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FAIR FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES IN YORK REGION

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 12, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the attached resolution to request that the federal and provincial governments acknowledge the funding shortfall in York Region for community social services and develop a more appropriate funding arrangement for these vital services.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement on a resolution requesting that the federal and provincial governments establish a fair funding arrangement for community social services in York Region.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region continues to be one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada. As of September 30, 2006, the Region was home to over 943,000 residents. Since 2001, York Region has welcomed approximately 36,000 new people a year to its communities. In addition, about 40 percent of the Region's population are immigrants, many of whom are recent immigrants only arriving in Canada within the last five to ten years. This rapid growth is anticipated to continue over the next 20 years as the Region's population is expected to reach 1.28 million. The result is growing pressure on community social service agencies to meet the needs of the Region's rapidly growing and changing population.

York Region has a coordinated approach to address the issue that the federal and provincial government funding arrangements for social and other human services have not kept pace with this growth. This issue has been raised in the past not only by York Region Council, Community Services and Housing Department, but also through the vigorous efforts of the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC) as highlighted in their reports.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Community Services and Housing Department is mandated to administer and deliver a number of municipal, federal and provincial funding initiatives that provide much needed social services to youth, children, families and individuals in York Region through its Family and Children Services, Employment and Financial Support and Housing Services Branches. In addition, through the Community Development and Investment Fund (CDIF), a framework and process was established through which the Department plans, manages and funds the purchase of additional community social services. Beginning in 2003, the Region has approached community agencies annually to submit proposals for projects to receive funding in the upcoming year through a purchase of service request process.

The CDIF purchase of service request process has highlighted the desperate and growing need for community social services, and consistently resulted in funding requests from agencies that have far exceeded the money available to the Region for community-based projects. In addition, the Region has received many proposals for projects that fall outside of the Region's area of responsibility, such as services for people with developmental disabilities, children's mental health services, settlement services for recent immigrants and abuse/violence prevention programs. The nature of the requests we have seen reflect the limited funding available to community-based agencies in these areas from the federal and provincial governments.

4.1 Changing Communities

Communities across Canada are experiencing changes to the demographic profile of their residents. This is especially evident in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In October 2006 the Strong Communities Coalition, an alliance of the United Ways of Oakville, Peel, York, Durham and the GTA/905 Healthcare Alliance, published a report entitled *Growing Pains: An Urgent Message from the Strong Communities Coalition*. The report stated that the four regions – Durham, Halton, Peel and York are undergoing a “population surge” and that the GTA/905 “is not only growing, it is aging at twice the provincial rate and is increasingly culturally and socio-economically diverse”. In addition, the report adds that “new immigrants have accounted for half of Ontario's annual population growth over the past 10 years. Peel and York have the second highest volume of new immigrants in the country”.

These findings were echoed in the report produced by the Community Services and Housing Department in 2006 entitled *Community Snapshots: Recent Immigrants Living in York Region*. As outlined in this report, between 1991 and 2001, the number of recent immigrants coming to York Region increased by 132 percent while non-immigrants increased by 31 percent. The data also showed that, at an increasing rate, immigrants are coming directly to York Region from their countries of origin, rather than starting the integration process in another part of the country before moving here.

It is forecasted that York Region will continue to be the single largest contributor to growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) until 2031. The GGH is comprised of the GTA and Hamilton and the surrounding ten Regions and Counties (Outer Ring) from Niagara to Simcoe to Northumberland.

These and other factors are changing the make-up of the communities across York Region and are causing a ripple effect through every aspect of community planning. This is particularly true in the area of community social services which aim to help people who are vulnerable and in need of additional supports.

4.2 Addressing the Funding Shortfall

The strain placed on community social services across the Region as a result of the ongoing growth and changing needs of residents is beginning to show. With the Region's growth rates and changing demographic profile, the demand for community social services also grows. However, the ability of community agencies to provide these services is undermined by the costs and inequities of the current social services funding arrangements.

The key factor contributing to the inequity in the funding arrangements is that funding is primarily allocated on the basis of historical patterns. Population and demographics are not generally being considered. These previous arrangements do not reflect the current and changing situation in York Region or across the GTA.

Both the federal and provincial governments have stated that they intend to establish a new financial deal for municipalities. In order to address the inequities that exist and better support community agencies, funding for social services would be best based on an arrangement more reflective of population size, growth patterns, actual need and other characteristics such as immigration figures.

The Region has made efforts to bring the inequity of the social services funding arrangements to the attention of the provincial and federal governments. Progress has begun to be made in this area but continued work is needed to sustain the message and ensure a fairer funding arrangement for community social services agencies.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Although this report includes no immediate financial impact on the Region, ongoing inequities in social services funding may result in increasing pressure for the Region to provide additional funding to meet the needs of residents.

According to the HSPC, the total size of the funding gap for social services in York Region in 2003/2004, including those that York Region is mandated to provide, was about \$173 million.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Community social services contribute directly to the well-being of residents, and by extension the economies, in all nine local municipalities. In order for all of York Region's municipalities to continue to manage growth and support the demographic changes taking place – increased diversity, an aging population, increasingly varied socio-economic levels – there must be a strong network of social services supports in place. Healthy communities need locally accessible services and fair funding arrangements to provide these services.

7. CONCLUSION

Work towards establishing a fairer funding arrangement for community social services is being carried out in a number of ways. York Region's Community Services and Housing and Planning and Development Services Departments are engaged in discussions with a variety of partners. The Strong Communities Coalition and the York Region HSPP are also contributing to this work, and HSPP's community partners are actively supporting their efforts. It is important that these efforts continue. A fair and equitable community social services system will enable every family and every person in York Region to reach their full potential and enjoy a high quality of life.

For more information on this report contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Director Policy and Program Support Services Branch, Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)