

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)

Knox Winter Shelter Program 2026 Establishment and Delivery

1. Background

Knox City Council is seeking Expressions of Interest from suitably qualified organisations to establish and deliver a Winter Shelter Program within the City of Knox.

Through the 2026-27 Council budget process, Council has allocated funding to investigate and establish a local Winter Shelter Program in response to increasing homelessness and the absence of dedicated overnight winter accommodation within the municipality. The nearest established Winter Shelter Programs currently operate in the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities.

Council recognises that homelessness is primarily the responsibility of the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments. However, local government has an important role in working collaboratively with community organisations, specialist homelessness services and local partners to strengthen local responses and improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Council is seeking proposals from organisations with the expertise and capacity to design and deliver a Winter Shelter Program that responds to local need and reflects best practice.

Establishing a Winter Shelter Program, including identifying suitable venues and obtaining all necessary approvals can take time. Applicants are therefore encouraged to propose a realistic and achievable delivery model. This may include staged implementation, operation from a limited number of venues or accommodation being provided on selected nights during the initial years of the program.

2. Funding available

Council intends to establish the Knox Winter Shelter Program over three years and enter into an initial two-year Service Agreement with the successful organisation. The Service Agreement will include an option for Council to extend the agreement for a third year, subject to satisfactory performance, achievement of agreed outcomes and Council's annual budget process.

Up to \$54,000 is expected to be available in the first year to support the establishment and delivery of the Knox Winter Shelter Program.

Funding available through the Service Agreement in the second year, and in the third year if the extension option is exercised, will be the balance remaining from the annual \$80,000 allocation after internal staffing costs. Based on an estimated annual salary increase of 3%, together with progression through the relevant salary band, staffing costs are expected to increase by approximately \$1,000 per year. Service Agreement funding will therefore reduce accordingly each year, with the final amount to be confirmed through Council's annual budget process.

Funding may support:

- Program planning and coordination;
- Partnership development;
- Volunteer recruitment, training and support;
- Venue preparation and operational readiness;
- Program delivery;
- Guest support and referral pathways;

- Monitoring, reporting and evaluation; and
- Other reasonable costs directly associated with delivering the program.

Funding will be provided annually, subject to the execution of a Service Agreement and satisfactory performance and reporting.

The successful organisation will be responsible for managing the Council funding and may distribute funding to participating venues or delivery partners where this forms part of the approved delivery model. Any such arrangements must be supported by appropriate agreements, financial controls, accountability requirements and reporting to Council.

Council encourages applicants to demonstrate how they will leverage additional funding, donations, volunteers or community partnerships to strengthen and sustain the program.

3. Objectives

Council is seeking proposals that will:

- Provide safe overnight accommodation for people experiencing homelessness during winter;
- Improve connections to housing, health and support services;
- Build partnerships across the homelessness and community sectors;
- Encourage community participation through volunteering and local partnerships; and
- Generate evidence to inform future homelessness responses within Knox.

4. Scope of the EOI

Applicants are invited to propose a delivery model that best achieves the program objectives. At a minimum, proposals should demonstrate how the organisation will:

- Establish and operate a Winter Shelter Program;
- Identify the proposed venue or venues where overnight accommodation would be provided;
- Demonstrate that proposed venues meet all relevant legislative, regulatory, planning, building, health and safety requirements, or provide a clear and achievable plan for securing compliance and approvals within a specified timeframe;
- Manage and support participating venues and delivery partners;
- Recruit, train and support volunteers;
- Work collaboratively with local homelessness and support services;
- Provide appropriate governance and risk management;
- Connect guests with appropriate housing, health and support services; and
- Monitor and report on program outcomes.

All investigations, applications, permits, approvals and compliance requirements associated with the proposed venues and operating model, including associated costs, will be the responsibility of the successful applicant and participating venue operators. Council funding or endorsement of a proposal does not constitute planning, building, occupancy, public health or other regulatory approval.

Applicants should seek their own professional advice and allow sufficient time to obtain any necessary approvals before services commence.

Council welcomes innovative approaches, including staged implementation or smaller-scale models where these demonstrate a realistic, safe and sustainable response. Applicants must clearly identify the number of venues, nights per week, operating period and approximate number of guests they realistically expect to accommodate during each winter season.

5. Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be an incorporated not-for-profit organisation;
- Have demonstrated experience working with people experiencing homelessness or vulnerable communities;
- Hold appropriate insurance;
- Demonstrate sound governance and financial management;
- Comply with Child Safe Standards and relevant legislation;
- Have the capacity to enter into a Service Agreement with Council;
- Demonstrate the capacity to manage any funding distributed to participating venues or delivery partners; and
- Deliver services that are inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory, regardless of a person's religion, beliefs, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or background.

Partnership applications are encouraged. The lead applicant will remain responsible for the performance, compliance, financial management and reporting obligations of the overall program.

6. Assessment Process and Criteria

Organisations will have four weeks, from 13 October to 10 November 2026, to submit an application through the SmartyGrants online portal.

Applications will be assessed by Council officers against the eligibility requirements and assessment criteria outlined in this EOI. Recommendations will be presented to Council for consideration at the Council Meeting on 14 December 2026.

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

Criteria	Weighting
Understanding of the project objectives and local need	15%
Proposed delivery approach	30%
Organisational experience and capability	20%
Partnerships and collaboration	15%
Governance, risk management and compliance	10%
Detailed budget, project costs and demonstrated value for money	10%

Council may invite shortlisted applicants to participate in an interview or provide further information before a final recommendation is made.

Council reserves the right not to award funding if no application sufficiently demonstrates the experience, capacity, compliance arrangements or service model required to achieve the program objectives.

7. EOI Application requirements

Applicants should provide the following information through SmartyGrants:

Organisation overview:

- Organisational background and relevant experience.
- Experience delivering homelessness, crisis accommodation or related programs.
- Organisational governance and financial management arrangements.

Proposed delivery approach:

- How the Winter Shelter Program will operate.
- The proposed number of operating nights, venues, beds and guests.
- How the proposed scale reflects the time, funding and resources available.
- Proposed partnerships (if applicable) and the responsibilities of each partner.
- Volunteer recruitment, training, supervision and support.
- Guest eligibility, intake, safety, support and referral pathways.
- How the program will connect with the broader homelessness service system.

Proposed venues and compliance:

- The address or location of each proposed venue, where known.
- The venue owner or operator and evidence of their support.
- The activities proposed at each venue, including expected operating nights and capacity, where known.
- Evidence that each venue is compliant and suitable for the proposed use.
- Where approvals or compliance requirements have not yet been completed, a detailed plan identifying:
 - the outstanding requirements;
 - the party responsible for completing them;
 - the professional or regulatory advice that will be obtained;
 - expected costs; and
 - the timeframe for achieving compliance before operations commence.

Implementation plan:

- Key milestones leading to the first winter season (1 June 2027).
- A realistic schedule for venue confirmation, approvals, recruitment, training and operational readiness.
- Contingency arrangements if a proposed venue or approval is unavailable or delayed.

Governance and risk:

- Approach to compliance, safety and risk management.
- Proposed governance and program oversight arrangements.
- Approach to safety, incident management, emergency management and risk, including insurance arrangements.
- Management of volunteers, participating venues and partner organisations.

Budget:

- Detailed budget and project costs.
- Proposed distribution of Council funding between the lead organisation, participating venues and partners.
- Additional funding sources, donations or in-kind contributions.

8. Reporting requirements

The successful organisation will enter into a two-year Service Agreement with Knox City Council and will be required to provide:

- Implementation and progress reports;
- Evidence that all necessary venue approvals and compliance requirements have been met before overnight accommodation commences;
- Annual financial acquittals, including reporting on funding distributed to participating venues or partners;
- Program outcome reporting;
- Participation and service data;
- Information on operating nights, accommodation provided, referrals and service connections;
- Incident and risk reporting where required; and
- An evaluation of the program's effectiveness and opportunities for improvement.

Continued annual funding will be subject to Council's budget processes, satisfactory performance, compliance with the Service Agreement and achievement of agreed milestones and outcomes.

9. Timelines

Milestone	Timing
EOI opens for 4 weeks	13 October 2026
EOI closes	10 November 2026
Assessment	November 2026
Recommendations taken to Council meeting	14 December 2026
Successful organisation appointed	21 - 24 December 2026
Service agreement commences	December 2026
Program establishment, venue preparation and operational readiness commence	December 2026 – 25 May 2027
Program readiness review completed, including evidence of venue compliance and approvals.	26 May 2027
First Winter Shelter season: Facility opens for overnight homelessness accommodation	Winter 2027 (1 June – 31 August)
Mid-point check-in	November 2027
Second Winter Shelter season: Facility opens for overnight homelessness accommodation	Winter 2028 (1 June – 31 August)
Program review and decision on whether to exercise the option to extend the Service Agreement for year	By November 2028

three	
Initial two-year Service Agreement ends or is extended for year three	December 2028
Third Winter Shelter season, subject to Council exercising the extension option: facility opens for overnight homelessness accommodation	Winter 2029: 1 June–31 August
Extended Service Agreement ends, if the option is exercised	December 2029