of social housing. An information kit will be developed with information on Registered Housing Agencies as well as information on previous developments and options for including social housing.

Strategies

9.1. Work to improve community recognition of the need for social and affordable housing among the residents of Darebin.

9.2. Develop carefully researched and innovative ways of providing information to neighbours and possible objectors to social and affordable housing.

9.3. Improve the knowledge of developers about the benefits of social housing.

Objective: 10. Ensure that all social housing in Darebin maximises environmentally sustainable principles and guidelines.

Affordable housing needs to be affordable to run in addition to being affordable to acquire. Council recognises that environmentally sustainable housing is also more likely to be financially sustainable and provide a more comfortable, positive and healthy living environment.

Environmentally sustainable design can significantly reduce resource use (both in construction and ongoing use) and save money on household running costs. Sustainability Victoria has estimated that an energy smart house can save more than \$800 per year in running costs. This is a significant figure for people on low incomes.

Electricity, gas and water prices are predicted to increase into the future and are likely to represent an increasing proportion of household expenditure. In this context, the costs of inefficient housing and the potential savings from more efficient options, particularly for low income households, will increase.

Environmentally sustainable housing begins with appropriate orientation and good quality passive solar design. This ensures that heating and cooling requirements can be minimised and required levels of energy efficiency achieved or exceeded with minimal resource use. Materials with good thermal mass, insulation and sealing of gaps minimises heat loss and gains. Fit outs will include water efficient fittings, rainwater collection and re-use facilities, efficient lighting and appliances, energy efficient heating, solar gas boosted hot water units. Additionally storm water retention and treatment capabilities, roof gardens and food growing opportunities should be considered and where possible factored into new developments.

Council is committed to all new developments maximising environmentally sustainable design principles and we recognise the particular importance of ensuring environmentally efficient housing for people on low and fixed incomes. We are also committed to supporting the retrofitting of existing housing stock to improve resource efficiency and reduce running costs.

Strategies

10.1. Provide advice, support and targeted programs to low income and vulnerable members of the community to assist them to minimise energy and water bills and improve the comfort of their homes.

10.2. Seek to ensure and encourage all new developments in Darebin and particularly those for people on low and fixed incomes are designed to ensure financial and environmental sustainability.

10.3 Continue to advocate for more local control over environmentally sustainable design requirements for new developments.

For more information

About the Local Action Plan on Housing Stress

Darebin City Council Housing Project Officer - 8470 8316

About opportunities for a developers and builders

Darebin City Council Planning Department – 8470 8850

About public housing

Office of Housing: 1300 650 172. (Free call number)

Councils sponsored public housing

Community Support Officer Aged Housing on 9481 1870.

Neighbourhood Renewal program you can contact

Neighbourhood Renewal Officer on 8470 8567.

Assistance with issues of family violence

Northcote Family Services on 9481 1870.

If you are homeless or are in need of housing advice

North East Housing Service on 9479 0700

Homeground Services on 1800 048 325. (Free call Number).