

August 25, 2011

BRIEFING NOTE to the Affordable Housing Committee and the Community Development and Recreation Committee on the Review of the Social Housing Waiting List

Purpose:

At the meeting of the Affordable Housing Committee on April 7, 2011, the Chair requested the General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to provide a briefing note on the review of the social housing waiting list currently underway. This note responds to that request.

Issue:

- Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) is conducting a review of the social housing waiting list and related housing access services in Toronto.
- This review is one of the actions identified in Housing Opportunities Toronto, the City's ten-year plan for affordable housing. In the plan, Council committed to "transform the social housing waiting list into a proactive social housing access system by leading a comprehensive review to explore how to improve service to clients, more effectively match applicants with units, and provide fair and efficient access to housing for the most vulnerable."
- New regulations under the *Housing Services Act* will replace the existing regulations under the *Social Housing Reform Act* which currently govern the requirements for the City's social housing waiting list. The new regulations will create greater flexibility for Service Managers to create policies which better meet local needs, including greater flexibility in administration of the waiting list system.
- The results of the review are intended to:
 - recommend changes to improve customer service for people using the social housing waiting list and related housing access services administered by the City; and
 - recommend changes to local City policies related to operation of the social housing waiting list.
- This review is not about the need to create more affordable housing. It is clear that the key challenge facing those on the waiting list is that there is not enough subsidized housing available and this creates long wait times for those on the waiting list.

Background:

- Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division is responsible for administration of approximately 92,000 subsidized and market-rent social housing units. These social housing units are owned and operated by Toronto Community Housing (TCH), various non-profit community providers, member-governed housing co-operatives and private sector landlords (see attachment).
- Approximately three-quarters of the total units administered by the City of Toronto are subsidized, rent-g geared-to-income (RGI) units. Tenants in RGI units pay rent which is adjusted to be equal to 30% of their income. Rules for these units must follow the legislative requirements of the provincial Social Housing Reform Act and vacancies are filled from the centralized waiting list.
- The City also administers other housing programs, including market rent social housing units, alternative housing, housing allowances and new affordable housing. These programs are not required to fill vacancies from the centralized waiting list.
- The centralized waiting list for subsidized social housing was created in 2000 as part of the transfer of social housing from the Province to municipalities. The City is required to maintain the centralized waiting list according to the regulations set out by legislation.
- The waiting list is currently administered by Housing Connections, a subsidiary agency of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, on behalf of the City.
- SSHA has overall policy direction for the waiting list service as the designated Service Manager for Toronto.
- Under the provincially legislated Special Priority Policy, priority on the waiting list must be given to victims of domestic violence.
- The City has also set local access priorities for the social housing waiting list, adopted by City Council in 2002, which give priority to households that are terminally ill or overhoused (i.e. currently in social housing in a unit too large for the household size). In addition to these priorities, one in seven RGI vacancies are filled by households that are disadvantaged, including homeless applicants, separated families, newcomers who are homeless, and youths (aged 16 or 17).
- There are currently 79,627 households on the waiting list for social housing. In 2010, 3,733 households were housed in subsidized social housing from the waiting list.

Key Points:

- The main purpose of the review is to identify ways to provide more efficient and effective customer service to housing applicants and to help them connect to other community and City services that can help meet their housing needs in both the short- and longer-term.
- Many of the rules for access to subsidized social housing are set by the provincial government through legislation, including the Special Priority Policy for victims of domestic violence. The City has no ability to change these legislated rules. Any recommended changes to provincial legislation

related to operation of the social housing waiting list which may emerge through the review will be proposed to Council to request provincial action.

- Other related housing access services, including nine Housing Help Centres, exist across the City which assist people to complete and maintain their waiting list application, in addition to providing a range of other services to help people to avoid eviction, find more affordable housing and address other housing issues. The relationship and coordination of these services with the centralized waiting list will be considered as part of the review.
- Through the Core Service Review, KPMG identified increasing the priority given to homeless applicants on the social housing waiting list as an opportunity to reduce emergency shelter use. This is one of the local priorities already being considered as part of the review, and the benefits, risks and potential effectiveness of the suggested change will be assessed.
- Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including waiting list applicants, community agency partners and housing providers, will be an important part of the review in order to hear about what is working well, where there are challenges, and opportunities for improvements.

What kinds of things could be recommended as a result of the review?

- Customer service improvements to make the waiting list easier to use, better and more quickly match applicants with available units, increase transparency and enable people to more easily monitor their application and make housing choices
- Ways to better connect applicants with services and other housing options that are available in Toronto to help meet their housing needs while they're waiting for social housing
- How good practices from other cities could be implemented in Toronto
- Changes to specific City guidelines for the waiting list, including local priority policies
- Requests to the Province for additional support and legislative change

Next steps:

A report on the results of the review will be presented to Community Development and Recreation Committee in the second quarter of 2012.

Contact for further information:

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Attachment:

Social Housing in Toronto Facts

Social Housing in Toronto Facts

Number of households on the social housing waiting list: 79,627
 Number of active applications on the waiting list: 68,453*
 Number of households with no dependents: 27,302 (40%)
 Number of households with dependents: 21,361 (31.2%)
 Number of senior households (one member 59+): 19,709 (28.8%)

Number of total individuals on the waiting list: 147,705

Number of households housed in 2010: 3,733

(all figures above as of July 31, 2011)

** Does not include households with inactive status. Households that are inactive maintain their spot on the chronological waiting list, but have to provide further information to maintain eligibility; usually, this means the applicant has not confirmed interest to remain on the list for at least 12 months.*

Number of households in core housing need in Toronto: 154,190 (StatsCanada, 2006)

Average rents of private rental apartments in Toronto (CMHC, Fall 2010)

Bachelor: \$778
 1 bedroom: \$950
 2 bedroom: \$1,135
 3+ bedroom: \$1,346

City of Toronto Administered Housing Programs

Program	Total Units	RGI Units	Market Units	Housing Providers/ Owners
Toronto Community Housing	58,710	51,606	7,104	1
Non-profit Housing Providers	20,707	10,139	10,568	157
Co-operative Housing Providers	7,448	4,716	2,732	68
Affordable Housing Program and City developed projects	2,456	1,147	1,309	28
Rent Supplement-Private Landlords	2,771	2,771	0	N/A
Housing Allowance Program	1,106	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	93,198	70,379	21,713	254