Call for action to help homelessness

Hilary Gallagher
Calls for action to help homelessness

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THE Tweed Shire Council has an opportunity to become an example for regional Australia when it comes to tackling homelessness if it acts on a draft policy currently on public exhibition.

Homeless campaigner and founder of the You Have A Friend charity, John Lee (pictured) has welcomed the council’s Draft Homeless Policy which identifies the crisis facing the Tweed in terms of those living rough and in need of supported housing but has raised concerns about future delays in implementing some of its recommendations.

“I applaud Tweed Shire Council in recognising the need to have such a policy in place, especially when you consider there are about 1000 people in the shire on waiting lists for supported housing and some of those people have been in that situation for 20 years,” Mr Lee said.

“However this latest draft policy comes out after the council commissioned the Tweed Shire Homelessness Issue Paper Final Report which was presented in November 2013 which was a comprehensive 93-page document which clearly identified homelessness issues in the Tweed.

“The report had important suggestions and potential solutions that could be considered in the Tweed Shire and in my opinion, provided important answers and suggestions for matters covered in the new Draft Homeless Policy.”

Mr Lee said the commissioned report already provided some proactive measures that the Tweed Council should seriously consider initiating.

“I think the council should take a lead on this because the NSW Government’s response to the problem in this area is, to say the least, extremely frustrating,” Mr Lee said.

“There seems to be a strange set of priorities as to where public money is being directed – for example Geoff Provest made an announcement about $100,000 being allocated for the Cudgen Nature Reserve to revegetate it with koala food trees.

“Don’t get me wrong, I love koalas but it is hard to explain how that money is being well spent to a mother and her child who are sleeping in their car.

“I believe we have the guidelines, now is the time to turn words into action.”

Submissions to the Tweed Shire Draft Homeless Policy are now before council for consideration.

A seminar at the Southern Cross University on Thursday afternoon will bring together local government, charities and university staff to work on a plan to provide effective measure to address the homeless crisis.

Titled Time For Action on Local Homelessness, the seminar is open to the public, registration is free and will be held at the SCU campus at Bilinga near the Gold Coast Airport from 4-7pm.

To register, visit scu.edu.au/communityseminars and for additional information, email communityseminars@scu.edu.au.