



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework

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| Date: | November 20, 2013 |
| To: | Community Development and Recreation Committee |
| From: | General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration |
| Wards: | All |
| Reference Number: | |

SUMMARY

This report seeks Council approval of the attached 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework. This framework will guide Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration (SSHA) and its partners in the planning, management and delivery of SSHA's full range of housing and homelessness services over the next five years. It is intended to support the transformation of these housing and homelessness services from a loose network of programs primarily focused on the administration of social housing and emergency responses to homelessness into an integrated, client-centered, outcome-focused service system that improves the ability of residents to achieve greater housing stability.

The catalyst for development of this service planning framework was the combination of a tightening funding environment, demand pressures on existing services, and changes to provincial and federal programs and reporting expectations. These included: the introduction by the Province of the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) in January 2013, which consolidated funding from five homelessness prevention programs into one program with greater flexibility to meet local needs but with less overall funding; and the renewal of the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) that focuses on Housing First approaches. This framework is consistent with Council's ten year plan for affordable housing (*Housing Opportunities Toronto*) and Toronto Housing Charter, and supports the implementation of CHPI and HPS.

The preparation of the service planning framework was informed by research, a review of best practices in other jurisdictions as well as extensive community consultation undertaken by SSHA during 2013. During the summer, SSHA consulted with a range of

service providers, service users and other stakeholders using a variety of different methodologies.

The service planning framework sets out seven strategic directions to guide SSHA over the next five years. It outlines SSHA's current responsibilities and key actions the division will undertake going forward to improve service delivery, increase service access, foster system stewardship, and strengthen partnerships to prevent and reduce homelessness while creating housing opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, recommends that City Council:

1. adopt the attached 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework; and
2. request the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to provide a progress report on implementation of the service planning framework to the first meeting of Community Development and Recreation Committee in the next term of Council.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

The implementation of all short-term strategic actions, beginning in 2014 will be considered as part of the 2014 budget and subsequent budget processes.

Medium- and long-term actions that impact service delivery in 2015 and beyond will be referred back for consideration as part of future year budget processes.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

Equity Impact

Housing and homelessness services serve a range of equity seeking groups including people experiencing homelessness, the working poor, youth, seniors, Aboriginal People, and other vulnerable groups. This report proposes a framework of strategic directions and actions to improve the planning, management and delivery of housing and homelessness services for these vulnerable residents.

DECISION HISTORY

The *Housing Opportunities Toronto: An Affordable Housing Action Plan 2010-2020* was adopted by Council at its meeting August 5-6, 2009. The HOT Plan includes a Housing

First approach to end homelessness and the introduction of a Toronto Housing Charter which includes a policy statement about all residents having access to safe, secure, affordable, well-maintained, and affordable home.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/cc/decisions/2009-08-05-cc38-dd.htm>

At its meeting of July 12-14 2011, Council adopted the report "Overview of Ontario's New Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy and Housing Services Act: Implications for the City of Toronto." This report outlined the Province's stated commitment to proceed with Phase 1 of program consolidation with five homelessness programs.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.CD5.5>

At its meeting of October 30-November 1, 2012 Council adopted the report "Changes to Provincial Funding Approaches for Homelessness Prevention and Social Assistance Programs: Implementation Strategies and Issues." This report outlined the implementation strategy for the new CHPI program, with 2013 as a transition year. It also requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration develop a consultative engagement framework and report back with a long-term strategic plan for 2014 and beyond.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX23.15>

At its meeting of October 8-11, 2013, Council adopted the report "Results from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment and Next Steps to Improve Services for Those Experiencing Homelessness." This report outlined the results and key findings from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment and described steps to be taken by SSHA in response to the survey results to improve outreach and housing supports for Toronto's homeless residents.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD23.5>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The City of Toronto plays a central role in providing housing stability for low income Toronto residents. SSHA is the division with the primary responsibility for overseeing, funding and delivering a range of housing, homelessness prevention and other related services designed to help people find and keep permanent housing. In addition to these services provided through SSHA, the City also administers income supports, employment initiatives, public health supports, recreation and childcare programs, and creates new affordable housing through other City divisions, all of which contribute to housing stability.

Since its adoption in 2009, the Housing Opportunities Toronto (HOT) 10-year Affordable Housing Action Plan has set out Council's strategic directions to guide the City's policy-work and investment decisions to provide housing opportunities for all Torontonians. Cornerstones of the HOT Plan include the Toronto Housing Charter and a Housing First approach to end homelessness

Recent policy, legislative, and funding changes, as well as operating pressures such as increased demand for services provide both the need and opportunity to develop a service

planning framework that supports consolidation and transformation of existing City managed homelessness and housing related programs into an integrated, client-centered, and outcome-focused housing stability service system.

Effective in January 2013, the Province introduced CHPI which replaced existing funding across the province for a range of housing and homelessness related services. It also reduced overall funding for housing and homelessness supports through the elimination of the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB). In 2013, the Federal Government also announced its plans to renew the Homelessness Partnership Strategy until March 2019. The renewed program will place increased emphasis on a Housing First approach to address the needs of individuals experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness.

The integration of existing provincial funding streams within a program framework that provides greater flexibility to meet local needs and the renewal of HPS provide a unique opportunity to re-evaluate how housing and homelessness services are provided to achieve greater housing stability outcomes. The attached service planning framework will guide the implementation of CHPI, HPS and other funding decisions as part of the overall transformation of housing and homelessness services from one focused on emergency responses to homelessness and the administration of social housing into an integrated housing stability service system.

The service planning framework also builds on work and initiatives that are underway or have been undertaken by the division and its partners over the past two years including:

- the review of the centralized waiting list for social housing
- planning for the proposed redevelopment to Seaton House
- the 2013 Street Needs Assessment
- the implementation of the Toronto Transitional Housing Allowance Program
- the quality assurance and access review of shelters.

COMMENTS

Service Planning Process

The attached 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework is the result of a year of research, planning, and consultation with a range of stakeholders. City Council directed the General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to develop a consultation strategy to solicit input from clients and community stakeholders on priorities and best approaches to services. An overview of the consultations is provided below.

A literature review was also undertaken to develop an understanding of the key principles, goals, definitions, and implementation strategies used in housing and homelessness plans with a municipal or regional government framework. Key themes, best practices, common areas of strategic focus were also identified. Data on housing and

homelessness services collected through various SSHA database programs and initiatives such as the 2013 Street Needs Assessment were also analyzed to provide additional context and to understand service trends.

Additional input and advice was provided by a reference group consisting of senior representatives of City divisions that work directly with vulnerable Torontonians.

Stakeholder Consultations

SSHA undertook a series of consultation and engagement activities during the summer with the assistance of an external consultant. The purpose of the consultations was to gather input and feedback from a range of stakeholders to inform the framework's development. The consultation process was broad and inclusive and included in-person discussion sessions, online surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews, a public opinion poll, and a workbook with background information.

More than 2,000 voices were heard through the consultations. SSHA consulted with and learned from youth, seniors, Aboriginal People, people experiencing homelessness, people staying in shelters, applicants on the social housing waiting list, housing service users, people who had recently secured housing, and members of the general public. Housing providers and community agencies that deliver housing and homelessness services or work with vulnerable populations were actively recruited to take part in the conversation about how to improve housing stability services, with more than 200 participants representing 175 agencies taking part in five face-to-face sessions.

Those on the front-lines working daily with people experiencing homelessness have important insights and input for the service planning process, so staff members from all areas of the SSHA and other City divisions were also key participants in the consultations. Staff members were invited to join in six in-person discussion sessions as well as provide input through an online survey.

A public opinion poll of a representative sample of over 800 Torontonians garnered the views of the general population on housing and homelessness issues and the key improvements that are needed to achieve successful outcomes for residents experiencing housing instability.

| Stakeholder consultations by the numbers | |
|---|---|
| 21 | Key informant interviews with clients who have been recently housed |
| 147 | Completed service user surveys |
| 144 | Clients participated in 17 focus groups |
| 207 | City staff participated in six staff discussion sessions |
| 238 | Service providers participated in five discussion sessions |
| 295 | Completed staff surveys |
| 314 | Completed public surveys |
| 804 | Sample size of the public opinion poll |

An overview of the key themes from the consultations and other service planning activities is presented below. A full summary of the key themes to emerge from the consultation can be found in Section 4 of the 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework appended to this report as Attachment A.

Overview of Key Themes from the Toronto Housing Services Consultations

Focus on Housing First

Toronto has embraced a Housing First approach to ending homelessness since 2005. Housing First is founded on the principle that the best way to end homelessness is to enable someone experiencing homelessness to find a safe, secure, affordable home, with supports as necessary, from which they can make changes and stabilize their lives. Housing is not dependent on the person accepting treatment for any physical health, mental health, or substance use issues, although they are offered.

Housing First underpins the City's Streets to Homes program and is reinforced in the HOT Plan. Additionally, Housing First is recognized as a best practice for homelessness reduction and has been adopted by almost all jurisdictions reviewed in the context of the literature review.

Housing affordability and other system-level challenges

Throughout the consultations, stakeholders often raised a series of concerns about issues that impact the overall housing services system and the ability of the City to effectively plan, manage, and deliver these services. All stakeholders noted that overall housing affordability and the high cost of housing in Toronto is challenging, making it difficult for low-income families to secure and maintain housing.

Housing stability and follow-up supports

Housing stability is about more than just housing. There was broad consensus among stakeholders that housing stability is about having housing that is affordable, suitable, safe, and in a healthy community. Feedback also emphasized the need to support residents' social, economic, and community integration to help them achieve greater attachment to home and ultimately achieve greater housing stability.

According to stakeholders, helping residents achieve improved housing stability is an appropriate goal for the service planning framework. And while there was support for this goal and consensus around what housing stability means, stakeholders clearly articulated that this goal cannot be achieved without significant improvements to the availability and types of follow-up supports for clients after they are housed or once the initial housing issue has been addressed. In other words, follow-up supports are critical to a successful Housing First approach to ending homelessness.

Importance of homelessness prevention

Homelessness prevention as a key priority in the overall service system received overwhelming support from all stakeholders. This also translated to a strong belief that the City should intervene when people are in hardship as opposed to when they are about to be evicted or are looking for admission to the shelter system.

Importance of client-centered services

The importance of client-centered services was stressed by stakeholders throughout the consultations. Interventions used to help people move out of homelessness should be determined by the person's individual circumstance and needs. Stakeholders spoke to the critical importance of specialized or customized supports based on an individualized assessment of need in order to achieve greater housing stability as an outcome.

Outcome-focused service system

An outcome-focused service system is important to ensure goals and objectives are being met. All jurisdictions that SSHA reviewed used evidence-based knowledge to support the development of their plans and to inform the evolution of the plans over time.

Information and access to services

Stakeholders spoke about the need to increase the availability of information, awareness among Torontonians about services, and the need to improve access to services. Many clients reported finding it initially difficult to access services as they did not know about them or where to go. Improved information and access can support a greater focus on homelessness prevention.

Working together better

The importance of more partnerships and better collaboration with and among service providers, with other service sectors such as health and corrections, as well as with other orders of government was a theme that emerged throughout the consultations. Partnerships and increased collaboration are especially important as they can generate effective and innovative solutions and help meet different client needs in the community. They also support improved service access and coordinated case management for clients.

Going Forward: Strategic Directions for Service Planning

The feedback and input received through the consultations and the review of emerging and best practices reaffirms the City's vision in the HOT Plan that all should have a safe, secure, affordable, and well-maintained home from which to realize their full potential. Based on the consultation results and other work this year by the division, SSHA has identified seven strategic directions to guide service delivery and gradual service system transformation over the next five years.

The first three strategic directions address the needs of SSHA's programmatic areas, and the remaining four work towards transforming the housing and homelessness service system to one that is client-centered, outcome-focused, and provides high quality service in order to help people achieve permanent housing solutions and improved housing stability. The key actions that accompany these strategic directions in the attached Housing Stability Service Planning Framework have been developed based on the input received from clients, service providers, City staff, and other community stakeholders and are guided by the following principles:

1. A Housing First approach to helping people find and maintain permanent housing
2. A focus on helping the most vulnerable
3. A commitment to achieving the most positive outcomes
4. Services that are easy for clients to access, are integrated and administratively streamlined
5. System change that is phased in over time to limit negative impacts
6. Ongoing engagement of service users, community partners, and stakeholders in developing priorities and solutions, and
7. Directions that are consistent with Council policy including the HOT Plan, the City of Toronto Strategic Actions 2013-2018, the Toronto Seniors Strategy, the housing policies of the City's Official Plan, and Equity, Diversity and Human Rights policies.

Strategic direction 1: Prevent homelessness

The best way to address the challenge of homelessness is to ensure that households at-risk of becoming homeless remain housed. Homelessness prevention services including eviction prevention, coordinated discharge planning, and ongoing housing supports are priorities in ongoing service planning processes.

Strategic direction 2: Supporting the transition to housing

SSHA provides a range of emergency and transitional services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness to ensure that everyone has access to at least temporary accommodation and can meet their basic needs. Going forward, SSHA will seek to transform services for those experiencing homelessness from strictly temporary solutions into those focused on supporting a transition to permanent, stable housing.

Strategic direction 3: Creating housing opportunities

Whether it is the persistently high share of Toronto households that reside in unaffordable, unsuitable or inadequate housing, or the ever increasing number of applicants on the social housing waiting list, there are clear indications that Toronto faces a housing *opportunity* challenge.

In part this is a challenge met by the work of the City's Affordable Housing Office, which supports the development of new affordable housing stock, in addition to other vital programs. But SSHA has an equally important role to play in creating new housing opportunities for vulnerable Toronto households by working collaboratively with private sector landlords as well as affordable and social housing providers, providing direct financial assistance to increase affordability and by pursuing reforms to outdated policies and systems that may no longer meet today's housing needs.

Strategic direction 4: Fostering system stewardship and innovation

Moving from a system that is primarily focused on short-term emergency responses to one that is focused on long-term innovative solutions will improve residents' housing stability. But changes need to be made gradually so as not to destabilize the current service sector. SSHA will also pursue opportunities for system innovation, review and implement appropriate accountability measures, and protect and invest in assets over the long term.

Strategic direction 5: Improving access and equity

All Torontonians have a right to access housing and homelessness services that address their needs, without being disadvantaged as a result of identity, ability or where they reside in the city. SSHA is committed to ensuring that all households are treated in a fair and equitable manner when seeking housing assistance.

This includes connecting people to appropriate supports while recognizing that one-size does not fit all and that some people may require access to specialized services. Offering clients streamlined, coordinated, and equitable access to a range of housing services is necessary if people are to be connected with the right supports.

Strategic direction 6: Delivering high quality services

All clients are entitled to respectful and considerate treatment by SSHA-related service providers, from the individual receiving support in moving off the street to the household seeking to register for the social housing waiting list. SSHA will work with community partners to ensure that all City, agency and housing provider staff deliver high quality customer service. This will involve new staff training and development as necessary, quality assurance reviews, and housing service sector support initiatives that increase the quality of services being delivered. In addition, improving the collection and reporting of service information to ensure client-focused outcomes are being achieved is also key to high quality service delivery.

Strategic Direction 7: Pursue and strengthen partnerships and improve service coordination

The housing and homelessness services provided by the City of Toronto would not be possible without partnership and collaboration between SSHA and a wide range of

community sector agencies and service providers. However, there still exist a number of yet to be realized opportunities to enhance services for system users through further service integration and/or coordination and developing new partnerships. SSHA will engage on ways to enhance service delivery by leveraging existing opportunities, identify service needs and gaps, and implementing best practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework will guide SSHA's service planning and management over the next five years as it transforms the housing and homelessness services system into one focused on helping people achieve greater housing stability. The strategic directions and actions outlined in the framework are based on the important input and feedback collected through the Toronto Housing Services Consultations, other planning initiatives over the past year, and the challenges faced in delivering services that help people achieve greater housing stability.

Adoption of the attached service planning framework is the first step in SSHA's divisional planning process. As a critical next step, SSHA will develop a comprehensive community engagement framework in 2014 to support ongoing service planning. SSHA aims to continue the conversation started with stakeholders through the Toronto Housing Services Consultation. Key elements of a proposed ongoing community engagement strategy may include:

- A broad-based multi-stakeholder community leadership forum, to support ongoing service planning
- A process to engage with service users and people with lived experiences of homelessness
- Mechanisms to ensure that forums for consultation are inclusive of a broad range of stakeholders that include service users, community service providers, researchers and academic representatives, community leaders, other City divisions and representatives from other orders of government, City staff and the general public
- A range of modalities and formats for engagement that allow for enhanced opportunities for participation and varied input
- Mechanisms to ensure that stakeholder input and the outcome of the engagement process is reflected in policy and program decisions.

Other early actions the division will undertake in 2014 that are outlined in the framework and support and strengthen the strategic directions include:

- Developing detailed performance indicators to improve the collection and reporting of service information

- Continuing to support the City's advocacy to other orders of government for funding for social housing
- Reviewing and updating the current Shelter Standards
- Completing the review of the waiting list for social housing to create a proactive, coordinated access system for social housing.

CONTACT

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

SIGNATURE

Phillip Abrahams
General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

ATTACHMENT

2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework