**Memorandum**

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| TO | Wellington City Council |
| FROM | Victoria University of Wellington Students Association |
| DATE | 19/05/17 |
| SUBJECT | Submission on the 2017/18 Annual Plan |

**1.      Introduction**

**2.      Commendations**

**3.      Key recommendations**

**4.      Housing**

**5.      Rental Warrant of Fitness**

**5.    Fairer Fares**

**6.      Contact**

1. **Introduction**

Victoria University of Wellington Students’ Association (VUWSA) exists to represent and advocate for the interests of Victoria University of Wellington’s 22,000 students.

VUWSA currently has more than 15,000 members, representing roughly 70% of Victoria University students. VUWSA is a democratic organisation, run by students for students. We are committed to fair representation and work tirelessly to consult with our members on issues of campus, city, and national importance.

Students play a central role in maintaining and growing Wellington’s thriving economy. Victoria University alone directly contributes $1 billion to the city each year, and this figure is growing. When combined with other universities and PTEs in the region, the student contribution reaches $2 billion.

Students are also an invaluable part of the Wellington community, and contribute strongly to Wellington’s vibrant and dynamic culture. They also make up a significant proportion of the part-time workforce.

VUWSA believes that one of the key reasons students choose to study at Victoria is because they want to experience what the city has to offer. Students value Wellington.

However, there are some key issues which make being a student in Wellington a real struggle. Improving on these aspects will enhance liveability, attract more domestic and international students, as well as retain a larger number of talented graduates; transforming Wellington into a genuinely student-friendly city.

1. **Commendations**

**Living Wage**

VUWSA would like to acknowledge the Wellington City Council for their continued implementation of the living wage rate to all directly-employed staff of the WCC and to those of Council controlled organisations. This is an excellent step towards becoming an accredited Living Wage Employer.

This decision acknowledges the importance and value that the Council places on its workers, and the benefits for the families and wider communities of those employees.

As a community stream member, and active advocate, of the Living Wage Movement Aotearoa, VUWSA would like to acknowledge this move and congratulate the WCC’s leadership; a move which we hope will inspire other large institutions in Wellington City, and across the country, to follow suit.

**Fairer Fares**

We are grateful for the leadership shown by WCC in supporting discounted fares for tertiary students. The commitment to a financial contribution from the City Council, as well as the continued support will go along way toward ensuring that 50% student fares are included in the Greater Wellington Regional Council’s long term plan.

1. **Key recommendations**

**2.1.** Commit to allocating further funding towards housing development around the city, and look at other ways to provide more accommodation for students.

**2.2.** Establish a Rental Standards Working Party as a co-led Council/Community initiative to ensure that a Rental WOF can be implemented in the timeframe committed to by Councillors during the 2016 local body elections.

**2.3** Publicly throw its weight behind a tertiary student fare for public transport in Wellington, and allocate money in the Annual Plan to make a significant contribution to the funding of this programme.

1. **Housing - resilience, affordability, and accessibility**

VUWSA notes the WCC’s commitment to affordable housing for first home builders, and the resilience initiatives with regards to making them safer during an earthquake. After the November earthquake, many inner-city apartments were rendered inaccessible and many people were displaced and had to seek alternative accommodation; this results in huge pressure being put on the already tight rental market in Wellington.

This was particularly evident during January, February, and even into March of 2017, when university students returning to Wellington after the summer holidays began the annual flat-hunting endeavour. There were countless news stories devoted to sharing students’ experiences with trying to secure a flat. Demand exceeded supply, with responses indicating interest in a property exceeding 90 within an hour of listing, or people queuing outside half an hour before a flat viewing began. VUWSA heard firsthand stories from students who witnessed landlords auctioning off flats to the highest bidder during such viewings.

*“For about three weeks, I was going to 4-6 flat viewings per day. It was like a full-time job. This was on top of working and finishing off summer school. At a couple of flat viewings, the landlord would hold an ‘auction’ - if one group could match or go above what the previous group had offered (above the listed weekly rent price of the place), the landlord would offer it to them. “*

**Ted Greensmith, Victoria University of Wellington student**

Ted’s experience is not unique. It is concerning that students, as a vulnerable group in society, are experiencing such a struggle to find somewhere to live. The impact this has on their mental health and ability to focus on their studies - which is what they are at university to do - is something that has far wider societal impacts.

VUWSA supports Focus Area 1 in the draft three-year work programme, about creating a more resilient city, but recommends the WCC look at investing even more into sound, earthquake-proof, housing infrastructure, with a particular focus on student accommodation. VUWSA considers that it is timely for the WCC and VUW to have a conversation about how more accommodation can be created for non-first-year students.

1. **Rental Warrant of Fitness**

In addition to the shortage of rental accommodation around Wellington, is the issue of housing quality. VUWSA’s Student Advocate hears from students on a regular basis about housing woes, from leaky ceilings, to open electrical wires, to cold and mouldy flats. Living in damp, cold living conditions is hugely detrimental to one’s health, and evidence from doctors at the University’s Student Health Service shows that a significant number of visits by students and ongoing illnesses are a result of poor living conditions. It should not be a rite of passage as a university student to live in this way.

In the lead up to the 2016 local body elections, VUWSA received a signed pledge from a majority of elected Councillors including the Mayor that read;

*“I will take all possible steps to ensure Wellington rental properties are covered by a compulsory Rental Warrant of Fitness within the next Council term (2016-2019).”*

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with Deputy Mayor Paul Eagle and Councillor Brian Dawson to discuss an implementation plan for the WOF, and look forward to continuing this working relationship in order to ensure the job gets done in the timeframe outlined above.

**Rental Standards Working Party**

We would like to recommend that a Rental Standards Working Party (RSWP) be established, tasked with developing a model that is satisfactory for both WCC and the community, and a timeframe that ensures the goal of implementation will be achieved. The working party could be a subgroup of the recently established Housing Task Force, or it could simply be complementary to this project and report to Council.

Establishing this group would ensure that this project does not slip off the radar, and by having a partnership between the community stakeholders who have advocated on this issue, and Council, the community would stay informed about progress as it takes place.

A proposed membership could be;

* *Deputy Mayor Paul Eagle (Chair)*
* *Councillor Brian Dawson (or other Councillors)*
* *Renters United Representative*
* *VUWSA Representative*
* [*He Kainga Oranga*](http://www.healthyhousing.org.nz/) *Representative*

1. **Fairer Fares**

VUWSA has campaigned for many years for a tertiary discount on public transport, because of the high cost of public transport proving to be a barrier for many students. In addition to the high cost of renting, food, and other necessities, often students are having to make the tough decision of whether to buy food or catch the bus or train to class.

VUWSA worked on a campaign and gathered submissions on the Greater Wellington Regional Council’s draft Annual Plan. More than 1700 people in the Wellington region submitted their own story of why Wellington should implement this discount, which is an overwhelming show of support for the discount. The GWRC and WCC should work together to implement this.

As in 2016, VUWSA recommends that the WCC publicly put their support behind this and allocate money in the Annual Plan for the funding of it.

1. **Contact**

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this submission in more detail in person. Please contact us if further clarification of this submission is needed, or to arrange for VUWSA to make an oral submission.

**Rory Lenihan-Ikin**

**President**

**Victoria University of Wellington Students’ Association**

Te Rōpū Tauira o te Kura Wānanga o te Upoko ō te Ika a Māui



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