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NEW VISION AND RELATED OPERATIONAL REFORMS TO YORK REGION'S EMERGENCY SHELTER AND HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION SERVICES

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated October 18, 2012, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the vision and related operational reforms to York Region's emergency shelter and homelessness prevention services focused on promoting housing stability.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, and the Human Services Planning Board - York Region.

2. PURPOSE

This report highlights and seeks Council approval for a new vision and related operational reforms to York Region's emergency shelter and homelessness prevention services and funding models. The vision and proposed reforms reflect key findings of a comprehensive review of York Region's services, the general direction of provincial reform, and feedback from community stakeholder consultations held over the summer 2012.

3. BACKGROUND

Community and Health Services Department completed a review of York Region's emergency shelters and homelessness services in the spring 2012 calling for a new vision and operational reforms

Currently, York Region, as a Municipal Service Manager, administers a range of provincial and Regional programs to address homelessness. Included are services that deal with the immediate impact of homelessness, such as emergency shelters and transitional housing, 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). These programs are delivered mainly through service and funding agreements with community service providers.

As communicated to Council in June 28, 2012 as Clause No. 3, Item 6 of Report No. 6 of the Community and Health Services Committee, staff engaged consultants to review York Region's emergency shelters and homelessness services over the winter and spring of 2011/2012 as a key action area of the Community and Health Services *Multi-Year Plan*.

The review highlighted the need for an integrated approach in York Region to:

- Respond to growing and more complex needs in the community
- Address service and administrative gaps
- Respond to provincial reforms
- Anticipate the opening of two new emergency and transitional housing initiatives in York Region in 2014 and 2015 (Belinda's Place and the Richmond Hill Youth Hub)

While the review confirmed that York Region has invested wisely in homelessness supports and prevention to date, it recommended developing a strong vision to guide and optimize the use of resources to promote housing stability.

Housing stability means helping people either retain housing or re-house when faced with crisis or homelessness through a continuum of individualized supports. While the exact type of supports will vary depending on the degree people are at risk of housing loss or whether they are experiencing transitional or persistent homelessness, the underlying goal for housing stability is to prevent and reduce homelessness in the first place, while helping people who are homeless with transitional supports to find and keep housing.

The review also identified specific operational reforms that have proven effective in jurisdictions which have successfully slowed or reduced homelessness trends in their communities. Immediate priorities for operational reform included wrap around service models, centralized access to emergency shelter and homelessness prevention services, and standardized data collection.

The results of the review and a proposed new vision for York Region's emergency shelters and homelessness prevention services was presented to the Community and Health Services Committee on June 20, 2012.

Staff has engaged emergency shelter operators and other community stakeholders over the summer 2012 on how best to implement operational reforms

In August and September of 2012 staff conducted consultations with shelter operators and other stakeholders. The consultations had two distinct but connected goals.

The first goal, in response to the findings of the review, was to consult with emergency shelter operators and other community stakeholders to receive feedback on how best to implement operational reforms and what made-in-York Region service models could look like.

The second goal was, as part of a collaborative effort by Community and Health Services (C&HS), to engage community stakeholders to inform York Region's Ten Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. The Ten Year Plan is a requirement of the Province's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy and will provide an overview of the Region's current and longer term engagement in the housing and homelessness system, from eviction prevention programs through to the affordability targets in the Regional Official Plan (2010). Once completed by January 2014, the Ten Year Plan will provide additional direction on how to build an integrated network of partnerships, programs and services that promote housing stability. Details of the Ten Year Plan will be presented to Council in 2013.

The Province's Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative will help support York Region's new service and funding models for emergency shelters and homelessness prevention services

As communicated to Council on September 20, 2012 as Clause No. 7, Item 3 of Report No. 7 of the Community and Health Services Committee, part of its Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy the Province recently announced the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). York Region is represented on a Technical Advisory Group to implement this initiative.

The vision of this significant program reform which consolidates most provincial homelessness funding, is a better coordinated, integrated service delivery system to prevent and address homelessness. Over time, the goal is to shift from reactive to proactive, permanent solutions on two key outcomes – people experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing; people at risk of homelessness remain housed.

Municipal Service Managers will be required to report on how they are addressing these outcomes. However, Municipal Service Managers will have greater flexibility to use provincial funding to address local needs and priorities in addressing these outcomes, including new service and funding models for emergency shelters and homelessness prevention services.

York Region's proposed vision aligns with the Province's general direction.

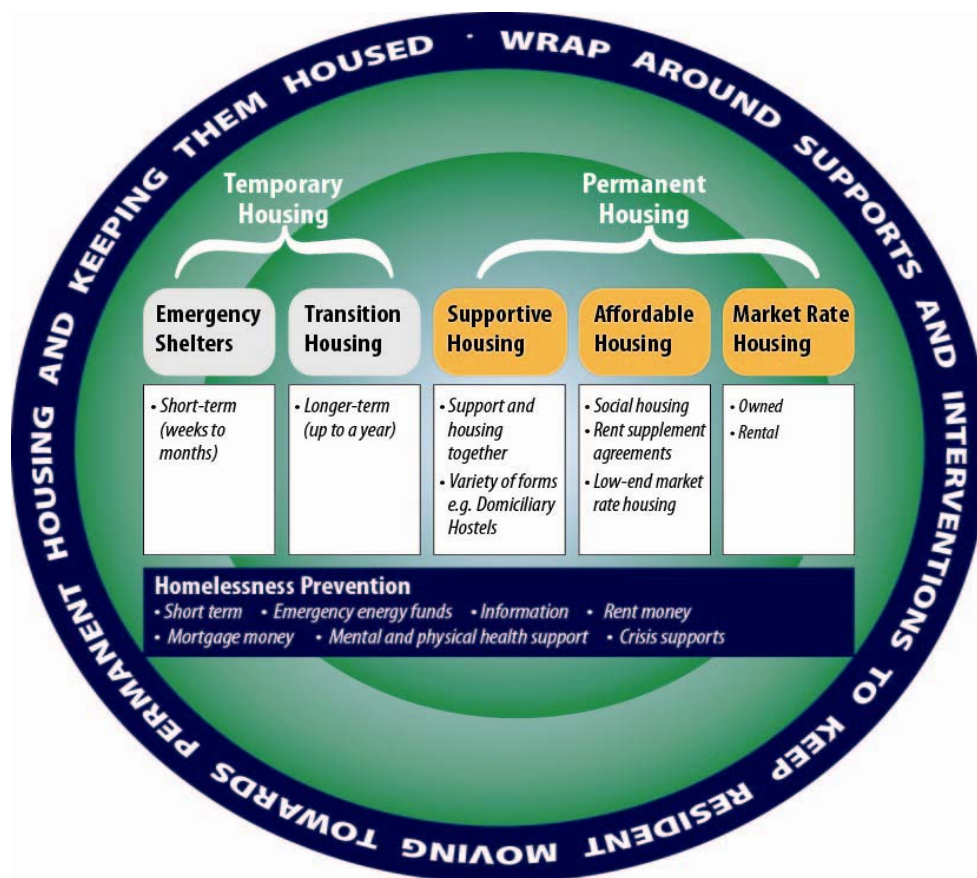
4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

York Region's proposed new vision will help guide investments focused on promoting housing stability for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of housing loss

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed new vision for York Region's emergency shelters and homelessness prevention services. The proposed new vision will guide investments and service planning for York Region's current and future emergency shelters, transitional housing, and homelessness prevention services. The vision 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. In York Region where obtaining affordable housing is difficult, preventing housing loss is especially crucial. Over time, investments in housing stability help reduce pressures on emergency or crisis supports for people who face housing risk.

The vision will also help inform York Region's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Figure 1



The community consultations confirmed the need for operational reforms to implement the new vision

Emergency shelter operators and other community stakeholders confirmed the need for new service and funding models as part of the new vision, with the initial focus on a number of operational reforms, including:

- Wrap around services
- Centralized access to services
- Data collection

The consultations also highlighted issues and opportunities on how to best implement reforms.

Wrap around services help people stabilize their lives through individualized supports

Wrap around services help provide people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with the particular range of supports they need to find and/or retain housing. While this often includes temporary shelter or immediate income support to pay rent or utility arrears, people also may need help with finding housing, life skills, education/training, employment, access to mental health or addictions services, or transportation. For some, this support may be for a short period, while others require more sustained support through outreach and case management.

Regardless of the specific type of service needed, people are better supported when services are coordinated or “wrapped around” them for as long as they need to stabilize their housing. This most often happens when service providers collaborate to fill service gaps and share accountability for the housing outcomes of their clients.

Currently, York Region faces a number of challenges providing wrap around services to support housing stability. For example, emergency shelters are currently funded to provide room, board and supervision to clients, with some additional support in housing search, referrals and, in the case of family and youth shelters, employment and some counselling. However, they receive very limited or no funding to provide intensive and follow-up support to clients as part of a successful wrap around service model. In addition, there are limited opportunities for service providers to coordinate services to meet clients’ needs.

In designing a York Region model, stakeholders emphasised the importance of developing a network of service providers within the community committed to wrap around supports, as well as the need for adequate funding to deliver wrap around supports directly as part of funding agreements.

Centralized access will provide a single entry point to homelessness services

People with complex personal needs compounded by unstable or unsafe social circumstances (e.g. poverty, delinquency, fragile family relationships) are often the most at risk of homelessness and require more intensive support to maintain housing. An essential feature of successful strategies elsewhere is a single or central access point to a community's homelessness services. This includes assessing a person's individual situation, identifying the services they need, and providing appropriate information, referrals, and follow-up. A central access point reduces the time people spend navigating through different services, particularly at time when they are under stress, and helps people with specific needs (e.g. youth, women) access specialized services more quickly.

Currently, there is no York Region-wide central access point to emergency shelters and homelessness prevention services. However, consultations over the summer validated the importance of having one and identified possible building blocks in the community (e.g. 211, the Housing Help Centre). In addition, stakeholders highlighted key elements for a successful York Region central access service model:

- 24 hour service with no time limits, staffed by people knowledgeable about the homelessness experience and services available.
- The process is transparent - people who access the service are aware of how information will be used.
- The service is accessible - people can access the service through multiple ways (phone, online or in-person) and are able to communicate in their language.
- The service is adequately resourced.
- Measures are in place to provide accountability and to evaluate how the service is working.
- The service should be phased-in to assess effectiveness, possibly through a pilot project.

Data collection will better inform our service planning and support the evaluation of homelessness services

A key gap in York Region's current homelessness system is a lack of capacity to collect and use data to determine who is in need and what their needs are. Research in other jurisdictions highlight the importance of having good and consistent data when making decisions about service priorities based on evidence of risk factors, client needs, and service effectiveness. Good data is also vital to monitor progress in meeting outcomes-based goals for clients. This is particularly important as the Province moves toward greater accountability through outcomes reporting.

To address this gap, C&HS will phase in a shared data collection and information management system over the next year. This will be through the Homeless Individuals

and Families Information System. This federal developed database will assist with the daily operations of emergency shelters and other homelessness service agencies. It will help with registering people who are accessing homelessness services, reporting on service use and providing reliable information on service needs.

Stakeholders highlighted the potential benefits of a centralized database but stressed the need for support to implement it successfully (e.g. it is easy to use for staff and sustainable, non-invasive for clients).

NEXT STEPS

Community and Health Services is ready to begin implementation of operational reforms

Community and Health Services will take the following steps to implement operational reforms progressively over the next 18 months:

- **Issue new service contracts** that reflect Provincial and Regional direction, and institute clear operator and Regional accountability.
- **Develop a wraparound service model as part of emergency shelter operator service agreements.** This will be tied to new funding arrangements with existing operators made possible by CHPI, which will allow C&HS greater flexibility in how to better support emergency shelters. C&HS will also work with emergency shelters on how best to link other service providers into the wrap around model.
- **Implement new service model for Belinda's Place and Richmond Hill Youth Hub.** The wrap around service and funding model will also be adopted in the opening of two new emergency and transitional housing initiatives anticipated in 2014 and 2015 – Belinda's Place and the Richmond Hill Youth Hub.
- **Consolidate fragmented administration and funding** as appropriate. Work is currently underway to review homelessness projects that have received community investment funding for multiple years to determine how they can be funded and administered more effectively through the Social Services Branch.
- **Explore how best to implement a central access service model in York Region using a collaborative community approach.** This will include identifying and working with possible community partners. As noted in the consultations this summer, the central access service will also play an important role in helping people in need access the range of emergency housing and homelessness prevention services available in the community.

- **Roll-out a centralized database in all of York Region's emergency shelters.** This will include developing standard guidelines, training and support. C&HS will also assist with data reporting and knowledge transfer through dedicated staff support.

Community and Health Services staff will also circulate this report to emergency and transitional housing operators.

Community and Health Services will continue to align services with York Region's new vision

Community and Health Services will take other steps over the next two years to align service delivery and planning with the proposed new vision. This will include:

- Streamlining homelessness prevention programs. There are currently a number of different Provincial and Regional programs that provide financial support with case management to help specific client groups retain housing or move if faced with housing loss. With greater funding flexibility from the Province, there is an opportunity to look at where access, eligibility, and service delivery can be consolidated and made simpler for both clients and program management.
- Looking for opportunities through York Region's Ten Year Housing and Homelessness Plan and Provincial initiatives (e.g. social assistance reform) to leverage other supports that promote housing stability, particularly to address bigger system gaps such as affordable housing, income support adequacy and access to services that support independent living.
- Re-aligning internal program and funding administration where needed to support the new service and funding models for emergency and transitional housing services (e.g. services currently funded through multiple programs).

Link to key Council-approved plans

The proposed vision responds to a comprehensive review of York Region's services and community stakeholder consultations completed over the spring/summer of 2012. It aligns well with the Province's stated objectives for homelessness reform and aims to directly benefit residents who currently struggle to maintain safe, affordable and suitable housing in York Region.

As well, York Region's new vision for homelessness services and related operational reforms tie directly to the C&HS *Multi-Year Plan* action areas under Goal 2 to:

- Invest in services and programs which provide housing stability
- Review programs that support individuals in crisis

The vision will also support progress toward:

- The 2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan objective of supporting healthy communities through a broad range of housing choices and supports to meet the diverse needs of residents
- Vision 2051 actions that promote housing stability, prevent homelessness, and provide services through an integrated network within communities so that York Region residents can readily access services they need
- The Human Services Planning Board of York Region *Making Ends Meet in York Region* Community Result for Affordable Housing.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

York Region costs to phase in the initial steps of operational reforms highlighted in this report will be partially offset with federal funding for implementing a centralized database and through flexibility provided by CHPI to re-allocate existing program funding. In 2013, \$214K gross and \$197K net costs have been included in the C&HS Operating Budget to support temporary resources associated with developing homelessness operational reforms. In addition, there may be potential costs to implement operational reforms depending on the type of service models developed. Future costs and potential tax levy impacts will be included in 2014 and 2015 Operating Budget forecasts.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

York Region's proposed new vision and related operational reforms to emergency shelters and homelessness prevention services will improve service and access to residents who are homeless or at risk of housing loss in all nine local municipalities. Promoting housing stability also helps reduce the cost of emergency or crisis supports in all communities.

7. CONCLUSION

The new vision and related service reforms is a sustainable approach to reduce housing risk in York Region

Promoting housing stability is an effective and sustainable approach to reduce housing risk in York Region. It is people-centred. Supports are designed to help build lives rather than intervene primarily when there is already disruption and crisis. Also resources are focused on programs and services that best support the particular needs of the resident(s) who needs help. This approach which is financially more cost effective is particularly critical in York Region, where growth and increasing risk has out-paced our existing service and funding capacity. The goal of this housing stability refocus will be, over time, to refocus resources on helping people who are at risk of housing loss to retain their

housing, or helping people who are homeless to transition as quickly as possible to permanent housing.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at Extension 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.