

*The following text, is our recently submitted Op-Ed article for publication in The Mercury.  
The aim of this article is to introduce the work of our committee to the community.  
It contains detail of the 3 key priority items we have identified, and are addressing.  
I have added it to this submission as background information/ supporting documentation.*

‘Tasmania is celebrating an economic ‘golden age’. But the patina is not visible to everyone. As Hobart flourishes with investment, planning to accommodate the boom languishes. In extreme winter weather, our city suffers unmitigated housing shortages, the true scale of which is unquantified, in both size, and effects.

Currently, approximately 3,500 Tasmanians languish on the public housing list, shelters are at capacity and homeless families are being split apart, with service providers reporting up to 50% of those seeking help being turned away.

Hobart is one of the least affordable cities based on rent to income ratio, with one of the lowest rental vacancy rates. We have an estimated 120 sleeping on the CBD streets every night. Common perception is that rough sleeping is what homelessness looks like, however, those sleeping rough make up only 8% of the homeless population.

People with lived experience have long been overlooked in dialogue about meaningful solutions, in spite of effectively being experts in the issue. Solutions must not only filter down from govt, but crucially, must percolate up from ground level, from people living this stuff. Local Government recognised this need.

In February 2019, the Hobart City Council moved a motion to establish the Housing with Dignity Reference Committee, proposed, and seconded by Alderman Damon Thomas and Alderman Zelinda Sherlock, respectively.

This committee is the first of its kind, reflecting a true and trusting collaboration between local government and the community; in this case, vulnerable housing affected cohorts.

Of the 24 standing members, 22 have lived homelessness experience, and the agenda is driven by concerns and ideas raised by these people, with hands on knowledge of the problem, and unique perspectives on solutions.

Alderman Thomas co-chairs the committee with homelessness advocate Kate Kelly; founder of Hobartians Facing Homelessness, a grassroots homelessness advocacy group.

Alderman Thomas is a longstanding supporter of the homeless community and with his establishment with HCC of this vital group, there is finally an opportunity for our most marginalised citizens to have a respected, tangible and productive voice at the table.

Housing with Dignity Committee comprises a diverse mix of people including: consumer representatives from Bethlehem House; Trinity Hill; UTAS student voice; older people; Common Ground residents, the Aboriginal Community, and people who have experienced shelters and chronic housing stress.

It is not a committee made up of service providers or politicians, but seeks to ally closely with them to achieve positive outcomes for marginalised people.

Its priority areas cover immediate, medium and long term scenarios, and are triaged to focus our diverse experience on provision of shelter and housing meaningfully, and effectively. The HWDRDG meets monthly; progressing with specific actions, in line with 3 priority areas.

#### Priority Area 1 –Data gathering

Access to independent, accurate and current data is imperative. We need projections of future social and affordable housing needs over the next five years as a starter. You cannot fix a problem you can't quantify.

#### Priority Area 2 – Breaking down stigma.

Nobody is immune to homelessness.

Stigma derails solutions from the ground up.

The demographics of homelessness are rapidly changing, with fast growing cohorts being retiree women and low income families- who cannot access affordable housing. Many remain hidden due to stigma that pervades our society around being without a home.

#### Priority Area 3 - Community Housing Models

Housing with Dignity is looking for opportunities in the immediate crisis as to where we can provide real support. We have set targets to deliver tangible outcomes for people without a home as quickly as possible.

An early agreed target is an increase of 10 beds per night in the greater Hobart area for primary homeless people, with incremental increases in beds to meet demand.

Longer term, we need more social and affordable housing everywhere.

We must create sustainable, inclusive communities and elevate social mobility for everyone.

Countries worldwide are investing in innovative and needs specific social housing models. These models are thriving and the neighbours are happy.

Like Finland, we too could be leaders in this field.

Lived experience of those who have known homelessness and housing stress, is a vital contribution to discussions, actions and policies that occur in this politicised and clamorous space.

We need to be part of the dialogue; we want liveable cities with an affordable housing mix that works for our diverse, growing community.

This committee, in collaboration with Government, services and the community, seeks to reinvigorate this discussion; working together to create housing with direction, housing with design, and housing with dignity.