

10.1 UPDATE ON HOMELESS MEAL SERVICE PROVISION AT WELD SQUARE

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. **NOTES** that there has been a marked reduction in anti-social behaviour at Weld Square since the cessation of the meal service in December 2020;
2. **NOTES** that feedback from service providers indicates that those in need are linked to other food services, including the central City of Perth Homeless Services Accreditation Site on Moore Street;
3. **NOTES** that Administration maintains formal and regular networks with Department of Communities, WA Police, Nyoongar Outreach Services and other outreach services to manage any arising concerns in a coordinated manner;
4. **DETERMINES** that no new goods and service provision, including meal services, are to be permitted at Weld Square until further notice.

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

At the ordinary Council Meeting on 20 October 2020, Council determined that:

“the Manna Inc. meal service and any other goods and service provision will cease and not be permitted at Weld Square from 31 December 2020 for 12 months to allow for an assessment of the impact on amenity and safety and Weld Square”, with a further report due to Council “no later than October 2021 relating to the provision of a food service in the Perth/Northbridge area and any changes to the activity and usage of Weld Square”.

The purpose of this report is to provide that update.

BACKGROUND:

Manna Inc. moved their free meal service to Weld Square in August 2008 and Council granted successive twelve-month approvals for the use of Weld Square until 2020, with a range of associated conditions that aimed to address concerns raised by nearby residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

During 2020, anti-social behaviour escalated at Weld Square with residents, businesses and visitors feeling increasingly unsafe and unable to use Weld Square as a local public space.

Further to this, there were also broader changes to the provision of homeless services in the public realm within the inner-city area over this period, in line with the Action Plan of the City Homeless Framework Committee, led by the City of Perth, in which the City of Vincent participated.

Of most significance in this regard, the City of Perth launched their Moore Street accreditation site early in 2020, to support the coordination of homeless service provision in the inner-city area. The Moore Street site currently operates an evening service on weekdays between 4:30pm and 8:00pm, and Sunday mornings between 8:00am and 11:00am.

The City of Perth works with providers and goodwill groups to provide services at the Moore Street site or in a roving capacity, depending on approvals. This process coordinates groups and services providing support to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness within the City and provides a single site and standard time of delivery to improve accessibility to essential services including food, health and hygiene services and access to donations of essential items.

This initiative also ensures a safe standard of service delivery, reduces duplication of services, identifies gaps in service and aims to best utilise the sector's finite resources.

During the transition period, Administration worked closely with Manna Inc. to communicate these changes to clients, other service providers and key stakeholders, outreach services, local businesses and residents, with information about other targeted assistance and supports offered to meal service clients at Weld Square before cessation of the service in December 2020. This included information about various COVID-19 relief initiatives for specific groups, including non-Australian residents, those visiting from other areas and those which have identified as housed but in financial distress and not accessing other crisis services and support.

As a result, Administration has received minimal queries regarding cessation of the meal service over the past twelve months.

Whilst Manna Inc. have not pursued a move to the central Moore Street site at this time, they do continue to provide other valuable services in the community, such as their school breakfast and inter-agency support programs and a message on their website notes that:

"Whilst the decision to cease the Weld Square food services was effected by the City of Vincent, I would like to acknowledge and commend them for their efforts in always keeping us informed, involved and included during the process" and that they will "continue to explore and prospect other options/partnerships to ensure a coordinated approach to service delivery for our clients within the Cities of Perth and Vincent".

DETAILS:

Feedback from a range of stakeholders was sought during the preparation of this report and is included below:

Western Australian Police Force

Perth Police have advised that there have been 22 incidents reported at Weld Square since July 2021, a decrease from the same period last year.

Operation Four Square remains ongoing, with police bike teams regularly patrolling and monitoring Weld, Wellington, Russell and Yagan Squares.

Police encourage the community to report issues focussing on specific anti-social behaviours, rather than just the presence of street present persons, so that they can respond accordingly. This may include things such as creating a disturbance, threatening or disorderly behaviour, drug use and trespass.

Police reiterated that homelessness is a complex issue and they continue to work closely with local government, service providers and the community to address concerns.

Ranger Services

The City's Ranger Services have noted a significant decrease in issues at Weld Square since the cessation of the meal service and continue to monitor the location proactively through CCTV and patrols. This includes obstructions, abandoned property, waste/litter, camping and anti-social behaviour.

Rangers continue to offer information and referrals to outreach services to street present persons and rough sleepers and engage with a range of stakeholders to facilitate a coordinated response to any issues arising.

Nyoongar Outreach Services

Nyoongar Outreach Services advised that feedback from staff and clients indicated no concerns with the cessation of the Weld Square meal service and that clients were generally accessing services from the Moore Street site. Further, staff have noted a decrease in street present persons and anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of Weld Square since cessation of the meal service in December 2020.

This feedback has been reflected in discussion with other outreach and service providers in the area.

Nyoongar Outreach Services have also suggested a need to clarify the role of outreach services in the community, and Administration will work with services to raise awareness in this regard.

Local residents/businesses

Administration has received a decrease in reports from local residents and businesses of anti-social behaviour, litter/waste and large groups gathering at Weld Square since cessation of the meal service.

It has recently been reported that on occasion, some unauthorised service provision is occurring at Weld Square and Administration is currently investigating this and following up with providers.

Local residents and businesses have communicated that a lot of continuing anti-social behaviour in the area, including noise, property crime and drug use is perceived to be linked to a few longer-term street present persons who frequent the area and Administration continues to liaise with WA Police, Department of Communities and service providers to offer supports and manage these concerns.

As suggested by local residents, Administration will also seek to promote community safety initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch in the area and raise awareness of the correct reporting numbers, in collaboration with WA Police and outreach services.

CONSULTATION/ADVERTISING:

The Safer Vincent Advisory Group met in September 2021 to collect and discuss feedback from WA Police, Ranger Services, outreach services and local business and residents.

Administration continues to work with the Department of Communities, WA Police, outreach services including Nyoongar Outreach Services and Uniting WA, neighbouring local governments including the City of Perth and other key stakeholders regarding homeless service provision in the inner-city area and in the referral of those frequenting Weld Square to appropriate services and support.

LEGAL/POLICY:

The City's commitment to the provision of support to organisations working with people experiencing homelessness and the maintenance of an interagency approach through collaboration with outreach services and other community organisations are key actions of the Safer Vincent Plan 2019/2022 and the Action Plan of the City Homeless Framework Committee in which the City participated.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Low: It is low risk for Council to receive this report and determine not to permit any new goods or service provision at Weld Square given the decrease of anti-social behaviour and alternative meal and service provisions available in the broader inner-city area.

Weld Square and the surrounding area do experience anti-social behaviour associated with both close proximity to licensed premises and support services, and the prevalence of vulnerable persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness within the inner City area. This cohort often present with complex needs relating to mental health, health, cognitive impairment, drug/alcohol use and trauma. The City continues to work collaboratively with State agencies, support services and other stakeholders to manage these risks.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

This is in keeping with the City's *Strategic Community Plan 2018-2028*:

Enhanced Environment

Our parks and reserves are maintained, enhanced and well utilised.

Connected Community

Our community facilities and spaces are well known and well used.

Thriving Places

Our town centres and gathering spaces are safe, easy to use and attractive places where pedestrians have priority.

Innovative and Accountable

We are open and accountable to an engaged community.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

This does not contribute to any environmental sustainability outcomes. This action/activity is environmentally neutral.

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS:

This is in keeping with the following priority health outcomes of the City's *Public Health Plan 2020-2025*:

Reduced injuries and a safer community

FINANCIAL/BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications to this decision.

COMMENTS:

Administration engages regularly with homeless service organisations and key stakeholders in the sector through monthly Department of Communities Homelessness Working Group meetings and six-weekly Outreach Collaboration Meetings, as well as other forums as required, to monitor homelessness trends, challenges and needs in the area.

The City also participates in six-monthly rough sleeper counts facilitated by the City of Perth and will also support an upcoming Connections Week exercise coordinated by Ruah Community Services in November 2021 which aims to better understand who is experiencing homelessness in our community and their needs for support and housing.