



City of
Peterborough

To: Members of the General Committee

From: Sheldon Laidman, Commissioner of Community Services

Meeting Date: September 13, 2021

Subject: Report CSSS21-007
Housing and Homelessness Benefits Review

Purpose

To provide information regarding Social Services' review of the Housing Stability Fund (HSF) and rent supplements as directed by Council and the Funds' alignment with the 2019 Homelessness System Review and upcoming provincial changes to Social Assistance Transformation.

Recommendation

That Council approve the recommendation in Report CSSS21-007, dated September 13, 2021, of the Commissioner of Community Services, as follows:

That Report CSSS21-007 be received for information.

Budget and Financial Implications

There are no budget or financial implications associated with the approval of this Report.

The changes detailed in this Report do not involve additional funds to either the Housing or Homelessness budgets for 2021 or 2022.

Background

In Ontario, there are 47 Municipal Service Managers that partner with the province to fund and deliver programs to the community in the areas of social assistance (Ontario Works) and employment supports, child care and early years programs, housing and homelessness prevention, and emergency social services.

As a Service Manager, the City of Peterborough delivers provincial mandates and outcomes for the various programs within this role. Service Managers collaborate with partners, plan, implement, and oversee service delivery systems while offering direct delivery of many social programs. Regular reviews of funded organizations and directing how local service providers deliver and sustain funded programs are part of the ongoing quality assurance activities of Service Managers.

On February 10, 2020 Council requested “that staff monitor the budget for available housing stability funds and report to Council as necessary.” This request was made after a reduction in the amount of HSF over two budget cycles. Council had also requested that policy/procedure, access to HSF, and rent supplements be reviewed after the 2019 Housing and Homelessness Consultant’s review.

This Report also puts into context the scope of changes that are being made at the Provincial level around the delivery of Social Assistance locally, the shift to Life Stabilization, and the connections to non-Social Assistance funding that can be used to build effective Life Stabilization Action Plans with community members.

2019 Housing and Homelessness Services Consultant’s Review

As the Service Manager for integrated planning for housing and homelessness services, Staff recognized that ending homelessness would require strong and aligned system-level leadership to ensure there are improvements across programs, systems, and organizations to increase client success. In 2019, the City retained OrgCode Consulting, Inc. to undertake an Operational Review of the effectiveness of the local homelessness response system. The Review considered the system of care dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness focusing on the need to move from a system that manages homelessness through emergency responses to a system committed to the prevention of homelessness and providing permanent housing. The recommendations identifying successes, challenges and opportunities were presented to Council in late 2019.

As a snapshot of housing and homelessness system management in Ontario, the Report stated that: “As is the scenario for all Service Managers, the challenge of preventing and ending chronic homelessness by 2025 will continue to demand transformation, performance management and operational oversight within its administration of services but also in the programs and community partners that it funds and supports throughout the region.”

The Report further noted that the focus on emergency shelters, outreach activities, meal programs, drop-in centres, and other emergency responses has demanded a huge portion of the available housing and homelessness funding. Best practices indicated

that there were opportunities to shift existing investments to shelter diversion and permanent housing. Some of the resources linked to diversion and permanent solutions include the HSF and the various rent supplement programs.

As a result of these recommendations, Staff began a review of HSF and rent supplements including a data and document review, a focus on evidence-informed practices, policy and procedures reviews, review of case files, and key informant interviews used to examine barriers to eligibility and suggested changes.

Further recommendations from the Review also included:

- Decrease the inflow of new people into homelessness using new approaches to prevent people from entering the shelter system and ensure rapid exits from homelessness are identified and actioned. A plan for diversion of families and individuals should be developed.

Actions: during 2020 and early 2021 shelter intake processes were refined to include stronger prevention and diversion supports and transitional housing opportunities for families. There was a particular focus during the Covid pandemic on ensuring families were provided with immediate options outside of the traditional shelter system.

A family diversion worker position with YES has been funded as a pilot through to December 31, 2021

- Connect homelessness with the available social and community housing options. This is especially important because “the lack of affordable and appropriate housing options available in Peterborough currently provides the greatest challenge in the community’s goal of achieving Functional Zero for chronic homelessness.”

Action: The Centralized Wait List for social and community housing was brought into Social Services from Peterborough Housing Corporation to ensure access is linked to other intake processes with Social Services.

- Establish a more coordinated and centralized housing placement service. This includes designated housing locator positions within the system whose sole purpose is landlord recruitment and retention.

Action: Discussions with the Housing Resource Centre to date have included shifting their service to focus on eviction prevention, landlord relationships, and a housing locator position.

- Establish the City in a strategic role of leading policy formation for the housing and homelessness service system. Using the Program Integrity Officer for Homelessness position to turn the recommendations into actionable

opportunities. This position is key to the growth, alignment and enhancement of the local homelessness and re-housing support system.

Action: The Program Integrity Officer is the lead for the Built for Zero program and focuses on incremental improvements to the homelessness system. Additionally, service agreements have been improved with key performance indicators around the shift to a housing focus.

- Explore the possibility of creating more Permanent Supportive Housing models to support households that require the intensity and frequency of the supports offered under this model.

Action: Options for Permanent Supportive Housing are under discussion, however, these models are very costly and require services from multiple partners from a range of sectors.

Provincial Vision for the future of Municipal Service Management

On February 11, 2021, Ontario's Minister of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced the release of a vision for a renewed social assistance system called Recovery and Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation.

The vision presents a roadmap for the Province to work with municipalities to create a social assistance system that is modern, sustainable, and has an emphasis on connecting people to the supports they need. At the core is a transformed service delivery model for social assistance that reconsiders provincial and municipal roles. Instead of being oriented along the traditional program lines of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), this transformation would instead focus on who can provide the service to get the best results.

The renewed system would realign administrative processes to create better client and community outcomes by reducing poverty and increasing labour market attachment. The model proposes a final state where:

- Qualifying for social assistance is not required for people to access supports for life stabilization from Municipal Service Managers;
- Supports are bundled around each individual and family based on their needs and acuity, where possible; and
- Municipal Service Managers use many tools within their portfolio and community to help people enhance and improve their quality of life

The proposed realignment of Provincial and municipal roles identifies that:

- The Province will oversee financial assistance, making it quick and easy for people to access the system while ensuring program integrity; and

- Municipal service managers will use their experience and expertise in delivering person-centered casework. Staff will leverage other internal resources, such as Housing Stability Fund and rent supplements, and in-depth knowledge of available community supports to create wrap-around plans with people

This shift is intended to support municipal front-line workers to connect clients with supports, such as job-readiness programs, housing and homelessness supports, childcare, skills training, and addictions and mental health services. This newly defined interaction between staff and community members is being referred to as Life Stabilization.

Connections between HSF/rent supplement review and the new Provincial vision

Since the 2019 announcement of the Employment Services Transformation (EST) prototype in the community, work has been underway to transform the Social Services Division into an organization that supports all individuals and families who need help navigating social, community, and health services and providing access to wrap around supports and services, when needed. This model recognized that people are most likely to achieve success when the rest of their lives are stable; they have a safe place to live, their physical and mental health needs met, and they feel connected and supported within their communities. Consolidating access to rent supplements and HSF within the Social Services Division will assist with access, evidence-based assessments for supports, and building comprehensive, sequenced Life Stabilization Action Plans.

In mid-2020 a new structure for the Social Services Division was implemented to shift the focus of work to the provision of Life Stabilization supports. While a newly integrated human service delivery model within Social Services was being designed locally that consolidated front-line job roles by function rather than by program, the Province started to consider similar models based on a “human services integration” lens. Ontario’s Vision for Social Assistance Transformation describes this as providing high-quality client service through a fully integrated, person-centered service model with a foundation of collaborative case planning.

Staff at Social Services already use a “Bridges out of Poverty” philosophy to engage with clients, which fits well with the Province’s vision. The Division is actively rolling out a new coaching model that builds the foundation for planning through mutual understanding, empowerment, and respectful relationships. Additional work is planned with investments in staff training and awareness of broader system supports, how to make “warm” referrals to external resources and services and developing and/or enhancing collaborative partnerships with external resources and services.

In the new model, municipal Social Services staff roles have been reoriented around Life Stabilization. Client Service Workers will assess the needs of individuals and families holistically and bring together whatever supports and resources are available. This includes providing housing and homelessness resources such as HSF and rent supplements.

The Housing Stability Fund Review Recommendations and Outcomes

HSF helps individuals and families in the City and County get or keep housing. Assistance is offered to qualifying individuals to pay overdue bills, rent, and other housing-related costs to prevent or end homelessness. 2021 funding for HSF totaled \$1,561,000.

Some examples of eligible housing costs are:

- Heat, hydro or rent arrears
- Mortgage or tax arrears
- Last month's rent
- Beds, bed covers, mattresses and box springs
- Replacing or purchasing appliances
- Moving or storage costs

The following data illustrates HSF spending between 2015-2020 (2020 spending was lower during the pandemic due to suspension of evictions and availability of other Provincial funding):

YEAR	Social Services Issuances	Social Services Unique Households	Social Services Funds	Housing Resource Centre Issuances	Housing Resource Centre Unique Households	Housing Resource Centre Funds
2015	3330	1301	\$ 1,315,402.96	409	273	\$ 326,177.33
2016	3380	2166	\$ 1,327,767.92	436	310	\$ 336,038.38
2017	3227	2128	\$ 1,283,305.64	406	212	\$ 324,078.14
2018	2903	1901	\$ 1,158,674.96	305	263	\$ 250,328.75
2019	2884	1937	\$ 1,131,718.70	450	341	\$ 336,370.25
2020	1955	1301	\$ 784,898.08	256	192	\$ 219,663.51

Currently the HSF is delivered by Social Services to social assistance recipients and by the Housing Resource Centre (HRC) for any other member of the community. This can be confusing to community members and leads to inconsistent application of policy.

The consultant's report suggested, and the review confirmed that HSF should be issued in the same place for everyone enabling:

- Actionable, accessible, and consistent data collection:

- Easier access for clients: and
- Standardized decision making

Actions taken:

1. Effective January 2022 HSF will be delivered by Social Services as part of the shift toward Life Stabilization. Eligibility will be capped based on income, but any member of the community is eligible to apply.

HSF will be one of many tools that are available to Client Service Workers in Social Services to build case plans empowering individuals and families toward stability.

2. Limits have been reviewed and policies were developed to allow for more flexibility when HSF can result in someone being housed or maintaining existing housing.
3. Data supporting this decision indicated that over 2015 to 2019 there was a steady decrease each year from month to month in the number of HSF requests. On average, HSF requests in Social Services decrease by 3% each month of the year. This suggests that people wait until January (for their entitlement to reset) to request funding. It also suggests that funding was not linked to preventing or ending homelessness which is the purpose of the funding. In 2018, only 9.2% of issuances were made to people who were homeless, and 8.1% in 2019. Data should be collected in one central location:
4. Currently there is limited tracking of people who request funds and the connection to the By Name Priority List (BNPL) of people experiencing homelessness which indicates that the focus is not directly on the most vulnerable people in the community. This gap has been amended under the new policy. Implement an evidence-informed assessment tool and case planning strategies:

Decisions have been made to use existing Social Services tools to determine whether prevention of homelessness is probable and developing longer term strategies for stabilization with the use of Life Stabilization Action Plans.

The Rent Supplement Review Recommendations and Outcomes

Currently there are nine categories of rent supplements delivered by three different partners in the Housing and Homelessness portfolios. The delivery partners are the Housing Resource Centre (HRC), Peterborough Housing Corporation (PHC), and the Social Services division. Rent supplements include the provincial legacy programs, federal/provincial programs, and municipally funded programs. All programs have different funding, eligibility and target populations. This is confusing for landlords, service providers and community members. The purpose of the review is to reduce the administration time spent on rent supplements, create one policy and procedure for eligibility and payment, and determine whether additional rent supplements can then be made available to the community based upon efficiencies found. As much as possible, rent supplements should be issued in the same place for everyone enabling:

- o Actionable, accessible, and consistent data collection
- o Easier access for clients
- o Standardized decision making

Actions Taken:

1. Rent supplements (except Provincial legacy programs with PHC) will be delivered by Social Services as part of Life Stabilization. Eligibility will be capped based on income, but any member of the community is eligible to apply.

Rent supplements will be an additional tool that is available to Client Service Workers in Social Services to build case plans empowering individuals toward stability.

2. Except for the Provincial legacy rent supplements with PHC noted above, all rent supplements will be reprofiled to help the City as the Service Manager achieve the goals in the Housing and Homelessness Plan and Life Stabilization. This will include supporting the prevention of homelessness. New policies and processes will align the delivery and administration of these funds and guide performance management, outcomes, and impact. It is expected that these decisions and further decisions planned for 2022 will allow for more eligible people in the community to have access to rent supplements without increasing the budget. The result is that there will be more targeted decisions that are consistent system-level decisions tied to action planning.

Summary

The Social Services Division is focused on continuous improvement activities to ensure that services are modern, meeting local priorities and goals, and effective. The described changes align with these service standards.

Work continues with the HRC and PHC. The work with HRC is to define its role as an organization that coordinates and centralizes housing placement services. HRC is working to enhance eviction prevention services and recruit and retain landlords to work with the City and its partners to end chronic homelessness.

PHC will discontinue adding new rent supplements so that a comprehensive review and strategy to address declining funding for provincial legacy programs can be jointly developed with the City. In early 2022 Social Services will continue to work in partnership with PHC to determine further steps to address declining provincial and federal funding of rent supplements and to ensure a range of options are available for the community.

Submitted by,

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