

HOMELESSNESS: a call for simple, strategic, and sustainable solutions

A discussion document and issues paper, April 2019

Introduction:

Many New Zealanders believe homelessness should be solved primarily by getting our social housing provision right – simple.

To make an impact social housing provision through near term supply increase and intensification needs to be underwritten by the expectation of sufficient baseline provision by the state, matched by a thriving community sector offering a range of whānau and personal support, and accessible pathways up and out of state housing. We are our community and we all have a role. That's strategic, and sustainable.

For many observers, homelessness is a direct result of inadequate supply at this end of the market and one element of this micro-system is adequate supply. But this is not the whole truth. Homelessness is also a clear statement of breach against both Te Tiriti and the human right to adequate housing. At the same time physical and mental health, whānau dynamics, poverty, social isolation, and abuse are also common contributors to the *direct result* of homelessness. So supply itself is only one part, and to ignore wider contributors is not sustainable.

Content:

To combat homelessness we need simple, strategic, sustainable solutions, and supply is not the panacea solution. This paper highlights a number of inter-linked approaches to homelessness and *kāinga* outcomes which feature sustainability at their core.

A part of the 'other solutions' are new and more cohesive responses to the principle that homelessness is not just about housing. Housing First is a move way beyond relying on supply, in which a successful *kāinga* outcome for someone experiencing homelessness will require real genuine and even intrepid commitment from any service providers or support person. It is an exploration, and service providers must be empowered to explore.

In Housing First approaches this is built-in, and the fundamental driver to achieve sustained housing links to the wider call for sustainable approaches and sustainable investment (in Housing First temporary placements are strongly resisted because they do not set up the individual for stability). Similarly, marae responses in Tāmaki Makaurau demonstrate directly the very meaning of sustainability – once you enter the marae you are a part of the whānau – the service is manaakitanga, and the delivery model is whanaungatanga.

It's no surprise the Auckland Housing First Collective have developed a kaupapa Māori approach to their task as acknowledged by Minister Twyford at the recent Auckland Māori Housing Summit. Their service targets a largely Māori group, and Māori values align strongly with Housing First values.

The Kāinga strategic action plan (the plan) suggests we shift from talking about *housing*, to talking about *Kāinga*. *Kāinga* amongst other things implies whānau outcomes, secure tenure, sense of place, and cultural wellbeing. *Housing* can imply these things too, but it is also synonymous with development, the price of land, infrastructure... all the things that take us away from concentrating on whānau to being over-whelmed by barriers to supply. It is a short trip, but our minds tend to fixate easily on those intractable problems and it seems hard to refocus on *whānau*.

The plan frames up a serious call for a national strategy – a shift from interventions driven by political policy, to interventions driven by public buy-in and the robust strategic oversight and gap + options analysis a strategy should provide. In this sense the plan calls for a space in which to discuss these issues, understand inter-dependencies, and express of our shared aspirations.

What is the link between addressing homelessness and KiwiBuild? One is an aspiration of government and the other is a policy of government. KiwiBuild – the policy in operation - has generated a huge development programme which ultimately has the capacity to end homelessness, but homeless people can't afford a KiwiBuild home. *So how are they connected; what's the strategy?*

Driving for social and whānau outcomes has long been a feature of Māori political advocacy. Like many organisations in the community housing sector (for example) Māori entities are generally values based not profit based, even when they are not 'Not for Profit'. But this does not mean they are not fiscally responsible, accountable, or viable. It just means their driver is not commercial.

This values-based, sustainable, whānau-focused approach is reflected in the international context at the moment. *The Shift* movement says we need to shift – globally - from viewing housing primarily through a finance lens, to viewing it through the lens of the social outcomes and impacts of our housing and investment choices and policy settings. *The Shift* says if there is homelessness in our system **we** are failing: the government... and all of us. But it's not a failure of housing, the market, or development, it's just a failure for whānau.

Māori have long called for this shift, identifying the need for the state to invest in the wellbeing of people first and foremost – not just 'things' like infrastructure. So *The Shift* is natural fit with the Kāinga plan, with and for Māori, for social outcomes over financial ones, and also with Te Tiriti.

When we say homelessness should be solved by getting social housing provision right, we mean simply for us a *greater investment in achieving that is fundamentally justified* - but only if the services (like Whanau Ora, or housing expertise) and process (like tenancies) are also in place and resourced to be effective. **We are also expressing a belief that a house is more than 'just a house' – that there is something fundamental in a home that can only be found or created in a home.**

The National Housing Strategy proposed in the Kāinga plan is a means to develop a basic stable agreed national approach to housing. We suggest it should be based on human rights and Te Tiriti, to open a dialogue about whether current investment – through the Auckland Housing Programme for example - will ever yield sufficient built units to meet demand and end sustained homelessness.

At this stage it seems likely that increased social housing units over the next 10 years will not house the level of demand we can already see building. **Now is the time to get the investment commitments right, based on three targets – all New Zealanders well-housed, the human right to adequate housing, and elevation of Te Tiriti, all in constant risk of breach.**

Buying and using motels is not sustainable, nor in our best interests in the medium and long-term. It is avoided with strategic planning for the sustainable goal - getting our planned social provision right over the next decade – a sustainable investment compared to the cost of on-going ad-hoc moves.

In housing Te Tiriti is in a state of constant breach. The 'investment frame' allows the government to say 'we don't have enough money to solve it'. The social model says *we don't have any choice*.

Winter is coming and it's clear what needs to change.