

Update on the City's response to the Ombudsman's report regarding the provision of Emergency Human Services following the 200 Wellesley Street Fire

Date:	October 22, 2012
To:	Executive Committee
From:	Deputy City Manager, Cluster A
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

In May 2012, the Ombudsman presented the findings of her investigation into the Emergency Human Services (EHS) response following the 200 Wellesley Street fire. The report contained a number of recommendations to improve the City's response to future emergencies. This report provides an update on work done to date to implement those recommendations, as well as next steps for work that is currently underway.

The Ombudsman identified seven recommendations to be completed by December 1, 2012 and all are on track to be completed before the deadline. Four key documents have been created or updated to address these recommendations:

- A revised Operational Support Function (OSF) to reflect the 2010 Council approval of the Emergency Human Services Policy;
- A new Vulnerable Populations Protocol, which establishes the framework for identifying and meeting the special needs of vulnerable populations during an Emergency Human Services response;
- A new EHS Policy and Procedure manual; and
- Staff roles and responsibilities descriptions for divisional responders.

The Ombudsman also made two recommendations to be completed by June 30, 2012 related to establishing partnerships with external agencies to manage in-kind donations and developing training for EHS staff responders. Work on these is underway, as described in this report, and will be completed prior to the deadline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy City Manager, Cluster A, recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

Equity Impact

Residents who require assistance when evacuated from their homes due to an emergency are often low-income and/or vulnerable Torontonians with few resources with which to manage this stressful situation. This report addresses recommendations that are designed to improve the City's provision of these emergency human services.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of May 11, 2010, City Council considered the report "Caring for Toronto Residents Displaced as a Result of Neighbourhood Emergencies: Review of Recent Events and Proposed Strategies" and approved the Emergency Human Services policy regarding the type, scope and length of services to be provided by the City to residents displaced during an emergency.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.EX43.3>

At its meeting of May 8 and 9, 2012, City Council adopted the recommendations contained in the Investigation Report (May 1, 2012) from the Ombudsman, titled "An Investigation into the Provision of Emergency Human Services following the 200 Wellesley Street Fire." At that time, Council requested that the City Manager report back to Council in the Fall of 2012 on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Ombudsman's report. Council also requested the City Manager to conduct a full review of the Emergency Human Services Policy and include in his report on the 200 Wellesley Street Fire, any recommendations for changes to the Policy based on this review.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.CC23.2>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Emergency Human Services (EHS) is an organized response to the urgent needs of people and their pets once they are out of immediate danger of a disaster or emergency incident. The primary services provided as part of Emergency Human Services include emergency accommodation, food, clothing, registration and inquiries, personal support services and operation of a Reception Centre for residents evacuated from their homes or who are otherwise affected by an emergency. The Emergency Human Services response

is coordinated by the Emergency Planning Unit (EPU), a part of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), and is provided in partnership with a range of Divisions and community agencies.

On September 24, 2010, a six alarm fire in a Toronto Community Housing (TCH) building at 200 Wellesley Street East forced the evacuation of approximately 1,200 residents from their homes. This was a significant neighbourhood emergency event, and was one of the largest such neighbourhood level emergencies in Toronto in recent memory in terms of the number of people displaced from their homes, the duration of the evacuation and the scale and complexity of need of the residents. Many of the residents affected were extremely vulnerable, with complex and varied social, financial and physical needs, requiring significant City support and assistance.

In May 2012, the Ombudsman presented the findings of her investigation into the Emergency Human Services response following the 200 Wellesley Street fire. The report contained a number of recommendations to improve the City's response to future emergencies.

COMMENTS

In his response to the Ombudsman's investigation, the City Manager agreed with all of her recommendations, which supported and strengthened those found through the City's own internal review of the response. Work has been completed or is underway to address all of the recommendations, and all are on track to be completed in advance of the schedule set out by the Ombudsman.

Work completed to date

The Ombudsman identified seven recommendations to be completed by December 1, 2012. The status of work on these items is described below, with all on track to be completed before December. This work has been done in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

There are four documents that have been created or updated as part of this work.

- The previously existing Mass Care Operational Support Function (OSF) has been updated and renamed to reflect the 2010 Council approval of the Emergency Human Services Policy.
- A Vulnerable Populations Protocol, which establishes the framework for identifying and meeting the special needs of vulnerable populations during an Emergency Human Services response has been developed.
- A new EHS Policy and Procedure manual has been created.
- Appropriate information for divisional responders, in the form of staff roles and responsibilities descriptions, has been developed.

Drafts of these documents and protocols were sent to the Ombudsman's Office for review and feedback as part of the process.

Roles of the Office of Emergency Management and SSHA's Emergency Planning Unit during an Emergency Human Services Response

The Ombudsman recommended that directives be established to document the role of the Office of Emergency Management and SSHA's Emergency Planning Unit in emergencies (Recommendation #1). Significant work has been done in this area since the 200 Wellesley Street fire.

The previously existing Mass Care Operational Support Function (OSF) has been updated and renamed to reflect the 2010 Council approval of the Emergency Human Services Policy. This revision integrates the policy into the City's Emergency Plan. The revised OSF, along with the EHS Policy and Procedures Manual, clarifies the role of OEM at an Emergency Reception Centre as follows:

- For Level 1 – Minor Incidents, OEM support is available 24/7 through the 'On-Call' Coordinator
- For Level 2 – Major Incidents, OEM will attend the site in a liaison function to assist with the facilitation of an integrated Incident Management System (IMS), structure, at the request of the EHS Incident Commander. The Toronto Emergency Operations Centre may also be activated by any member of the Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee.
- For Level 3 – Emergency Incidents, OEM will attend the site in a liaison function to assist with the facilitation of an integrated IMS structure, at the request of the EHS Incident Commander or at the direction of the OEM Director. The Toronto Emergency Operations Centre, operated by members of the Emergency Management Working Group, their Divisional alternates and OEM, will always be activated.

The updated Emergency Human Services OSF reflects the notification procedures set out in the Emergency Level escalation chart, as approved by the Emergency Management Working Group (EMWG) and the Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee (TEMPC). The OSF has been reviewed by OEM staff and, at the time of submitting this report, formal approval by the EMWG is anticipated by the end of October, 2012.

Role of the EHS Incident Commander

The Ombudsman recommended that the City Manager confirm the EHS Incident Commander is the single point of decision-making authority for Emergency Human Services responses or provide an alternative (Recommendation #2). In response, the City Manager has issued a memorandum to all Division Heads, TEMPC members, Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Corporations, and EHS partner Divisions clarifying that the EHS Incident Commander is the single point of decision-making authority for Emergency Human Services responses. The role of the EHS Incident Commander has also been clearly defined in the new EHS Policy and Procedures Manual.

Further, the Ombudsman identified that greater clarity regarding the role of TCH in Emergency Human services responses was required to ensure more effective coordination

in future emergencies. Staff have developed a draft protocol to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities between EHS response staff and TCH staff, and are working with TCH to finalize and implement the protocol by the end of 2012.

Liaison with elected officials

The Ombudsman recommended that the City Manager ensure a senior manager is available to act as a liaison with elected officials during emergencies (Recommendation #3). On January 10, 2012, the Deputy City Manager distributed a memo to all Councillors along with the Councillor Notification & Roles in an Emergency chart which outlines how Councillors will be notified during emergencies and the role of the Mayor and Councillors during an emergency.

The EHS Policy and Procedures Manual clarifies that the General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) is directly responsible for keeping the local City councillor(s) informed of developments that affect the length of time evacuees are out of their homes, the services that are available during an evacuation and special issues that may arise. Should the General Manager of SSHA not be available, the City Manager will ensure a senior manager is available to act as a liaison with elected officials during emergencies.

Inter-divisional communication for staff responders

The Ombudsman recommended that a protocol be established for future emergencies regarding inter-divisional communications for staff responders (Recommendation #4). Staff have reviewed processes for communications with Divisional responders and the new EHS Policy and Procedures Manual clearly establishes the roles and responsibilities for inter-divisional communications during EHS responses at activation, when a response is provided curbside and when a Reception Centre is opened, including that:

- The EHS Operations Centre is responsible for inter-Divisional communication with staff responders.
- A general email account may be established as required during the response for the purpose of communicating EHS response updates to all stakeholders, including partnering divisions/organizations, Emergency Planning Unit Manager, Strategic Communications, local councillors, SSHA General Manager, SSHA Senior Management Team, and the City's Senior Level Management.
- The Personnel Coordinator provides key information to EHS partner schedulers from Toronto Employment and Social Services, Children's Services, Toronto Public Library, and Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's Hostel Services to assist them in to secure staffing during an emergency response.

System of record keeping

The Ombudsman recommended that a single system of record keeping be established to transmit key information between shifts and that this be done in accordance with the City Clerk's "Responsible Record-Keeping Directive" of August 22, 2011 (Recommendation #5). Staff have reviewed processes for record keeping and the EHS Policy and Procedures Manual clearly establishes protocols for record keeping in accordance with the City Clerk's directive, as follows:

- All EHS staff are responsible for recording decisions made and actions taken during each shift in the appropriate log. At the end of the shift, these logs are posted for new staff to read and all outstanding items are identified at each shift change. This structure is in keeping with the procedures used by the OEM as part of the Incident Management System.
- After the EHS response, the Emergency Planning Unit is responsible for record storage and retrieval.
- A web- based Emergency Human Services Information System is currently under development which will automate documentation such as client registration and tracking and the functional needs assessments used at registration to identify vulnerable people and their service requirements.

Policy and Procedures Manual

The Ombudsman recommended that a Policies and Procedures Manual be developed for staff responders (Recommendation #6). A comprehensive Policies and Procedures Manual has been drafted, along with EHS Staff Responder roles and responsibilities descriptions. Both the OEM and the Ombudsman's Office have provided input on the manual contents. This manual will be distributed to the Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee, the Emergency Management Work Group, Division Heads and staff responders.

Vulnerable Populations Protocol

The Ombudsman recommended that the Vulnerable Populations Protocol be finalized in consultation with relevant expertise such as the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (Recommendation #7). The Vulnerable Populations Protocol has been developed (see Attachment 2) in consultation with the Vulnerable Populations Working Group, which includes representatives from health and mental health organizations such as the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, EMS, Toronto Community Care Access Centres and Toronto Public Health. The EHS Policy and Procedures Manual further clarifies how the protocol will be operationalized during a response.

Ongoing work

In addition to the above recommendations, the Ombudsman made two recommendations to be completed by June 30, 2012 (Recommendation #11). Work on these is underway, as described below, and will be completed prior to the deadline.

In-kind Donations

The Ombudsman recommended that the City Manager establish partnerships with external agencies to handle in-kind donations for future emergencies (Recommendation #9). A Request for Information was issued in June 2012 to solicit information from the community about possible options for delivery models and cost structures to inform a future purchasing process. Staff will continue to work with Purchasing and Materials Management to determine the next steps to identify appropriate community agencies with expertise in handling in-kind donations to provide these services in future responses.

Training

The Ombudsman recommended that the City Manager ensure that staff responders are aware of the City's Emergency Plan and are adequately trained in Emergency Human Services (Recommendation #10). The OEM has an extensive training program that is delivered five times per year, for a total of 360 training spots. The training comprises Basic Emergency Management, Incident Management System 100/200, and Emergency Operations Centre. In order to act in a management capacity within the EHS Incident Command System, City staff must have completed this training.

The new Policies and Procedures Manual and the EHS Staff Responder Roles and Responsibilities descriptions are foundation documents for EHS training. A comprehensive training plan is currently under development, which will include a training curriculum based on the new Policies and Procedures Manual and a training schedule for all potential EHS staff responders.

SSHA and the OEM will be coordinating their training requirements and delivery schedules to ensure responding staff will have the required training before being deployed.

Additional Recommendations Regarding Communication and Accountability

The Ombudsman recommended that evacuees displaced by emergencies be provided with timely and accurate information to the extent possible (Recommendation #12). One of the guiding principles established in the EHS Policy and Procedures Manual is an “evacuees first” policy to ensure that as much information as possible about the emergency situation is shared with the evacuees before being released to the media. The Manual further clarifies the procedures in place to ensure that information is provided to evacuees in an accurate, timely and accessible manner.

The Ombudsman recommended that debriefs and lessons learned be done in a coordinated and timely manner (Recommendation #13). The EHS Policy and Procedures Manual clarifies that within two months of the end of the response, a formal debrief will be held with staff responders and evacuees. The formal debrief will be facilitated by a third party, and will consider responses to a previously circulated questionnaire that is completed by staff and evacuees.

The Ombudsman recommended that the City Manager ensure senior public servants respond in a timely way to Ombudsman requests and hold them to the standards set out in his August 4, 2011 directive (Recommendation #14). The City Manager, working with the Ombudsman office, amended the City's Ombudsman Investigation Protocol to clarify expectations and roles and responsibilities. In particular, the revised Protocol emphasized the expectation with regard to the timely manner in which responses are provided to the Ombudsman. The revised Protocol was communicated to the Deputy City Managers and all Division Heads through a memorandum on June 25, 2012.

Review of the Emergency Human Services Policy

Council also requested that the City Manager conduct a full review of the Emergency Human Services Policy and identify any recommendations for changes to the Policy based on this review.

Following the EHS response to the Wellesley Street Fire, staff conducted a thorough review to assess how the EHS policy worked and identify any areas for improvement. Through the internal review, as well as the recommendations from the Ombudsman, a number of opportunities for improvement have been identified, as described above. Policies and procedures for implementing the existing policy have been refined and clarified through the development of the OSF and Policies and the Procedures Manual which will improve future EHS responses.

Overall, the Emergency Human Services policy as approved by City Council lays out an effective framework for providing residents affected by emergencies with food, shelter and other needed supports in a time of personal crisis. No changes to the policy are recommended at this time.

CONTACT

Phillip Abrahams, Acting General Manager
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Tel: 416-392-7885, Email: pabraham@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Brenda Patterson
Deputy City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Emergency Human Services Operational Support Function
Attachment 2: Vulnerable Populations Protocol