



POSITION STATEMENT

HOARDING AND SQUALOR

Background and Context

The City regularly deals with situations involving severe hoarding or people living in squalor. Invariably, people living in those conditions have complex needs which often relate to mental health that the City does not have the skills or expertise to resolve.

In cases involving children living in squalor, the City will seek assistance from the Department of Communities to ensure the welfare of those children. However, in other cases, there is limited support available to the City to assist people who are severe hoarders or living in squalor to improve their circumstances.

Properties where severe hoarding is evident or conditions are squalid impact on the amenity and safety of surrounding properties and are regularly the subject of complaints.

The City's ability to deal with those situations is limited to dealing with the symptoms of the issue. In terms of hoarding, the City regularly issues notices to property owners or occupiers requiring the removal of hoarded items. Often, the City is required to give effect to those notices and attempt to recover the costs of doing so through the Courts. The City is invariably successful in seeking orders to recover costs, however, in most circumstances, the person ordered to pay costs does not have the financial resources to do so.

In cases of squalor, the City occasionally declares homes unfit for habitation. This means that a person cannot continue to live in the property until it is brought up to a sanitary condition. Unfortunately, people living in squalid conditions often do not have the capacity or financial means to improve a property to the extent that it is fit for habitation. Often those people will not have alternative accommodation and the City is placed in the unenviable position of either having to allow people to continue to live in unsanitary conditions that impact their health and the amenity of surrounding residents or leave the person homeless.

The Department of Health has produced a guideline for dealing with Hoarding and Domestic Squalor. Whilst useful for understanding the complexities around severe hoarding and squalor, the Guideline provides little in the way of practical solutions. The Guidelines suggest that dealing with hoarding and squalor is a local government issue through the following statement:

"Local Government have a range of services which can work together to manage cases of hoarding and squalor. Whilst collaborating with external agencies will enable the most comprehensive response, local government services also have the ability to assist people living in hoarding and squalor conditions. It is for the Local Government itself to discuss and implement procedures that enable coordination between departments."

The City does not accept that local governments have the skills or capacity or legislative basis for dealing with the causes of severe hoarding and squalor.



COUNCIL'S POSITION

1. Council acknowledges that people living with extreme hoarding or in squalid conditions often have complex needs that are beyond the capacity of local governments to deal with.
2. Real support and timely intervention are required from State Government health and welfare agencies for people living with extreme hoarding or in squalid conditions to address their needs and reduce the impact the condition of their properties have on other people.
3. Local governments require clarity around which State Government agency is responsible for leading the response to people living with extreme hoarding or in squalid conditions to enable efficient reporting and clear accountability for resolving those issues.