

Brisbane City Council fails to back up claims of rising violence among homeless

By Kenji Sato ABC Radio Brisbane Homelessness

Thu 28 Nov 2024 at 10:00am



Musgrave Park is a refuge for dozens of homeless people in Brisbane. (ABC Radio Brisbane: Kenji Sato)

In short:

Brisbane City Council has failed to back up its claims that homeless violence is escalating in the city.

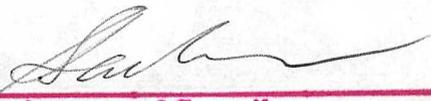
Queensland Fire Department denies the council's claims that they complained about "dangerous unauthorised fires".

Police say there were no reports of wounding or vandalism at Brisbane's two largest homeless camps between September and October 2024.

Brisbane City Council has failed to substantiate claims of "escalating" violence and crime in the city's homeless tent camps.

Tabled and presented to Council
at its 4753 Meeting held on:
3/12/2024

Tabled by: CR. COLLIER


Chairperson of Council

The claims were made as the council announced it had created a joint taskforce with Queensland Police to crack down on antisocial behaviour at the camps.

One of the claims was that the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) had complained to the council about "dangerous unauthorised fires" at parks used by the homeless.

Cr Sarah Hutton said the department had asked the council to switch its public barbecues back on to reduce the number of illegal fires.



Musgrave Park is one of Brisbane's biggest homeless camps. (ABC Radio Brisbane: Kenji Sato)

A QFD spokesperson said they had no record of ever having said such a thing.

"The Queensland Fire Department has no record of this request to council," a department spokesperson said.

"QFD does work closely and interact regularly with local governments across Queensland to mitigate fire risk and ensure public safety."

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The ABC understands the fire department also reached out to the council, but received no clarification.

A Brisbane City Council spokesperson said the request was "officer-to-officer advice".

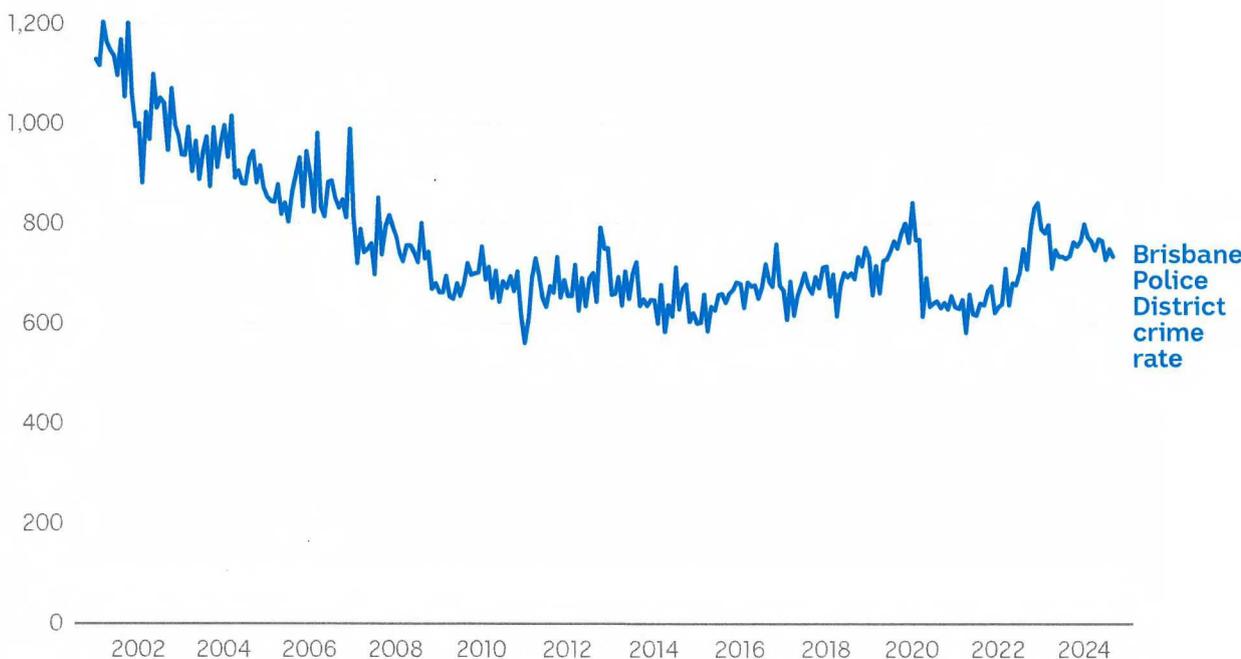
On October 24, Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner said there had been 60 offences committed in Musgrave Park, but did not specify a timeframe or where he got the data from.

A council spokesperson said the data came from the Queensland Police Service Online Crime Map website, and covered the past 12 months.

However, the map contains no information about Musgrave Park, showing only de-identified crime clusters indicating the general vicinities where crimes were committed.

The map also contains no longitudinal data showing an increase in crime in a given area.

Broader longitudinal data of the Brisbane Police District shows no significant increase in crime, with overall crime rates decreasing 35 per cent since 2001.



Brisbane Police District crime rates per 100,000 people

Kenji Sato / Source: Queensland Police Service / [Get the data](#)

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'A matter for QPS'

A Queensland Police Service spokesperson said they were unable to comment on the lord mayor's use of their statistics, since they lacked context such as a time and point of reference.

"We need that context to provide a relevant response," the spokesperson said.

"I'm able to confirm that no wounding or vandalism incidents have been reported to police at Musgrave Park or Kurilpa Point Park, South Brisbane, between September 21 and October 21 [of this year]."

A council spokesperson said their claims of increasing violence at Kurilpa Point and Musgrave Park were based on QPS data, internal reports, and reports from residents and community service providers.

The ABC asked to see a copy of the police data that council was citing, but were told "QPS data is a matter for QPS".

The ABC understands the council's joint taskforce does not exist as a formal entity, but is merely the continuation of an already-existing relationship between police and council's public liaison officers, who monitor homeless activity.

The council would not clarify what the taskforce actually did, whether it was a formalised entity, or how it would crack down on antisocial behaviour.

However, the spokesperson said that the taskforce did exist, and has had four meetings since October.

'Wrap-around support' required

Northwest Community Group president Paul Slater said the council was demonising homeless people without substantiating their claims with good data.

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Paul Slater says the media has repeated Brisbane City Council's unsubstantiated claims. (ABC Radio Brisbane: Kenji Sato)

Mr Slater said he was dealing with more cases of homeless people who had been harassed or physically assaulted by members of the public.

"We're seeing the public starting to slash their tents and abuse these people because of media stories pushing false narratives spread by the Brisbane City Council," Mr Slater said.

"We should be supporting our most vulnerable, and we need to be providing them with housing and the wrap-around support they need."

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Cameron Parsell says public anger should be directed at governments' failed housing systems. (ABC News: Liz Gwynn)

University of Queensland homelessness researcher Cameron Parsell said there was very poor evidence that criminalising homelessness reduced crime.

Professor Parsell said there was very clear evidence that providing adequate housing and support was far better at reducing risk factors such as mental illness and drug addiction.

He said the evidence clearly showed it was far cheaper to provide housing to homeless people, rather than criminalise them.

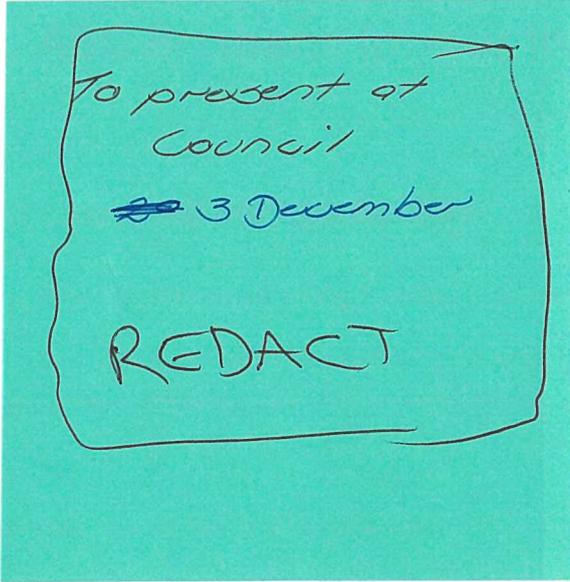
"Unambiguously, criminalising homelessness doesn't work and it punishes people who are already excluded," Professor Parsell said.

"The cost of a night in the watch house is more than \$800 per night, so the cost effectiveness of locking people up compared to providing housing is

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just absurd."



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