York Region

Community and Health Services Department
Office of the Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: Community and Health Services Committee Members

FROM: Joann Simmons, Commissioner of Community and Health Services Department

DATE: November 11, 2009

RE: **Update on Early Investment Initiatives**

In March 2009, Regional Council approved $1.3 million in annual funding through the 2009 Operating Budget to support early investment initiatives to meet the needs of York Region residents. These initiatives were prepared as part of the discussion on the Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan, a strategic document to guide our programs and services from 2010-2015.

While a separate report to the November 11, 2009 Community and Health Services Committee will provide an update on the development of the Multi-Year Plan itself, I would also like to update you on the progress in implementing the approved early investment initiatives.

The attached table highlights the status of each initiative through the responsible branches within the Community and Health Services (C&HS) Department.

Background

The early investment initiatives were developed to provide Regional Council with recommendations for responding to emerging and pressing community needs while the C&HS Multi-Year Plan is being developed.

Due to the recent economic uncertainty, a major focus was supporting housing stability for low income workers facing financial crisis as a result of job loss or a significant change in employment. Other priorities included helping people fleeing domestic violence to establish and maintain successful tenancies in social housing communities, as well as improving access to basic needs for under-resourced families and individuals with multiple barriers or complex needs.

Status

Given that all but one of the initiatives are new, implementation has focused on providing residents in need with timely benefits. In some cases, this has meant developing purchase of service agreements with community agencies; and in other instances, existing capacity within C&HS branches has been used as the platform for service delivery. The goal throughout has been to address identified service gaps, provide preventative interventions, and support positive outcomes for residents through well-planned and effective services.

These initiatives are funded through the 0.2% of the tax levy approved by Regional Council in 2009 for social services and social housing. Due to start-up time for implementation, the 2009 budget allocation is $1 million, with annualized funding of $1.3 million beginning in 2010.

Joann Simmons

Joann Simmons
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Attachment – 1

Community and Health Services Department Multi-Year Plan
Update on Early Investment Initiatives

120 Initiative (Branch)	Cost	Rationale	Update
Theme 1: Improve supports to the working poor *Provide support to help sustain households through unexpected emergency or financial crisis so they can focus on finding and keeping employment*			
Emergency Financial Assistance to Avoid Loss of Housing **(Housing and Long Term Care)**	**2009** $200,000 **Annualized** $400,000	**New Program** • Provide temporary financial assistance to households at risk of losing housing due to significant income loss (e.g. loss of employment). • Funding made available to households living in **market rent units** in social housing sites. Many of these households do not have sufficient resources to enter the ownership market and are particularly vulnerable in periods of economic downturn. When these households experience a significant loss of income, the housing provider incurs significant financial losses through rental arrears and has no alternative but to proceed with eviction. These evicted households may require shelter services or other costly interventions. • Providing temporary rent-geared-to-income assistance to preserve these tenancies prevents homelessness and provides stability for the affected families and their housing providers. • There are approximately 1,800 market rent units – support could be provided to help from 45 to 60 households.	**Implementation** • Program guidelines developed and instructions sent to social housing providers. • Applications are in process.
Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) **(Strategic Service Integration and Policy)**	**2009** $250,000 **Annualized** $250,000	**Enhancement** • Funding enhancement to HPP so renters in private rental units or homeowners can stay in their homes when they lose their jobs and while they search for new ones.	**Implementation** • Enhanced funding will pilot the delivery of HPP to southern areas of York Region • Through a Request for Proposal, Jewish Family & Child Services has begun service delivery in Markham, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and parts of Whitchurch-Stouffville • Access to current location of service delivery of HPP in Newmarket is a challenge for residents living in the south • C&HS will ensure HPP is delivered consistently across York Region

ATTACHMENT 1

Initiative (Branch)	Cost	Rationale	Update
Theme 2: Improve supports to C&HS clients with multiple barriers *Improve access to basic needs and improve access to supports that assist in stabilizing housing*			
Clothing Allowance for Regional Domiciliary Hostel Residents **(Social Services)**	**2009** $108,000 **Annualized** $108,000	**New Program** • Domiciliary Hostel residents funded by Homes for Special Care (HSC) may receive a $600 clothing allowance per year while those funded by York Region may receive $150 for winter clothing only. • It is recommended that a general clothing allowance (inclusive of winter clothing) of $300 be provided to York Region funded Domiciliary Hostel residents to ensure that whether the resident is funded by HSC or the Region, they receive adequate clothing. • There is an average of 360 residents per month in Domiciliary Hostels funded by York Region.	**Implementation** • Clothing has been purchased for approximately 275 residents • Program use will increase to address winter needs
Housing Support Services for Special Priority Applicants and Households **(Housing and Long Term Care)**	**2009** $87,500 **Annualized** $175,000	**New Program** 1. Provide up to three months of individual transitional housing support services to special priority applicants (e.g. people who are suffering from or who are at risk of domestic violence) to assist them in establishing and maintaining successful tenancies in rent-geared-to-income housing: • Each year more than 125 special priority households are housed in the Region's social housing portfolio. • In order to stabilize applicants coming out of emergency situations and establish a successful tenancy, these households may require assistance, such as income supports, appropriate programs for their children, personal financial management skills training, etc. • At present it can be very difficult for a special priority applicant to access all of the supports required. 2. Provide similar housing support programs for special priority households in social housing locations where a majority of rent-geared-to-income vacancies are filled by special priority applicants: • Most special priority households choose housing locations in the Markham/Richmond Hill area. There are currently six housing sites that consistently fill most of their rent-geared-to-income vacancies with special priority households. • Housing sites with significant special priority populations are not resourced to assist these households in maintaining successful tenancies.	**Implementation** • Funding will support a purchase of service of two transitional housing support staff through community-based agencies. • Service delivery will begin in Fall 2009

Initiative (Branch)	Cost	Rationale	Update
Theme 3: Respond to resident needs *Support children in need*			
Backpack Program **(Social Services)**	**2009** $125,000 **Annualized** $125,000	**New Program** • This program will help families receiving Ontario Works to provide their children with essential school supplies at the start of the new school year. • The program will address implementation concerns with the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB). • The OCB is designed to help parents receiving social assistance transition to work by taking child benefits off of social assistance and allowing parents to continue to receive these benefits after beginning employment. • Back to School Allowances formerly provided to parents on social assistance as a lump sum payment have been consolidated into monthly OCB payments. These poorly resourced families are now expected to put part of their monthly OCB payment over the course of the year toward seasonal costs. The purchase of seasonal expenses such as back to school supplies will cause hardship to many Ontario Works families. This proposed Backpack Program will assist families on OW who cannot afford these seasonal items and avoid other shortfalls in the family budget (e.g. food, rent). • This program will help approximately 2,500 school-aged children across the Region annually.	**Implementation** • Benefit allowance issued to families receiving Ontario Works with dependent school aged children (4-17 years) in August 2009 • Support provided to approximately 1,366 families with 2,420 school aged children
Winter Coat Program **(Social Services)**	**2009** $240,000 **Annualized** $240,000	**New Program** • This program will help families receiving Ontario Works to provide their children with a winter coat. • The program is also designed to address implementation concerns with the OCB. Lump sum payments for Winter Clothing Allowances for Ontario Works clients has ended and is now consolidated into monthly OCB payments. This increases the burden on low income residents in York Region as it will be difficult for these families to provide for these important seasonal items for their children. • This program is estimated to help approximately 3,200 children in York Region annually.	**Implementation** • Benefit allowance issued to families receiving Ontario Works with dependent children (0-17 years) in October 2009 • Support provided to an estimated 2,120 families with 3,532 children