



Responding to Housing Stress

A local action plan

2013 -2017

Context Document

Draft

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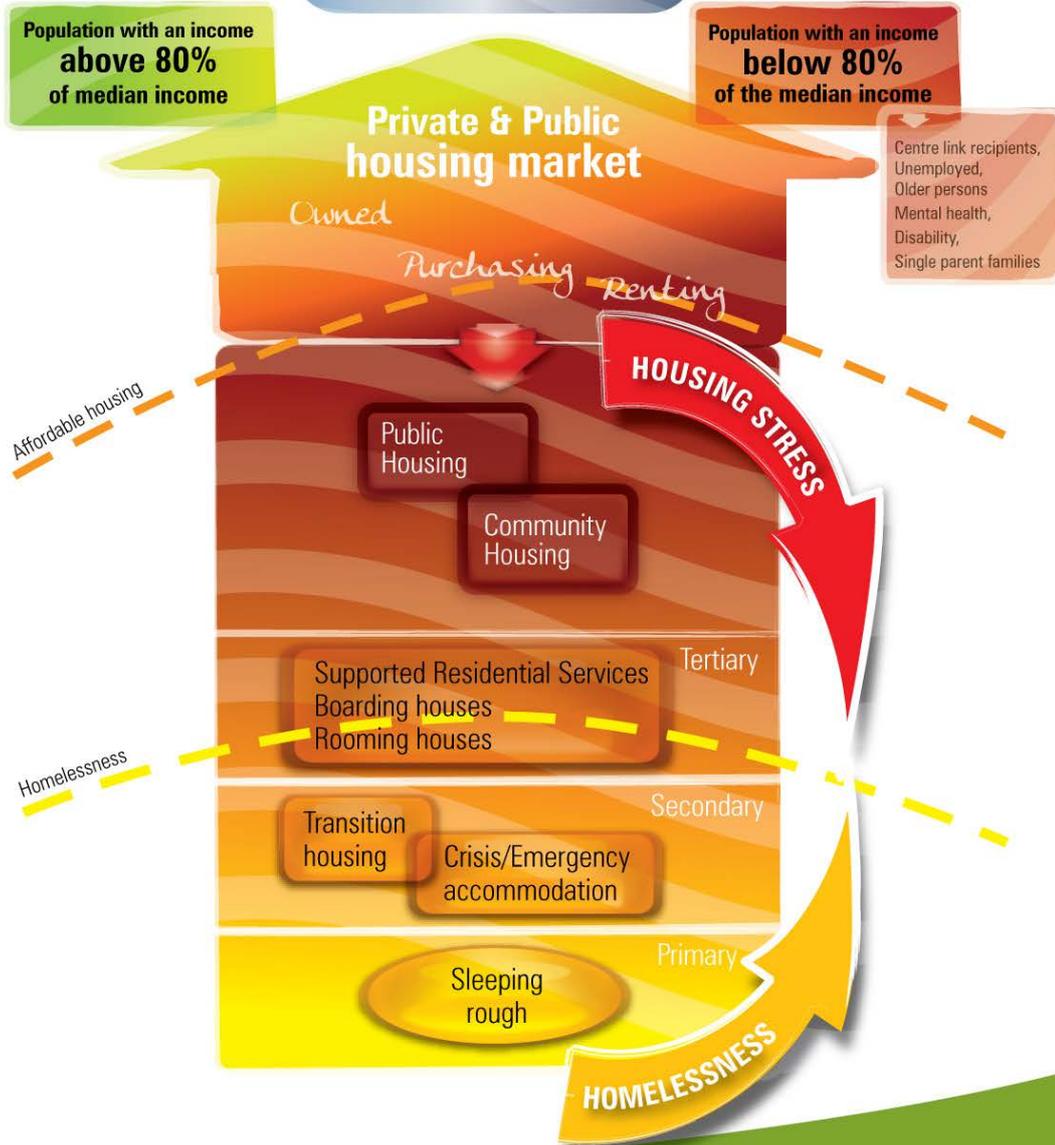
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Overview

Housing, housing stress and homelessness



Darebin
128,087 PEOPLE
at 2006



Introduction

The outlook for housing affordability in Darebin (and Australia -wide generally) is quite bleak.

Since Council published and implemented the 'Darebin Housing Stress - A local action Plan 2010 - 2013 the affordability situation has become worse.

The increasing demand for affordable housing, especially for moderate to low income households continues to provide significant opportunities for the housing industry to increase production of new dwellings either through infill developments or conversion of properties for residential purposes.

The housing industry's supply response has been inadequate to meet the demand and this is because the entrenched systemic barriers to affordability generated by the market and public policy (including Taxation Policy) have not changed.

The most worrying recent issues that have emerged for the City of Darebin are

1. The significant loss of public housing stock
2. Absence of affordable private rental available anywhere in Darebin for households on Government pensions and benefits.
3. The gradual withdrawal of or inadequacy of investment by Federal and State Governments in affordable housing and the lack of public discourse around the issue despite its national magnitude.
4. The cumulative negative impact on the wellbeing of the city (See Appendix 1: Housing and wellbeing)

Aim of the draft action plan

The aim of the Darebin Housing Stress Action Plan 2013 - 2017 ('The Plan') is to provide a broad based and agile platform for Council actions to respond simultaneously to the multiple challenges in which many of the key drivers for affordable housing are not controlled by local government.

In order to maximise Council's leverage and influence to support those households in housing stress, the concept of affordability will be expanded to include the idea of 'affordable living' which takes into account;

- Transport costs associated with accessing employment areas, services and facilities
- Household expenditure on utilities
- The costs of adaptable housing as a household needs may change, such as the suitability for people ageing or people with a disability.

This aim for liveability is consistent with Council's vision that underpins the Council Plan 2013 – 2017 vision of 'Darebin - *The place to live*'.

The Draft 'Responding to Housing Stress – a local action plan 2013 – 2017' builds on the broad framework of the Darebin Council's previous 4 year strategy Responding to Housing Stress – a local action plan 2010 -2013.

Darebin Council acknowledges that this previous framework continues to be relevant due to;

1. The complexity and multi factorial nature of this issue and
2. The requirement for a long term incremental investment across a wide range
3. Of issues simultaneously to maintain traction and avoid any slippage of effort.

The 31 actions in The Plan are all on going. However the following actions require some urgent attention:

1. To protect and enhance the city's public housing. The changes to the Commonwealth and State Governments make any predictive action premature at this stage.
2. To get 'our own house in order' by identifying any underutilised Council owned sites and getting in principle endorsement for affordable housing should any opportunities arise.
3. To clarify and strengthen Council's role in response to homelessness and homelessness services.

Who is in housing stress in Darebin? - An overview

Affordable housing is typically defined as when households that earn less than 80% of the median income, pay less than 30% of their weekly income on rent and/or mortgage repayments. *Housing stress* is defined when individuals and households who earn less than 80% of the median income pay more than 30% of weekly household income on housing. By examining the changes in household income and household prices, from the 2011 Census data, we can infer that approximately 12.4% of all rented households and 8.2% of mortgaged households in Darebin are under housing stress or at risk of housing stress, paying approximately 30% or more of their income on rent or mortgage.¹ In December 2011 the Australians for Affordable Housing published research into housing stress in Melbourne based on ABS modelling² which indicated that housing-related stress in Darebin was rated eleventh out of 31 Metropolitan Local Government Areas (LGA's) for housing stress, with estimates revealing that 16% of Darebin households (9144 households) experience housing stress. The figures highlight a significant housing issue within Darebin, however, the problem is not a defining feature for the municipality, but is a major challenge across Melbourne and Victoria.

¹ Darebin City Council, based on ABS 2011 Census

² <http://housingstressed.org.au/2011/12/03/housing-stress-in-melbourne%E2%80%99s-suburbs-revealed/>

Figure 1 - Changes in median income and housing costs 2001-2011

Income	Census year			% change since 2001
	2001	2006	2011	
Median total personal income (\$/weekly)	323	397	531	64.4%
Median total family income (\$/weekly)	865	1,117	1,438	66.24%
Median total household income (\$/weekly)	709	903	1,175	65.73%
Housing Costs	Census year			% change since 2001
	2001	2006	2011	
Median mortgage repayment (\$/weekly)	220	314	438	99.1%
Median rent (\$/weekly)	150	185	291	94%

Source: Darebin City Council, ABS 2011 Census Data

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

- Lone-person households including young adults and seniors
- Younger, small families and single-parent families.
- Key workers. – Who may pay high housing costs as a result of relocation

- High-need households. While low income earners are defined as those who earn less than 80% of median income, the OECD definition for poverty refers to those who earn less than 60% of median income. Clearly households earning below 60% of median income are likely to be high-need households requiring a highly-subsidized form of housing or social housing and particular assistance to manage housing and living costs
- Aboriginal Households -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 non Indigenous population. Aboriginal people are more likely to rent than non Aboriginal people and are also more likely to be public or social housing tenants.

The Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria develops and manages the provision of housing for Aboriginal people across Victoria and Council's response around Aboriginal housing issues will be developed with the Board and through the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

(See Appendix 2: Dynamics of Housing Stress)

Housing stress and the current private rental crisis.

The Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot 2012 (the Snapshot) is an annual project surveying the affordability of rental properties for people living on a low income in Australia.

For the purposes of this project, an affordable rental is one which took up less than 30% of the household income.

At the time of data collection (13 April 2012), 15,429 rental properties were listed as available online (at www.realestate.com.au) in metropolitan Melbourne (an increase from 14,211 around the same time in 2011).

The Rental Affordability Snapshot of **greater Melbourne** found:

- There is **no** affordable and appropriate rental housing available for income support recipients in Darebin and Metropolitan Melbourne (single or couple households in receipt of Centrelink payments such as Newstart Allowance, Parenting Payment, Age Pension or Youth Allowance/Austudy/Abstudy).
- For single parents with two children under 15, being on a minimum wage was only a very small advantage. For this group, 317 properties in the greater Melbourne area (2.1%) were affordable and appropriate.
- For couple households with two children under 15, where both parents were earning the minimum wage and receiving Family Tax Benefit A, just over one-third (34.7%) of properties were affordable and appropriate.
- Earning the minimum wage was of no housing benefit to individuals without children living in Melbourne; that is, compared to receiving income support. The percentage of affordable and appropriate housing for this group was also zero.

Developed by the Social Action Research Centre at Anglicare Tasmania in 2007, the Snapshot was designed to highlight the lived experience of looking for housing whilst on a low income. This is the third year that the Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot has been undertaken at the national level.

Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot April 2012

Impacts of Australian taxation policy - negative gearing

The taxation system also favours investors with the option of negative gearing. An astonishing one in seven taxpayers is a landlord or landlady. Figures from the Australian Taxation Office show 1.7 million people have two, three or more properties.

Negative gearing and capital gains tax are both major disincentives to sell investment properties, in fact they encourage people to retain investment properties and borrow to purchase another one.

Negative gearing is the favourite tax break, giving people the chance to lower their income tax. Almost 1.2 million Australians in 2008 reported losses on their investment properties, allowing them to claim those losses against their taxable income.

The tax breaks saved property investors about \$4 billion.

Research proposes that they are generally not keen to rent to students, group households, welfare recipients, sole parents or families with children; or to invest where it is needed, that is, where there is low cost housing.

(See Appendix 3: Policy context)

Loss of diversity - pricing out the poor

The Commonwealth Government provides rent assistance in the form of cash subsidies to those eligible low income households who are required to seek private rental accommodation while waiting for public, social or community housing.

As an example, on 20 March 2013 a single parent with one or two dependent children paying more than \$335.72 rent per fortnight receives the maximum fortnightly commonwealth payment of \$144.06

Rent assistance recipients per active private rental properties

LGA	Assistance recipients June 2010	Active rental properties June 2010
Darebin	7242	13,220
Hume	7630	6483
Greater Dandenong	10,471	10,318

Comparing the number of rental assistance recipient's rental properties at June 2010 reveals that nearly all rental properties in Hume and Greater Dandenong are rented by low income Centrelink recipients. Whereas in Darebin just over half of the properties are rented by low income Centrelink recipients and the number is declining.

The data indicates that Darebin is unaffordable to low income residents even with rent subsidies from the Commonwealth and therefore low income residents are moving to the outer suburban fringes.

Commonwealth Rent assistance movement from 2008 to 2010

LGA	Assistance recipients June 2010	% increase from 2008 to 2010
Darebin	7242	0%
Hume	7630	11.3%
Melbourne Metro	162,205	6.2%

The table above demonstrates that there have been no applications by Darebin households for Commonwealth rental assistance by eligible households since 2008 and an increase in the migration of low income households to outer suburbs.

Loss of public housing

Public housing represents 4.5% of total households in Darebin. At June 2008 there were 3,301 public housing units in Darebin comprising a mix of 1 bedroom, 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom premises.

At June 2012 there were 2816 public housing properties in the City of Darebin. A net loss of 485 units.

The waiting list for public housing in Darebin at June 2012 was 7,007

Location of public housing

Neighbourhood	Number of properties	Percentage
Alphington	20	0.5%
Fairfield	32	1.5%
Kingsbury	27	1%
Northcote	462	16%
Preston	746	26%
Reservoir	1246	44 %
Thornbury	283	10%
Total	2816	

Principle income source

Income source	Number of people	Percentage
Waged / self employed	374	9%
Pensions/ benefits/ Allowances	3706	91 %
Total	4080	100%

Homelessness

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

Darebin Council uses a broad definition of homelessness, which is informed by a range of understandings from policy, legislation, and advice from the homelessness sector

Homelessness occurs “when a person is left without a conventional home and lacks the economic and social supports that a home normally affords. He/she is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, and has few independent resources. Often the person has no immediate means and in some cases, little prospect of independence”.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Burdekin Enquiry into Homeless Children in 1989 defined homelessness as “a lifestyle which includes insecurity and transience of shelter. It is not confined to a total lack of shelter. For many children and young people it signifies a state of detachment from family and vulnerability to dangers, including exploitation and abuse broadly defined, from which the family normally protects a child.

Rights Based Approach

Consistent with the Victorian Charter of Human rights, Darebin Council's approach to homelessness is informed by the following principles;

- * is inclusive.
- * is respectful of people's rights and treats all people with dignity.
- * encourages participation.

* is empowering and builds on people's strengths and knowledge of their own lives.

* aims to reduce discrimination against people experiencing homelessness in the municipality.

It is Darebin Council's view that a tailored and focussed approach is likely to result in more sustainable outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

As such Darebin Council will focus its efforts on supporting people who are in the Primary or Tertiary categories of homelessness, that is;

1. People sleeping rough or in improvised accommodation. Although this is the smallest category of people experiencing homelessness, there is considerable evidence that this group have significant health and other complex issues, and most have been homeless for well over five years. This is the most vulnerable group and requires specifically tailored responses to ensure a sustainable pathway out of homelessness.
2. People living in boarding/rooming houses in the municipality. Rooming House residents form the largest group of people experiencing homelessness in Darebin. Currently available data and information indicates that there are 29 registered rooming houses in Darebin of varying size (7 comprising 'student' properties).
3. Boarding houses are emerging as the most affordable option for people on low incomes and often the only option for people released from prison.

Council will also continue to work collaboratively with the homelessness sector and other levels of Government in addressing those issues for people in Secondary Homelessness, that is those in temporary and crisis accommodation.

Through our consultation, feedback has indicated women are far more likely to experience secondary homelessness.

We will work with the homelessness network to further understand the gendered experience of homelessness to add value to the work of these agencies.

Summary of Challenges

The following shortcomings require strategic actions in the Social and Affordable Housing Policy & Strategy:

1. Gradual net Loss of public housing stock
2. Lack of legislative mandate and planning for affordable housing
3. Under-supply of social and community housing
4. Lack of private rental housing for low income households
5. The increasingly limited availability of dwellings for purchase by moderate income households
6. Lack of housing options for a range of specific groups in Darebin such as people with disabilities and older women
7. Lack of homelessness services.

(See Appendix 5: Policy issues and barriers)

Appendix 1: Housing and wellbeing

The UN Declaration of Human Rights states that safe, secure, affordable and adequate housing is a fundamental right for all.

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.

For families and individuals an absence of secure housing renders them with;

- instability
- constant moving and disruption
- anxiety
- disconnect 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

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

Insecure housing is closely associated with;

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

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

Long term consequences include;

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

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³ *Institute of Medicine: Homelessness, Health and Human needs, National Academy Press Washington DC 1988*

“Access to affordable housing is critical to reducing disadvantage, improving Victorians’ sense of wellbeing and maintaining the social fabric of our communities. Affordable housing provides the basis for completing a sound education, obtaining and holding on to employment and maintaining good health. It also underpins the stability of communities and local and regional economies”. A Fairer Victoria 2005

Appendix 2: Dynamics of housing stress

Governments at all levels have important roles in facilitating the delivery of an efficient and affordable housing supply for all Australians. There are a range of housing related policies and initiatives across government, the key most recent policies and initiatives are presented below.

The Framework for National Action on Affordable Housing (NAAH)

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. The NAAH aims to provide a framework for coordination and partnerships with community organisations, private developers, state and local governments and the Commonwealth.

“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.

It argues for a policy of ‘no exits into homelessness’ from statutory custodial care, hospital, mental health and drug and alcohol services – sufficient available housing stock is an essential component of any discharge planning strategy.

A Fairer Victoria 2009

A Fairer Victoria (introduced in 2005) 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 and in 2009 the Victorian Government will invest \$325.4 million over the next four years to strengthen neighbourhoods and local communities. This includes investments aimed to prevent homelessness and support people out of homelessness and strengthen public, social and emergency housing.

Melbourne 2030 – planning for sustainable growth 2002

⁴ E. Robinson and R. Adams, *Housing stress and the mental health and wellbeing of Australian families* (Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse Briefing No. 12 Australian Institute of Family Studies)

Under the *Fairer City Direction* in Melbourne 2030 planning policy, there 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 is a member of the Northern Regional Housing Working group.

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. These will provide significant opportunities for more affordable housing on ‘market friendly’ development sites. A pilot project in the Inner North Sub region of Melbourne (including parts of Darebin) will be undertaken to help the sub-region reach its full potential.

Towards and Integrated Victorian Housing Strategy

A framework to address our future housing challenges September 2006

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.

The strategy has three key priority objectives:

- to facilitate the operation of the housing market;
- to ensure housing and residential development supports the Government's wider economic, social and environmental sustainability objectives; and
- to minimise housing stress.

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. It is intended to provide guidance and direction for local councils when developing and reviewing strategic planning work and to assist local councils and State Government in coordinating future infrastructure and services with population growth.

Recent Government Affordable Housing Initiatives

Key recent initiatives of the federal government include the:

- National Affordable Housing Agreement and National Partnerships (2009)
- National Rental Affordability Scheme – Phase 1:2008 – June 2021, Phase 2 from 2012
- The Nation Building and Jobs Plan - Social Housing Initiative February 2009
- The Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness December 2008

Key initiatives of the Victorian government include:

- Investments into Registered Affordable Housing Associations (RAHAS)
- Local Action of Affordable Housing (LAAH) - Victorian Office of Housing DHS Darebin along with 5 other councils are part of the LAAH.
- Implementing Melbourne 2030 affordable housing actions
- Towards an integrated Victorian Housing strategy, a framework to address our future housing challenges (Sept 06)

The primary focus of these initiatives is to increase investment in and supply of affordable housing. There is also a strong direction in the initiatives to develop a more integrated response to housing and encourage governments and sectors to work together to improve housing affordability, reduce homelessness and improve integration of homeless services system and mainstream services.

Appendix 3: 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:

- Facilitating the 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 (eg. building approvals and commencements, demographic projections);
- Community Grants (eg. 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 does permit planning authorities to consider “any significant social and economic effects of the use or development”, “if the circumstances appear to so require” (s60(b)), which may be interpreted to include the impacts of developments on affordable housing. 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,

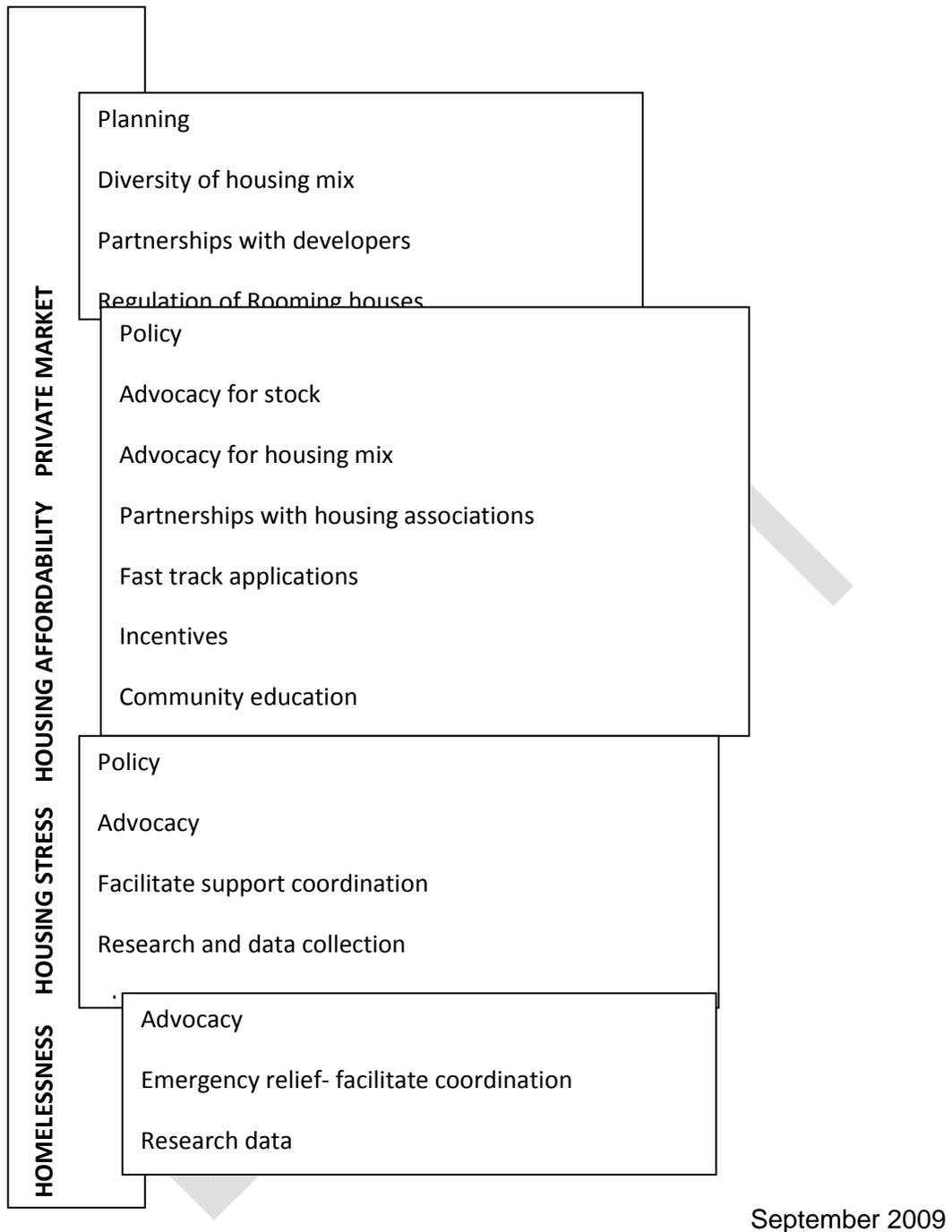
the City of Port Phillip coordinates the provision of community housing in Port Phillip for the state government's Office of Housing and other community housing organisations.

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

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Figure 3 Local government responses to housing stress



Appendix 4: Policy issues and barriers

Melbourne 2030 encourages Councils to take every opportunity to increase the supply of affordable housing. While the sentiment is supported, it must be acknowledged that local government is an insignificant player in the provision of housing (including social and public) and has no real method of ensuring housing is affordable in a market driven economy - particularly when there is an absence of legislative requirements.

Melbourne 2030 provides few details about how to achieve greater housing affordability instead emphasising research and continuing to explore models. The more concrete affordability directions tend to be associated with social housing rather than private sector housing.

The ability of Councils to seize on affordable housing opportunities as part of higher density housing applications is reliant upon the goodwill of developers, and the availability of land that may be purchased by housing organisations for the provision of affordable housing. The lack of legislative tools in the Planning Scheme and / or Planning and Environment Act restricts Council's ability to effectively negotiate with the private sector and facilitate affordable housing outcomes.

Furthermore, the broad definition of affordable housing limits Council's ability to ensure that residential development remains affordable accommodation over time, and is not on-sold to the private sector when land values increase; and the lack of planning mechanisms to achieve affordable housing outcomes often results in impressions that affordable housing equates to inferior or substandard accommodation. This impression needs to be removed from the development industry through education and greater promotion of affordable housing solutions.

To date, projects have taken from 3-4 years from conception to delivery and there is a large failure rate due often to the opposition of neighbours and the need for VCAT hearings. Affordable housing does not receive any priority at VCAT although their final rulings have been consistently favourable.

Section 173 of the Planning and Environment Act provides a tool for Councils to negotiate with developers around a number of outcomes for community including, theoretically, affordable housing. It does not allow Councils to require affordable housing.

The provision of land

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 the disposal of 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. Land could be granted to registered housing associations or other community or charitable group with the provision that the land be used for the development of affordable housing. This approach provides considerable benefits to housing associations, not the least of which is that they can use the granted land as equity to leverage funds and to count as a contribution towards state government grants to build affordable housing. There are a number of drawbacks to this approach, however, and each case would need to be considered against the following concerns:
 - *The cost to Council* - land is a valuable asset and both the loss of income that might have been gained and the lost opportunity inherent in retaining land to increase value need to be considered. Any choice to forego profits from sale may well have an impact on other Council strategies including development of open space or other local community infrastructure.
 - *The suitability of the land* - Council is more likely to dispose of land that is not suitable for open space or the development of Council facilities. The location and nature of the land may mean that it is also not suitable for the development of affordable housing.

- *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 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:
 - *Statutory restrictions* – the Local Government Act (S190) restricts maximum leases to Councils to 50 years in most cases. This is problematic for housing associations as DHS require a minimum 100 year lease to receive funding.
 - *Use of asset* - consideration will need to be given to the use or disposal of the housing at the end of the lease period.
 - *Opportunity cost* - the lease option effectively locks the asset away from use by the community for the lease period.

Council land disposal processes can act as a barrier to the development of affordable housing in two ways: requirements to give public notice can encourage a high level of community concern and requirements to tender can mitigate against the creation of partnerships with affordable housing providers. The removal of safeguards that protect good local governance and due diligence would need to be carefully considered. Rather, improved community education to reduce community concern and an understanding of the need for transparent processes is preferred.

Rate exemptions and discounts

Some Councils provide rate exemptions to affordable housing associations and community housing providers. There is a view that S 154 of the Local Government Act provides scope for the provision of rate exemptions to affordable housing associations on the basis properties used for public or charitable purposes can be excluded from rates. The Act also states, however, that houses or flats used as residences are not considered to be used primarily for public or charitable use. On this basis, Council has previously not provided rate exemptions for these purposes. Regardless of the intention of S154, it is within the power of Council to provide rate exemptions to affordable housing groups if it so chooses. Some conditions would need to be established to ensure that the benefit remained in Darebin, either by being passed directly onto tenants or through re-investment in the area.

Summary and overview

1. Public Housing stock

There are currently 2816 public housing properties in the City of Darebin. This comprises a mix of 1 bedroom, 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom premises. Public housing represents 4.5% of total households in Darebin and is mainly located in the Northern parts of the municipality with minimal in the South (see attached map). This number represents a decrease of 106 units which have been sold since 2006. It is not clear if the income generated from these sales has been re-invested into social housing.

Location of public housing

Neighbourhood	Number of properties	Percentage
Alphington	20	0.5%
Fairfield	32	1.5%
Kingsbury	27	1%
Northcote	462	16%
Preston	746	26%
Reservoir	1246	44 %
Thornbury	283	10%
Total	2816	

Principle income source

Income source	Number of people	Percentage
Waged / self employed	374	9%
Pensions/ benefits/ Allowances	3706	91 %
Total	4080	100%

Residents by country of birth

Country of birth	Number	Percentage
Australia	3431	66%
Overseas (9 main countries – Asia and Africa)	1753	34%
Total	5184	

Residents by age

Age cohort	Number	Percentage
Under 6	347	7%
6-15 years	460	9%
16- 24 years	563	11%
25-54 years	1753	34%
55-74 years	1325	26%
75+ years	439	9%
Total	5184	

Duration of tenancy

Length of tenancy	Number of lease holders	Percentage
0-5 years	979	35%
5-10 years	689	25%
10-15 years	559	19%
15-20 years	303	11%
20+ years	300	10%
Total	2812	

Household size

Number of persons per household	Number of households	Percentage
1 person	1654	54%
2 people	593	21%
3 people	256	9%
4 people	146	5%
5 people	68	2.5%
6 people	54	2%
7 people	19	0.5%
8 + people	22	1%
Total	2812	

Household type

Household type	Number of households	Percentage
Singles	558	20%
Couple	18	1%
Couple with child	80	3%
Couple with children	58	2%
Single parents	314	11%
Single parents +	143	5%
Group	399	14%
Older couple	146	5%
Older single	1096	39%
Total	2812	

Demand and waiting lists for public housing in Darebin

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has estimated that the current need in Darebin for public housing is 1500 units - 400 accessible single bedroom units, 600 single units and 500 2-3 bedroom units.

Current waiting list for Darebin is around 7000 applications from families and individuals. This comprises data from Department of Human Services (Preston office) which has a total of 3,019 people waiting for public housing. The DHS Broadmeadows office, which also services Darebin, has a waiting list of 3088.

2. Social Housing

There are several types of social housing in Darebin.

a. Rooming Houses

There are currently 29 'for profit' registered rooming houses in Darebin comprising 7 'student' properties and 22 general properties of various sizes. Private rooming houses (Boarding Houses) are emerging as the most affordable housing option for people on low incomes and are often the only option for those people released from prison.

Rooming houses are generally in poor condition where residents are required to share kitchen, toilet and bathroom facilities.

There are an increasing number of unregistered (illegal) rooming houses operating across the inner city Councils. These are often converted suburban houses makes enforcement practices difficult. Residents in these facilities are generally at higher risk due to overcrowding and poor emergency fire provisions.

b. Joint ventures

There are also two models of 'joint ventures' developed between the State Government and Darebin City Council where the State Government has built social housing on Council owned land.

Model 1 - Social housing joint venture managed by a third party

There are 40 properties on 9 titles (Council property) and managed by a third party.

These comprise;

4 X 3 bedroom properties for newly arrived migrants

8X 3 bedroom properties for low income families

8 X 2 bedroom properties for single parents and / or young people

20 units for older people located at the Fairfield Lions Village.

Model 2 - Public housing managed by the State with Council having nomination rights.

This has been a traditional; long standing model that ensures priority is given to older people in Darebin who are on low incomes can remain in their local neighbourhoods and close to support networks. This priority is a formal protocol developed through a nomination process administered by Council.

These arrangements usually have a built in sunset clause, whereby the stock eventually reverts to general public housing waiting lists.

9 Eric Street Estate in Preston – ages 30 and over

4 Agg St, Thornbury – 55 years and over

1 Holmes St, Northcote – 55 years and over

130 High St, Northcote – 55 years and over

3. Community Housing

There are 5 registered not-for-profit community housing agencies that provide affordable housing for particular target groups:

William T Onus Hostel	Northcote	(Aboriginal)
Catchment Youth Refuge	Reservoir	(Young People)
Marjorie Oke Rooming House for women	Fairfield	(Women)
Little Sisters of the Poor	Northcote	(Women)
Vasey RSL care	Bundoora	(Veterans)

4. Common Equity Housing

Housing co-operative is a legal association formed for the purpose of providing housing to its members on a continuing basis. It is owned and controlled by its members. A co-operative is distinguished from other housing associations by its ownership structure and its commitment to co-operative principles.

Postcode	Total	1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom
Thornbury	12	-	6	5	1
Northcote	11	-	4	6	1

Responding to Housing Stress

A local action plan

2013 -2017

Draft

Strategic actions

Strategic Actions

The following suggested actions have been developed after consideration of the data and issues associated with the development of better affordable housing and affordable living outcomes in Darebin. They are intended to indicate the scope of Council's ongoing effort to ensure that Council's investment is most effective and relevant.

Six broad strategic areas of activity are defined, each with a number of specific actions. The areas of activity reflect a mix of on going key Council roles and some specific 'hot button' issues that require some additional attention over the next four years.

1. Protect and increase the level of public housing.
2. A balanced approach to addressing homelessness
3. Increase the level of social and affordable housing
4. Maintaining direct support for households in housing stress and living stress
5. Advocacy
6. Education and capacity building

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
	2.3 Maintain an up to date list of all registered rooming houses in Darebin that is available to the public.	Health Protection Services	January 2014 and ongoing	Updated list available on Council website and part of Department of Consumer Affairs central database
	2.4 Develop and formalise a 'Rooming House Closure protocol' with North East Housing in the event that a private rooming house is closed and the tenants are made homeless.	Community Planning & Customer Service	By November 2014	A mutually agreed and formalised Rooming House Closure protocol.
	2.5 Contribute to the development and maintenance of a Rooming House web site in conjunction with the Metropolitan Melbourne Rooming House Group and the VLGA.	Community Planning & Customer Service	March 2014 and ongoing	An operating website endorsed by VLGA
	2.6 Advocate for an assertive outreach program to provide support to people sleeping rough.	Community Planning & Customer Service	Immediately and on going	Successful recurrent public funding for a dedicated assertive outreach program for the region (as a minimum)

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
	<p>2.7 Work with the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) to develop a role for Council to support the specialist homeless system.</p> <p>2.8 Ensure that all urban design frameworks include the provision of civic infrastructure that includes water fountains, larger public seating and shade trees for those people who spend prolonged time on the street.</p>	Community Planning & Customer Service	March 2015	Draft discussion paper for consideration by Council and peak bodies.
<p>3. Increase the level of social and affordable housing in Darebin</p>	<p>3.1 Develop and implement a 'Social and Affordable Housing' Program to maximise social housing on Council owned sites including but not limited to; The redevelopment of the civic precinct in Preston. The eleven Council owned sites (these include 'air rights' above existing car parks) identified as being suitable for social housing.</p> <p>3.2 Create a governance structure to guide and oversee the development of a social housing strategy and roll out plan made up of Council staff and Registered Housing Agencies to ensure that any models for social housing meet Council's objectives and tailored to meet practical needs of diverse communities in most need.</p>	<p>Community Planning & Customer Service</p> <p>Assets and Business Services and Community Planning & Customer Service</p>	<p>November 2014</p> <p>January 2014</p>	<p>A Social and affordable Housing Program endorsed by Council.</p> <p>Structure and terms of Reference endorsed by EMT</p>

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
	3.3 Investigate the efficacy of establishing a Land Trust as an effective instrument for future partnerships in the development of social housing on Council land.	Community Planning & Customer Service	June 2015	Discussion paper/ feasibility study prepared for consideration by EMT
	3.4 Aim to be more agile in provide a range of incentives to assist developers to include social housing in their developments. These may include consideration of parking, height and other variable elements of the planning scheme (provided that local amenity is not compromised) and actively link developers with half sold properties with other partners to trigger development.	City Development	Immediately and on going	Increased number of social and affordable housing units on larger residential developments
	3.5 Maximise the use of Section 173 agreements to achieve an increase in social and affordable housing.	City Development	Immediately and on going	Increased number of social and affordable housing units on larger residential developments
	3.6 Continue to strengthen and facilitate partnerships between Registered Housing Agencies and Developers on a project by project basis.	Community Planning & Customer Service	Immediately and on going	Number of partnerships created.

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
	<p>3.7 Work with Registered Housing Agencies (and their peak body) to develop proposals and funding submissions for additional social and affordable housing in Darebin.</p> <p>3.8 Monitor and respond to opportunities to increase social housing for specific identified high needs groups in Darebin, including people with a mental illness, women and families, sole parents, single older people and Aboriginal people through Council's Active Ageing Strategy, the Youth Services Review, Early Years Framework , Darebin Leisure Strategy and Council's Equity and inclusion objectives.</p> <p>3.9 Foster and maintain good working relationships with support agencies as well as tenancy managers to ensure the success of social housing tenancies.</p> <p>3.10 Include Aboriginal Housing Victoria as a potential 'Registered Housing Association' for the purposes of developing social housing on Council owned properties.</p> <p>3.11 Consider integrating cooperative housing models when developing social housing projects to ensure a mix of affordable rental stock and affordable ownership options.</p>	<p>Community Planning & Customer Service</p> <p>Community Planning & Customer Service</p> <p>Community Planning & Customer Service</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p> <p>Immediately and on going</p> <p>Immediately and on going</p>	<p>Number of submissions and applications supported by Council</p> <p>The number of appropriate policies and strategies that have included social and affordable housing as part of their planning and program design</p> <p>Number of formal and valid Funding and Service Agreements</p>

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
<p>4. Maintain direct support for households in housing stress and living stress</p>	<p>4.1 Provide housing support services and nomination rights for the public housing units in the Holmes Street estate and Eric Street estate to ensure that low income people (and in particular older people) can remain in Darebin.</p>	<p>Aged and Disability Services</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p>	<p>Number of older Darebin residents who receive nomination rights.</p>
	<p>4.2 Provide financial counselling and family support services to people in housing stress and who are living in insecure accommodation.</p>	<p>Family and Children's services</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p>	<p>Number of referrals and clients in housing related stress.</p>
	<p>4.3 Provide home care and home maintenance services through the HACC program to older people in insecure accommodation and who are in housing stress.</p>	<p>Aged and Disability Services</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p>	<p>Number of referrals and clients in housing related stress.</p>
	<p>4.4 Provide outreach and centre based youth support services to young people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness in the community.</p>	<p>Youth Services</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p>	<p>Number of referrals and clients in housing related stress.</p>
	<p>4.5 That Council's fees and charges policies take into consideration those households deemed to be in housing or living stress</p>	<p>Community Planning & Customer Service and Revenue Services</p>	<p>Annually and on going</p>	<p>Number of meetings and emails to Revenue services during annual budget process.</p>

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
	<p>4.6 Through Councils Environmental Programs provide advice and support to people in housing stress to assist them to minimise the cost of heating, cooling and waste removal.</p> <p>4.7 Ensure that all new developments in Darebin and particularly those for people on low and fixed incomes are designed to ensure financial and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>4.8 That low income households (including public tenants) are given priority should any energy saving programs or initiatives be developed by Council</p>	<p>Environmental and Natural Resources Team</p> <p>City Development</p> <p>Environmental and Natural Resources Team</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p> <p>Immediately and ongoing</p> <p>Immediately and ongoing</p>	<p>Number of individuals and households assisted.</p> <p>Number of new developments with 5 star energy ratings and above.</p> <p>Number of successful programs implemented by Council.</p>
<p>5. Advocacy</p>	<p>5.1 Ensure that the advocacy actions of the Darebin Housing Advisory Committee inform and are informed by other local government housing structures such as the Housing and Local Government Network (HALGN) and with the work of peak bodies including the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association.</p>	<p>Community Planning & Customer Service</p>	<p>Immediately and on going</p>	<p>Number of agenda items, forums, and actions by peak bodies that are directly relevant to Council and the city.</p>

Strategy	Action	Department	Timelines	Measures
	<p>5.2 Actively pursue the development of a Crisis Accommodation Facility in the North.</p> <p>5.3 Collaborate with other local governments and peak bodies to advocate for changes to the State Planning Policy Framework to enable;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Settings for social housing targets (such as inclusionary zoning); and b. A definition of affordable housing 	<p>Community Planning & Customer Service</p> <p>Strategic Planning Team and Community Planning & Customer Service</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing</p> <p>Immediately and ongoing</p>	<p>Number of letters, emails and advocacy actions from relevant housing and welfare agencies in the North to relevant State and federal government Ministers and senior officers.</p> <p>The prominence and level of joint action (campaigns, research, issue specific forums) between Council and other relevant stakeholders.</p>

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