



Late Item: FPOL2101-16

Finance, Policy, Operations and Legislation Committee

Wednesday, 20 January 2021, 6.00pm

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13. Late items

In cases where information is received after the finalisation of an agenda, matters may be raised and decided by the meeting. A written report will be provided for late items.

FPOL2101-16 PIONEER PARK FREMANTLE CAMP OUT

Meeting date: 20 January 2021
Responsible officer: Chief Executive Officer
Decision making authority: Council
Attachments: Nil
Additional information: Nil

SUMMARY

A camp for homeless and disadvantaged people has been operating at Pioneer Park, Fremantle, since Boxing Day without approval.

The City has been working with care agencies, the State Government and other key stakeholders on finding long-term solutions to camp inhabitants' ongoing care and accommodation needs. The City's position is that, despite the best intentions of camp volunteers and donations from the broader community, the camp is not delivering the long-term assistance and care that its inhabitants need and is undermining the work of professional service providers.

There are also increasing concerns about public safety, both for the inhabitants of the camp, and for the broader community who are impacted by its ongoing presence in Pioneer Park. The City is working with care agencies, the State Government and WA Police to provide a compassionate and welfare-focused approach to resolving the camp and returning the park to the broader public.

OFFICER'S COMMENT

The City was approached on 21 December 2020 by a group under the banner Freo Street Kitchen with a plan to deliver a short-term food service for people in need over Boxing Day.

At the time it was purported to be a 24-hour food service but without any approvals from Council, this has become a campsite and a focal point for people from around Perth and country WA, with an estimated 80 people sleeping at the park. At the time, no indication was given of the intent to camp at the site and the City has received no indication that the occupants are prepared to leave.

The camp has been supported by volunteers who have donated food and other supplies.

Notwithstanding that the camp is not approved, the City's primary focus has been to try to safeguard the wellbeing of people within the camp and the broader community. While the camp has provided short-term support for vulnerable people, a temporary set-up in a public park is not a viable long-term safe solution, or an appropriate use of the park.

The City has taken action in relation to the operation of the camp to protect the health of occupants. This action includes daily emptying of bins and toilet cleaning. The City has also continued to provide electricity and security services including daily visits to the camp by Community Safety officers and ongoing CCTV surveillance.

An internal working group has been formed with service providers including St Patrick's Community Support Centre, Uniting, RUAH, the Department of Communities, WA Police and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation to discuss how this situation can be resolved.

Discussion at the working group is ongoing and continues to focus on how to wind up the activities at the park in a manner that is as compassionate as possible and provides maximum support to the vulnerable people congregating there.

St Patrick's outreach staff attending Pioneer Park have undertaken assessments using the VI-SPDAT (vulnerability indicator) to assess the individual needs and vulnerabilities of those staying at the camp.

The assessment indicates:

- 23% identify as being at risk of being attacked or beaten
- 42% have legal issues
- 88% have AOD indicators, with 58% having tried treatment before but returned to using
- 58% have mental health indicators (this appears low and will be reviewed), with 27% having been hospitalised for this against their will. Of those that indicated they had mental health issues, almost third had not seen a mental health professional in the past 6 months
- 66% indicate some form of disability most of these are serious head trauma or brain injury.
- Total number of people 70 tents about 100 people
- Estimated that the people in the park are 50% local and 50% from Perth and surrounds.

Inhabitants of the camp include a cohort of elderly people aged over 55 years, and approximately 20 single women. At least two families with young children presented at the camp and have since been engaged with support services for alternative accommodation as a matter of priority. The Department of Communities facilitated one family's return to country.

WA Police have reported increasing instances of violence within the camp, including assaults with weapons. Camp organisers have made it clear they would prefer to manage security issues inhouse, although Police and Community Safety officers have continued to be an ongoing visible presence at the camp.

The City has received several complaints from nearby businesses about noise and unsocial behaviour emanating from the camp. There have also been increasing complaints from residents and community members regarding the camp, the ongoing presence of the camp in the park and the perceived growth of the camp.

The City remains concerned about the impact the use of homeless and disadvantaged people to make a political point may ultimately have on the welfare and wellbeing of the inhabitants of the camp.

The City aims to bring the camp to compliance and to return the park to its normal use. The occupants of the camp are not there lawfully, and the park is unable to be used for its intended purpose while the camp continues. Clearly this is a sensitive and complex issue involving many people who are in need of sustained support and housing solutions. Any solution will have to give consideration to this sensitivity.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost to the City of providing basic hygiene services (waste collection and toilet cleaning) is approximately \$986.80 per fortnight for waste collection and \$1,136 per fortnight for toilet cleaning).

The City is also doing pressure washing and hosing around the area at a fortnightly cost of \$1,210.

A further \$8,910 has been spent to date on additional Community Safety patrols in and around the camp.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The two relevant pieces of legislation that control camping are the Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act (1997) and City of Fremantle Local Government Property Local Law (2002).

Under the City's Local Government Property Law, a person shall not without a permit "camp on, lodge at or occupy any structure at night for the purpose of sleeping on local government property", or "erect any tent, camp, hut or similar structure".

Under the Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act, a person cannot camp on land other than in a caravan park or camping ground without written approval.

CONSULTATION

The City is in daily contact with service providers, WA Police and care agencies regarding the welfare of people within the camp and options for immediate short-term and ongoing support. The City has also met regularly with the Department of Communities and other state agencies. City staff have had regular contact with camp organisers, and made it clear the camp is not authorised and that it is not considered a viable solution to the very real issues of homelessness and disadvantage in Fremantle.

VOTING AND OTHER SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

Simple majority required

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

Council adopt the following position in relation to the camp at Pioneer Park:

- 1. The camp has not been approved by the City of Fremantle and the City does not support the camp remaining at the park.**
- 2. The camp is occupied by a number of vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Council is greatly concerned for their welfare and does not consider that remaining in the camp is in their long-term best interests. Council believes the needs of the occupants can best be addressed through engagement with the professional support agencies who have the skills, knowledge and experience to tailor appropriate solutions to each individual situation.**
- 3. Council is greatly concerned by the largely uncontrolled nature of the camp and is also concerned about the impacts of the camp on nearby businesses and other users of Pioneer Park.**
- 4. Council is seeking the closure of the camp and return of Pioneer Park to its intended purpose and will work constructively and collaboratively with the State Government and service agencies to seek a closure that prioritises the welfare needs of the occupants. A timeframe and process for this will be developed in collaboration with other key stakeholders. The target timeframe for this will be within two weeks of this resolution.**
- 5. Council acknowledges the work of volunteers at the camp and recognises their community spirit. Council now calls on the camp organisers and supporters to work with the City to return the site to its intended use and to channel their efforts into supporting existing service agencies.**
- 6. Council will:**
 - (a) Continue to provide waste collection and toilet cleaning services in the interests of maintaining basic hygiene at the camp, however it recognises there will be a time when these services are discontinued as part of the camp closure process; and**
 - (b) Support and provide full cooperation with WA Police in their efforts to ensure community safety and legal compliance at the camp.**