



MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Community and Health Services Committee

FROM: Adelina Urbanski, Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: June 20, 2012

RE: **Emergency Homelessness Services Review Update**

I am pleased to provide a brief update on work underway to review York Region's emergency homelessness services (the Review).

As a Municipal Service Manager, The Regional Municipality of York currently administers a range of Provincial and Regional programs to address homelessness. These include services that deal with the immediate impact of homelessness, such as emergency shelters, as well as services that help meet other needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (e.g. eviction prevention, street outreach, drop-in programs, housing search).

The Community and Health Services Department (C&HS) Multi-Year Plan identified the need to review these programs in the face of the growing number of at risk households, potential service and funding gaps, and changing provincial policy as a result of the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

Consulting Matrix, a consulting firm with experience in York Region's emergency shelter sector, was engaged to undertake the first stage of the review. Work included a comprehensive literature review, interviews with emergency shelter operators and community agencies, and discussions with C&HS staff to:

- Describe the need for homelessness services in York Region.
- Identify the programs and services that currently exist and gaps and challenges.
- Describe effective practices and approaches in other jurisdictions.
- Provide options for addressing gaps, aligning resources and collaborating with community partners.

The consultant's work was limited to services that are funded, at least in part, by York Region. For this reason Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters were not included, since they are funded directly by the Province of Ontario, but it is acknowledged that they provide vital services for an important population and could be enhanced through innovative service models (e.g. community hubs).

Although the consultants identified affordable housing as an integral component of homelessness prevention, addressing the need for more affordable housing was outside the scope of their work. Housing needs in York Region will be addressed in the Region's Ten Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, currently under development. The Housing and Homelessness Plan is part of the Province's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy and is expected to be complete early in 2014. The Review is part of a collaborative approach within C&HS to develop the Housing and Homelessness Plan over the next 18 months.

Next Steps

The key findings of the consultant report and immediate internal and external next steps will be presented at Community and Health Services Committee on June 20, 2012.

In response to the consultant's findings, C&HS will also consult over the Summer/Fall 2012 with emergency shelter operators, other stakeholders and staff on how to reform the current system.

A new vision for homelessness programs will guide these consultations. While York Region has invested wisely in providing a continuum of supports, the current model, due to projected growth and Regional complexities, must be revised to better address future and current change. A key finding of the review is the need for a more integrated approach, including implementing centralized client in-take, enhanced data systems, and new service and funding models.

The new vision is for an integrated system of client-centred services that promotes housing stability within the community. Housing stability means helping people either retain housing or re-house when faced with crisis or homelessness through a continuum of individualized supports. The new vision will focus resources on preventing and reducing homelessness in the first place, while helping people who are homeless with transitional supports to find and keep housing.

This approach reflects evidenced-based policy that it costs less to help people sustain permanent housing, including supports, than to manage crisis situations once someone is homeless. It also recognizes the benefit of safe, affordable and secure housing to the health and well being of individuals, families and communities.

C&HS staff will report back to Council in the Fall/Winter 2012-2013 on progress and strategies in meeting the recommended vision.

Alignment with Provincial Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy

A potential benefit of the Province's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy is the opportunity and flexibility for Municipal Service Managers to re-shape homelessness programs with the goal of preventing and reducing homelessness based on local needs, priorities and capacities. This includes the Ten Year Housing and Homelessness Plan mentioned above, as well as other initiatives to simplify and consolidate the provincial homelessness funding provided to Municipal Service Managers and policy direction that supports local innovation and decision-making. The findings and recommended vision arising from the Review aligns with provincial policy and provides a framework for made-in-York Region solutions to homelessness.

Alignment with Other Strategies

The Review is a critical step in completing the York Region Housing and Homelessness Plan, which is a success indicator in the Corporate Strategic Plan 2011-2015. The Review also supports the Human Services Planning Board – York Region's Making Ends Meet initiative by assessing the need for housing programs and services that meet the needs of low and moderate income households.

Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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