

Auckland Council, Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau
Via email: akhaveyoursay@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

RE: Auckland Council Annual Budget 2023 /2024

- Community Housing Aotearoa – Ngā Wharerau o Aotearoa (CHA) thanks Auckland Council – Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau for the opportunity to share our perspectives on the Auckland Council Annual Budget 2023 /2024. We have prepared this submission in response to the Annual Budget 2023 / 2024 consultation document released on 28 February 2023.
- CHA is an Incorporated Society and a peak body for the community housing sector. To achieve our vision of ‘all New Zealanders well-housed’, we have a strategic focus on supporting a well-functioning housing system and working toward the realisation of the right to housing. We are also mindful of the larger institutional and regulatory settings within which our members and other community organisations operate.
- Our 84 provider members provide homes for nearly 30,000 kiwis nationally across 18,520 homes, and our 37 partner members include developers, consultants, and local councils. Community Housing Providers (CHPs) are primarily not for dividend entities that develop, own, and manage social and affordable housing stock, with rental and progressive homeownership tenure offerings. We work closely with national Māori housing advocate Te Matapihi, which represents Iwi-based and Māori community housing providers. Alongside Te Matapihi we operate a service called Homeless Sector Support. More about us can be found [here](#).

Overall Comments

- Community Housing Aotearoa, as a peak body for the community housing sector, **does not support stopping Auckland Council coordination and funding of homelessness initiatives** (mentioned on pages 16, 31, 62 of the consultation document). This funding supports vital homeless outreach services across the Auckland region.
- With regards to question 1 Operating Spending Cuts (outlined in the consultation document), in particular:
Reducing regional services such as community and education programmes, arts and culture programmes, regional events, economic development, and other social services activities such as homelessness funding, community empowerment and funding for youth centres to save \$20 million.

CHA recommends **do not proceed with these reductions and instead further increase rates and / or debt**. This funding supports community services that contribute to creating resilient and thriving communities.

- CHA acknowledges and supports this annual budget’s focus on prioritising projects that make Auckland a resilient city. However, focusing on community and its people, is what makes a city and community resilient. This proposed \$20 million saving, which can have a

big impact on community outcomes, will only provide a 6% saving, which is a small percentage of the total budget shortfall of \$295 million.

- With the recent unprecedented weather and emergency events that have impacted the Auckland region, there is a need to retain these minimal funding streams and resources that support realising community aspirations, build strong and resilient communities, and make Auckland a great place to live. CHA's Vision "All New Zealander's well housed", not only refers to a warm, safe, dry and affordable home but also to the place you live and the sense of community, belonging and connection to that place.
- As an organisation with size and scale, Auckland Council is well positioned to show leadership and strongly advocate to central government on housing and homelessness and has levers you can utilise to prevent homelessness. In the mayoral election, Mayor Brown committed to a series of four pledges on housing proposed by Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga (TOW) an alliance of 30 community, faith, union and Māori groups lobbying for a housing strategy:
 - **One:** Auckland Council adopting a right to a decent home.
 - **Two:** A co-ordination group to figure out how to implement that right to a decent home, along with progress reports on action taken by Auckland Council or its development arm Eke Panuku.
 - **Three:** Getting Auckland Council to investigate and report on providing affordable and accessible housing alternatives in partnership with Kāinga Ora, community housing providers and developers, along with supporting Māori housing initiatives.
 - **Four:** Directing Auckland Council to investigate inclusionary zoning options that set aside a percentage of a development for affordable housing.

CHA endorses these housing pledges and their adoption by Auckland Council.

Supporting evidence

Auckland Council's Homelessness Initiatives fund and homeless outreach services

- The homelessness initiatives fund, a discretionary fund of \$500,000, provides council with an important welfare role in responding to homelessness. This funding supports a number of community initiatives including outreach services provided by homeless and housing service providers across the Auckland region. Outreach services are localised services that connect people experiencing homelessness into housing and homeless social support services. This is often a first step in connecting people into long-term, permanent and stable housing.
- Auckland Council receives welfare calls through its call centre on a daily basis. By funding localised outreach services, this means council can refer calls received that are welfare based on to housing and homeless social services so that people are connected to the right support, at the right time in the right place. Council has a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of all Aucklanders therefore it is vital to have a response when receiving welfare calls.

- In 2017, Auckland Council commissioned an evaluation of homeless outreach services that council part funds.¹ The evaluation was undertaken by Dovetail who provide evaluation, research and facilitation services. The evaluation found that:
 - *Outreach services are part-funded by council with the intention of enabling support workers to build relationships with people experiencing homelessness, to assist them into sustainable accommodation.*
 - *Part-funding from Auckland Council to outreach services is important in terms of being an important contribution to their work and providing a referral source for concerns raised by members of the public or Council staff, beyond compliance responses. It also provides a stake for Council in homeless and housing issues and a basis for advocacy to government agencies on policy and service delivery.*
 - *For Auckland Council, funding offers a means of acknowledging its role in the community and the welfare of its citizens, beyond simply a compliance role, and more fundamentally, provides a referral source for concerns raised by members of the public or Council staff.*
 - *In the period from July 2015-June 2016, 59% of notifications received by the Auckland City Mission outreach team were from Auckland Council.*
 - *Recommendations for Auckland Council from the evaluation report includes:*
 - *Continue to part-fund homeless outreach services.*
 - *Explore opportunities to expand support for outreach services (in total funding and to other providers).*
 - *Continue to partner with the sector in developing solutions and advocating for outreach services and funding.*
 - *Consider provision of central city public amenities (such as lockers and showers) for rough sleepers.*

- During the recent emergency weather events we heard from Auckland Emergency Management staff the important role that homeless outreach services provided to people who were experiencing homelessness who turned up at Civil Defence centres. Having a relationship with these services meant that council staff could connect people into the services that they needed.

- Many other council staff across parks, community facilities, bylaws, regulations and libraries through their roles engage / interface with people who experience homelessness and housing insecurity on a daily basis. Libraries (e.g., Central Library) and Community Centres (e.g., Ellen Melville Centre) already do an incredible job connecting with people who experience homelessness, some providing specific programmes and access to facilities. However, there needs to be a more coordinated and consistent response across Auckland Council to support staff to engage and to know where to refer people to.

- The Regional Partnerships Lead – Homelessness role that sits in Council’s Community Services Directorate supports the coordination and a more joined up approach, therefore this role should be retained. This role coordinates the Auckland regional network the Rough Sleeping Steering

¹ Dovetail (2017) Rough Sleeping Outreach Services: Report from Dovetail for Auckland Council

Group, which is an Auckland based group of representatives from homeless and housing providers, community organisations and government agencies. The value of this group was highlighted during the COVID response and in particular for its role in strengthening the connection between the health and the housing sector.

- Instead of reducing funding, Auckland Council should be looking to increase homelessness funding to support local and regional initiatives. There is an opportunity to partner with central government to become more aligned about responses to housing and homelessness in Tāmaki Makaurau and to provide more sustainable funding for initiatives like outreach services. Although central government has a lead role and responsibility for homelessness and housing, there is also a need for localised and regional approaches to respond to and prevent homelessness.

Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Act 2019

- In 2019, the Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Act reintroduced the four well-beings; social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities, for local government. Re-inserting the four well-beings back into the Local Government Act acknowledged the valuable role local leadership and local government has to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of citizens and communities. The four well-beings importantly acknowledge that local government has a broader role in promoting thriving communities, than merely providing core infrastructure services.
- In acknowledgment of the opportunities and challenges we face including population growth, climate change, inadequate infrastructure and the impact of recent weather events in Tamaki Makaurau and nationwide, a focus on well-being outcomes at a local government level has never been more relevant.
- Local and regional councils have a critical role to play in empowering communities to support people to identify their own priorities and what is important to them, building community connectedness, participation, planning for the long term and a better future. Reducing regional funding that supports community development, community empowerment and homelessness initiatives is in complete contrast with this.
- Councils around Aotearoa are leading the way in promoting the four well-beings and their approaches to housing and homelessness. Waikato Regional Council support the Regional Housing Strategy – Waikato Housing Initiative (WHI) an initiative of the Waikato Mayoral Forum. One of core focus areas of the Waikato Initiative is affordability and significantly increasing the region’s affordable housing stock. Tauranga City Council’s strategy and action plan – named Kāinga Tupu: Growing Homes was developed by key community providers with the aim of eliminating homelessness throughout the Western Bay of Plenty. This sits under the Kāinga Tupu Mayoral taskforce and is focused on strong partnerships with government agencies. And since 2003, Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) has championed initiatives to address housing affordability, initiating an early form of Inclusionary Zoning. QLDC’s Inclusionary Housing policies have garnered widespread public support in recent consultation on making them mandatory.

- The reinstatement of the four well-beings provided clarity to Local Authorities about whether certain activities are or are not within their purpose. The Auckland Plan 2050, Auckland’s long-term spatial plan developed with and on behalf of Aucklanders, “sets out directions and focus areas that look at the four well-beings of our communities.”²

The Auckland Plan 2050

- The Auckland Plan 2050 sets the direction for how Auckland will grow and develop over the next 30 years. The plan identifies six outcomes that will deliver a better Auckland:
 - Belonging and Participation
 - Māori Identity and Wellbeing
 - Homes and Places
 - Transport and Access
 - Environment and Cultural Heritage
 - Opportunity and Prosperity.
- Building strong and resilient communities is about creating a sense of connection and belonging, which speaks to outcome area one in the Auckland Plan 2050: Belonging and Participation: *Aucklanders will be part of and contribute to society, access opportunities, and have the chance to develop their full potential.* Outcome 4 Homes and Places states that *Aucklanders live in secure healthy and affordable homes and have access to a range of inclusive public places.* This outcome area is about shifting to a housing system that ensures secure and affordable homes for all and supports the four housing pledges proposed by TOW.
- To operationalise the Auckland Plan, Auckland Council has developed a number of key strategies over the past five years, including *I am Auckland, Children and Young people’s strategy and Thriving Communities.* The recommended operational spending cuts in this budget relate directly to the resources and budgets that supports the delivery of these strategies and community outcomes.
- Acknowledging that implementation of the Auckland Plan has a shared responsibility, partnership between central and local government, Mana Whenua, non-government organisations and Auckland Communities to deliver these outcomes for Aucklanders is more important now than ever before.

² Auckland Council (2018) The Auckland Plan 2050