



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**To:** Members of the Peterborough Regional Liaison Committee

**From:** Sheldon Laidman, Commissioner of Community Services

**Meeting Date:** June 11, 2020

**Subject:** Report CSSSPRLC20-003  
Social Services COVID-19 Update

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## **Purpose**

To provide an update on Social Services activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Recommendation**

That the Peterborough Regional Liaison Committee endorse the recommendation outlined in Report CSSSPRLC20-003, dated June 11, 2020, of the Commissioner of Community Services, as follows:

That Report CSSSPRLC20-003 regarding the update on Social Services activities during the COVID-19 pandemic be received for information.

## **Budget and Financial Implications**

There are no municipal budget implications as a result of this report. This report does discuss additional funding provided to the Social Services Division. Budgetary implications from additional requirements due to the COVID-19 situation are being continually assessed and considered as decisions are made.

## **Background**

The City of Peterborough is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager for Social Services in the City and County of Peterborough. As the Service Manager, the Division

collaborates with partners, plans, implements and oversees service delivery systems while offering direct delivery of many social programs. Many of the services are essential to maintain during this emergency and the costs associated with delivering such services have not decreased during this emergency. The Division is playing a key role and continuing to provide and fund critical responsibilities such as child care, social assistance, housing, and homelessness prevention and system responses.

The Social Services division has remained in close contact with local support agencies during the crisis to:

- understand their immediate needs related to COVID-19;
- connect with other sectors to ensure alignment of service provision between agencies and wrap-around services for individuals are available; and,
- Maintain a current list of available resources for the benefit of local community groups and individuals seeking aid (a central list of resources is being maintained on the City's website (<https://www.peterborough.ca/en/city-services/financial-supports-during-covid-19.aspx#Emergency-Assistance>)).

On March 23, 2020, the Ontario Government announced \$200 million in Social Services Relief Funding (SSRF) to municipalities to support their response to COVID-19. The funding was to help communities with additional shelter needs, food banks, and emergency benefits. The funding came in two forms—\$52 million in direct payments to individuals and \$148 million in SSRF funding under expanded Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) guidelines. The City was allocated \$1.1 million from this fund.

The direct payments to individuals were based on applications for emergency assistance such as:

- expanded emergency assistance through Ontario Works (OW). This expansion provides financial supports for rent and food for those pending or ineligible for the federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).
- enhanced social assistance discretionary benefit fund that is available to those who need help to cover food, rent, medicine, transportation, informal childcare, and other services as a result of closures. Singles are potentially eligible for \$100 monthly and families \$200 monthly from April to July.

The SSRF-CHPI expansion funding of \$1.1 million has allowed the City to offset Covid-19 requirements around social distancing and isolation for individuals experiencing homelessness as well as support for the food security system. More details are provided later in this report. In addition to the Provincial support, the Federal government provided the United Way with \$632,180 under the Reaching Home initiative to support community homelessness responses. The City has been coordinating with the United Way on how this funding may be used towards the additional costs incurred and services provided during the emergency.

## **Support to Community Agencies**

The City and County of Peterborough are home to a range of non-profit agencies and local community groups that serve and provide valuable support to vulnerable residents. Many of these agencies continue to help during the pandemic. The Social Services Division is committed to supporting existing networks and experts to deliver their services through capacity building, service co-ordination, information sharing and connecting networks and organizations. This reduces the risk of duplication and increases efficient use of resources.

The Social Services department has reached out to as many agencies as possible to offer support. This support includes:

- sharing information about community resources
- ensuring that individuals have a solution to issues that arise and,
- helping boost volunteer capacity when needed.

There is considerable concern in the community regarding the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, such as seniors, individuals living in poverty and/or experiencing homelessness. Efforts are underway by many organizations, including the City, to develop and/or expand approaches to reduce social isolation with the specific populations they serve. Check-ins with vulnerable community members are also an opportunity to assess and identify gaps in services that can be relayed to Social Services who look for solutions or potential partners.

Community Development Staff have shifted their priorities to address needs of vulnerable populations during the pandemic. These activities focus on:

- Procuring and organizing meal deliveries to the shelter locations
- Supporting emergency food programs including food banks, meal programs and hamper programs
- Assisting with homelessness after-hours services and weekend coverage
- Partnering with PPH and members of Age-friendly Peterborough to communicate with the broader senior population
- Developing a program that addresses isolation issues among older adults

Client levels at food banks in the City and County are slowly increasing. They are currently managing their service by reducing the number of volunteers and in most cases, supplying prepared hampers to clients. Kawartha Food Share has reported they are meeting the needs of their Member Agencies and working to supply more fresh food such as milk, eggs and proteins.

The City has provided \$60,000 in financial assistance from the SSRF to the following local agencies:

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Good Neighbours Care Centre	General operations	\$7,500
St. Vincent DePaul	General operations	\$7,500
Salvation Army	General operations	\$7,500
Kawartha Food Share	Agency food supply	\$15,000
One Roof Community Centre	Meal program	\$7,500
Community Care Peterborough	Meals on Wheels	\$7,500
Nourish\YWCA	Emergency Hampers	\$7,500
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$60,000</b>

Food banks in the County are taking similar actions as City food banks by using fewer volunteers and providing hampers. Only the Millbrook Food Share has closed due to aging volunteers and concerns for their health. Their clients have been referred to food banks in the City.

### **Housing and Homelessness**

COVID-19 has changed the approach, but not the mission to end homelessness in Peterborough. It is more urgent than ever that people experiencing homelessness are provided with safe, affordable permanent housing with the appropriate supports.

Built for Zero (BFZ) Peterborough continues to work to solve homelessness despite the new challenges presented by the pandemic. As of May 1, 2020, the City does not have any confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in the shelter system. However, the City has implemented a straightforward enhanced shelter model to provide accommodation and supports to people experiencing homelessness who are either COVID positive or have COVID symptoms.

- **Ensuring staff and shelter residents safety:** The City has been working closely with PPH to support infection prevention and control in the shelters, including the relocation of some shelter services to alternate locations. We will continue to partner with PPH and local shelter providers to help ensure their facilities are protecting the health and safety of both clients and staff.
- **Intake Processes and Data improvements:** The City has instituted a centralized intake process into the shelter system with COVID-19 screening measures that also diverts and prevents individuals from becoming homeless in the first place. This intake process ensures access, adequate use of resources in the community, and integrity of data collected for the system.
- **Social Distancing for Shelters:** A collective of community and health-care organizations including the City, Brock Mission, Peterborough Paramedics, and PPH have launched a supported social distancing site for people experiencing

homelessness at the Peterborough Sport and Wellness Centre. Managed and staffed by Brock Mission, community workers have been trained to screen individuals for COVID-19 upon entry, to escalate to testing if deemed appropriate, and to properly use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Families and couples were moved out of the YES Shelter to allow for social distancing. Three of these families have since moved to permanent housing.

- Services for Individuals awaiting test results: The City has been using local motels for isolation for individuals who are waiting for COVID-19 test results.
- Isolation Services: A range of community and health partners (health partners, Police, Paramedics, addictions and mental health as well as harm reduction services) have been working with the City to provide space for isolation and services specifically for individuals with confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- Rapid Rehousing Initiatives: Peterborough has matched 193 households with housing between the months of January and March 2020. Twelve additional units were identified for move-in in the first two weeks through a Rapid Rehousing Initiative which is prioritizing access to housing for existing shelter clients.

Service expansions are currently funded by the Provincial SSRF and Federal Reaching Home allocations. This funding will not be adequate long term and the City has requested additional funding from the provincial CHPI program to ensure this level of service can continue.

The Housing team continue their work supporting local Community Housing providers and working with BFZ partners to build models and apply for funding that will provide permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness.

### **Ontario Works (OW)**

In addition to the increase in activity due to applications for COVID-19 Emergency Assistance benefits, OW staff have been connecting with clients to ensure they have access to food, are able to pay rent, are taking advantage of online training and education opportunities, and connecting with any needed health supports.

With the need to serve clients differently, the pandemic has provided opportunities to accelerate modernization of OW service delivery:

- Most staff are working remotely to process new applications and complete regular wellness checks with their clients.
- On April 27, the division launched an OW reloadable payment card (RPC) initiative. Reaching out to those clients who currently receive payments by cheque and offering the option of RPC or direct bank deposit, will help the division meet the goal of paperless payments by the end of the year.
- Work is underway to begin the digitization of Ontario Works client files.

There has been a noticeable impact on employment outcomes for Ontario Works participants during this period. The number of OW participants reporting employment fell dramatically in March with 555 cases reporting employment earnings—the lowest level since February 2015. The percentage of confirmed exits from OW fell to approximately 15% from the 2019 annual average of 31%.

Many OW participants work in precarious, seasonal or temporary employment. This will present further challenges for individuals looking to return to the labour market should these jobs not return when social distancing measures are eased and other COVID-19 related income support programs like CERB end.

### **Children's Services**

School age programs at Edmison Heights and Westmount Elementary were closed on March 17, 2020 following the Provincial directive ordering the closure of all child care centres and Early ON programs. They will remain closed until May 31, 2020 pending any further extension of school closures.

Since March 30, 2020, the Division has been managing the provision of Emergency Child Care (ECC) to health care workers, first responders and other essential emergency workers, as defined by the Province, in the community. The City's plan provides 114 licensed spaces in centre-based and home child care for children 0 – 12 years. The cost of this Emergency Child Care service is to be 100% covered by the Province.

Approved operators include Compass Early Learning and Care, Northview Child Care, Pearson and Peterborough Child Care, and licensed home child care at Compass and Wee Watch. These programs were selected based on:

- proximity to critical health care services;
- ability to serve a broad range of ages; and
- organizational capacity.

The City and the ECC operators worked closely with Peterborough Public Health (PPH) to ensure that additional precautionary safety measures were in place, including daily screening, enhanced cleaning and pandemic plans (e.g. isolation requirements for families that have travelled, what to do in the event of a possible COVID-19 case, etc.).

A centralized intake screening and approval process for all individuals requiring ECC was developed based on the provincial eligibility criteria. Inquiries about ECC applications can be made online through the City's website at [peterborough.ca/childcarefoessentialworkers](https://peterborough.ca/childcarefoessentialworkers).

Regular Fee Subsidy applications are temporarily on hold as all licensed child care centers are closed except for those approved to provide ECC.

The Division is maintaining regular contact with Children's Services providers to support their operations during the pandemic period. This has included the continuation of the general operating grant payments provided to each child care centre. The continuation

of this funding was at the direction of the Ministry of Education which flows this funding to the Service Manager.

Submitted by,

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Commissioner of Community Services

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