



Council Report # 2018-09

Title: Homelessness System Services Review

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Reviewed by: Lisa Horne, Director Community and Social Services

Approved by: Jennifer Moore, CAO

Strategic Plan: Thriving and Inclusive Communities

Council Date: February 21, 2018

Recommendation

“Whereas Council of the County of Northumberland received Report No. 2018-09 Homelessness Service System Review;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved That this report is received for information.”

Purpose

To provide an update on Northumberland County’s plans to move forward and implement a new emergency shelter system for our community. The County will be requesting proposals from service providers for the delivery of innovative shelter services for Northumberland. This updated shelter system will incorporate best practices for homelessness diversion, and it will be based on the ‘Housing First’ model that now underpins all local inter-agency collaboration to address homelessness.

Background

2017 Homelessness System Service Review

The Community and Social Services Department hired OrgCode in mid-2017 to complete an operational review of the local housing and homelessness system of care to identify successes, gaps and opportunities to enhance the impact of provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and municipal investments in homelessness for the upcoming funding cycle.

OrgCode Consulting, Inc. is a subject matter expert in housing and homelessness. Their core services include action-oriented research, data-informed analysis, robust facilitation and program evaluation, and training and technical assistance. They are experts in evidence - informed practices to end homelessness.

Consultations

OrgCode led the local process of completing the service review and final report. This process included online questionnaires for service provider leaders and front line staff, interviews with key community and department staff, focus groups and Persons with Lived Experience, and analysis of data from funded organizations. The Report made recommendations for next steps with County funded homelessness programs and priorities to meet the County's goal of ending chronic homelessness.

The Director and Community Services Manager were debriefed on the recommendations in the final report on December 18, 2017.

Community Agencies who participated in the review were debriefed on the recommendations in the final report on January 24th 2018 and on February 6th 2018.

The Report was framed around 3 main concepts with recommendations that align to each main concept:

1. Service Delivery Excellence-- Housing First orientation
2. Service Orientation-- fidelity to evidence-based practices
3. Data Analysis and Performance Measures-- local data

Given the recommendations found in the report it was determined by senior staff that the sheltering services program would be put to an RFP seeking new and innovative solutions for emergency shelter system that is aligned with the County's vision of homelessness sheltering.

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

The County is a designated Service System Manager for the delivery of the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) in Northumberland County.

The vision for the CHPI is the following:

A better coordinated and integrated service delivery system that is people-centered, outcome-focused and reflects a Housing First approach to prevent, reduce and address homelessness in communities across Ontario.

Consistent with Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) and the Ontario Housing Policy Statement, the CHPI has the following objectives:

- To enable Service Managers to better support a full range of services that aim to prevent, reduce and address homelessness at the local level.

- To facilitate the development of seamless support services programming to connect individuals and families to community resources and assist households at risk of or experiencing homelessness to obtain and retain affordable housing that is linked to supports appropriate to their needs.
- To promote a culture of policy, planning and service delivery that is focused on an outcome-based and people-centered approach, while recognizing the complexity of homelessness and issues related to homelessness.
- To create and support opportunities for Service Managers to develop creative and innovative approaches.
- To increase flexibility at the local level to prevent, reduce and address homelessness

The Service Manager is solely responsible for decisions about funding allocations and ensuring that services reflect local need.

Risk Considerations

Increasing expectation by both the Federal and Provincial governments to modernize and provide innovative sheltering services and the defining measurable impacts on people needing sheltering services:

- The ability to provide emergency sheltering services under a Housing First model that eliminates barriers to entry and service
- An increased focus on person-centered service and understanding of trauma-informed practices
- An acknowledgement that sheltering is meant to provide a path to immediate access to safe, secure and permanent housing quickly
- The ability to exercise choice and self-determination in housing location and type realizing local availability and affordability
- Demonstrate we are meeting County obligations under the Provincial CHPI guidelines which provides the majority of the funding for homelessness programming

Increased Accountability:

- To demonstrate effective use of funds and providing a foundational structure in terms of homelessness needs and services in Northumberland County
- Improving data collection and system analysis to inform evidence based planning
- Potential to lose future funding opportunities unless demonstration of all foundational pieces of the response system are operating effectively and align with Provincial Funding requirements.

Timing:

- Issuing at the top of 2018, provides the department an opportunity to move through the RFP process early in the year with a goal of establishing a functioning program by the end of quarter two, with options to phase in further improvements

Interim Strategy

The County has protocols in place for instances such as this, and County staff and community partners are working together to ensure everyone in need of assistance will have access to the resources they require.

Shelter:

- Best practice “Sheltering Diversion Strategies” document shared with all key members of homelessness service community
- The department began funding the Salvation Army to rent 5 efficiency suites at local hotel for one month to rehouse individuals with no other options
- The department is working with Cornerstone to focus on any homeless families that present and require assistance. The County and Cornerstone are starting to develop an interim strategy for a Family Homelessness Diversion Program

Case Management:

- Once relocated, individuals are assessed, supported and monitored to determine next steps
- Key lead agencies provide wrap-around supports, intensive case management to individuals and monitoring progress. These are Community and Social Services, FourCast, Green Wood Coalition, and Northumberland Hills Hospital
- Community Services Coordinator acts as central point of contact and maintaining tracking logs
- Regular teleconferences ensure all necessary financial and social supports are in place and coordinated activities are being held

Food/Warming Centres/other resources:

- The faith community continues to be a key partner in providing food and food gift cards
- Cobourg Police Services continued to operate their Warming Room that also has food vouchers, showers and washroom facilities, lockers, and clothing as well as connections into coordinated case management and assessment processes
- Food 4 All will provide food supports that can be made and kept in hotels

Communications:

- Information on local resources collated by faith community and Health Unit is available for distribution to all agencies
- Information about Warming Spaces and Food Programs widely distributed
- Media release from County to include organizations' contact information once obtained

Follow up meetings with key community partners continue to occur on a regular basis. These meetings have focused on:

- assessing access and entry points into the interim system
- designing a system response to ensure that the collaboration of multiple agencies is effective and that everyone understands their role
- discussing additional financial and personnel resources needed to stabilize the interim response
- solidifying interim service path and identifying lead agencies
- increasing capacity across the system to recognize that Homelessness Prevention and Shelter Diversion are necessary first steps

Discussion/Options

Current opportunities presented by this report include:

- Ensuring thorough community engagement, professional development, the development of a system framework, and the use of common assessment tools that all community services assisting individuals who are experiencing homelessness are aligned with common vision, client-centered approach, and evidence-based tools
- Pacing the change in orientation and shift in service delivery over a 5 year time frame to build a responsive and effective homelessness service system
- Driving the change through County leadership with strong messaging that recognizes that as the funder and system leader we instruct agencies about what the results and behaviours will be with the funding that is provided
- Building in a one year review that asks the question about how these changes have had an impact on policies and procedures throughout the organization of funded agencies

Building a Housing First Model

“Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that involves moving people who experience homelessness into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, with no preconditions, and then providing them with additional services and supports as needed. The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are more successful in

moving forward with their lives if they are first housed. This is as true for homeless people and those with mental health and an addiction issue as it is for anyone.”

Source: Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Financial Impact

The County’s approved budget for homelessness services for emergency sheltering for 2018 is \$265,000 annually.

It is also anticipated that there will be measurable financial impacts to the County in terms of social return on investment and improved long term outcomes for the community.

Funding Implications ongoing

The Department has been working closely with community partners to begin to build an effective and connected system response for homelessness. Of note in the Review is a local deficit of Intensive Case Management staff and Rapid Rehousing Workers across the County. In building an effective system response opportunities for funding and resources could be accessed to enhance the ability to build and fund the right services through the County’s 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, the 20,000 Homes Report recommendations and the new System Review.

Member Municipality Impacts

Homelessness Services are intended to serve the entire community so this will impact residents throughout Northumberland County.

Conclusion/Outcomes

Emergency shelters provide a critical landing place for people in our community who are experiencing a housing crisis. Modernizing our emergency shelter system is another important step in delivering on our community’s commitment to achieve meaningful outcomes for individuals and families across the entire spectrum of homelessness.

Attachments

Homelessness Service System Power Point Presentation