



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Updated Toronto Shelter Standards

<b>Date:</b>	September 2, 2015
<b>To:</b>	Community Development and Recreation Committee
<b>From:</b>	General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

### SUMMARY

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This report seeks Council approval of the updated Toronto Shelter Standards (2015). Updating the Toronto Shelter Standards is a key action of the Housing Stability Services Planning Framework (HSSPF), adopted by Council in 2013.

The updated Toronto Shelter Standards reflect Shelter Support and Housing Administration's (SSHA) commitment to delivering high quality service that is client-centred and outcome focused. The document is the product of extensive stakeholder involvement. It reflects interests and concerns identified through client surveys, SSHA's complaint process and Quality Assurance Review, and takes into account leading practices, recent changes to applicable laws and municipal priorities.

The Toronto Shelter Standards are a clear set of expectations, guidelines and minimum requirements for the provision of shelter services in Toronto that, while raising the bar from previous versions, must remain attainable by shelter providers. Significant improvements to the Shelter Standards include new sections on Harm Reduction, Case Management and Service Planning with a Housing First focus, Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity and Facilities Management. Clearly set principles of service delivery, staff code of conduct and client expectations are complemented by enhanced standards for LGBTQ2S clients and new mandatory staff training requirements, such as customer service, LGBTQ2S cultural competency and LGBTQ2S youth inclusion, working with people who have disabilities, trauma informed care and harm reduction. Advancing SSHA's commitment to continuous improvement, the new Shelter Standards also have a changed structure, organization and layout that will make them easier to read, find information, reference and update.

The revised Toronto Shelter Standards support the ongoing effort to transform Toronto's housing and homelessness services into an integrated, client-centered, outcome-focused service system that improves the ability of clients to achieve greater housing stability.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the updated version of the Toronto Shelter Standards, as set out in Attachment 1, for implementation throughout the shelter system.

### **Implementation Points**

There will be a phased approach to implementation, with some revised Shelter standards taking effect upon Council approval and the majority in 2016 to facilitate an orderly implementation of new or updated requirements and to provide short-term operational stability for shelter providers as they transition to meet these requirements.

For example, new or revised documentation and reporting requirements will require SSHA to create new forms and templates and make SMIS enhancements in order to provide the tools necessary for shelter providers to comply with these requirements.

Similarly, new or revised training requirements will require new training content to be created or delivered and longer lead times for shelter providers to get their current staff base fully trained.

SSHA will continue to consult with shelter providers and the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness in the development of the implementation plan.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications for the 2015 Approved Operating Budget for SSHA resulting from the adoption of this report.

The implementation of the new Shelter Standards may impact the operations of directly operated and purchase of service shelter providers. However, no direct operating costs for SSHA arise from the approval of the Shelter Standards. SSHA will work with providers to identify implementation related needs and potential strategies to address these.

If there were to be any financial impacts in 2016 that cannot be absorbed through the divisional budget, these will be separately reported to City Council.

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

## Equity Impact

Housing and homelessness services, including Toronto's shelter system, serve a range of equity seeking groups including people experiencing homelessness, the working poor, youth, seniors, Aboriginal people, and other vulnerable groups. Consultations on revisions and updates to the Shelter Standards took into account various stakeholder needs including the experience of Aboriginal clients, members of the LGBTQ2S community, clients with substance use challenges, clients with disabilities, families and seniors.

## DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of November 26, 27, 28 and 29, 2002, City Council adopted the most recent version of the Toronto Shelter Standards.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2002/agendas/council/cc021126/cms10rpt/cl006.pdf>

At its meeting of July 19, 20, 21 and 26, 2005, City Council was provided with a report on Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's Quality Assurance (QA) Review process, which described the QA process and its role in monitoring compliance with the Shelter Standards.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc050719/cms6rpt/cl014.pdf>

At its meeting of December 16, 17 and 18, 2013, City Council unanimously adopted the 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework. The framework includes nine strategic directions and a number of key actions to transform Toronto's housing stability service system. These included the review and update of the Shelter Standards.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.10>

## ISSUE BACKGROUND

The delivery of emergency shelter services in Ontario is discretionary. Unlike other human services (e.g., childcare services, long-term care services) there is no dedicated legislation or regulations regarding how such services are delivered.

In the absence of provincial standards, the City of Toronto developed shelter standards to provide City-funded shelter providers and shelter clients with a clear set of expectations and guidelines for service with the aim of ensuring that people who seek shelter services in the city are provided with a consistent and standard level of service regardless of how they access or request the service.

This is particularly important because the size of the City's homeless shelter system – the City funds approximately 4,000 shelter beds spread over 59 shelter locations - and the corresponding potential for varying levels of support services and customer service.

The first version of a standards document was released as the *Hostel Standard and Guidelines* (1992), which were expanded and enhanced in the next version called the

*Hostel Standards* (1997), which in turn were significantly revised and released as the *Toronto Shelter Standards* (2002).

The City subsequently developed a quality assurance (QA) review process to ensure that agencies were meeting the requirements of the Shelter Standards and also introduced the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS), a web-based information management system implemented in all City-funded shelters, that automated manually-intensive work practices, increased the efficiency of managing and administering the Toronto shelter system, and provided more responsive and coordinated client services in all shelters across the City.

The Shelter Standards, in conjunction with the QA process and SMIS, allow the City to establish a common set of operational requirements and work towards an emergency shelter system where there is a high degree of consistency in key services regardless of who the client is or where the client seeks shelter.

## **COMMENTS**

In December 2013, City Council unanimously approved the Housing Stability Service Planning Framework (HSSPF), SSHA's five year strategy that guides the planning and management of Toronto's housing and homelessness service system. Since the adoption of the framework, SSHA has embarked on multiple key actions that together aim to transform the shelter system to provide better customer service, improve coordination and enhance outcomes for clients.

The Shelter Standards play a key role in supporting the transformation of the shelter system to being client-focused and outcome based with the main objective of supporting housing stability. In this context, the revised Shelter Standards form a platform for shelter operations that is flexible enough to respond to changes expected through the realization of other service enhancements, such as the introduction of the harm reduction framework.

## **How the Shelter Standards were updated**

The process of updating the shelter standards took into consideration the many service advances and legislative changes that had occurred since the previous version was approved by Council in 2002. The project proceeded in two main phases; first came research and information gathering, then consultation and engagement.

### **An Emphasis on Solid Research**

The research phase focused on gathering and analysing relevant information that could inform the update and form the basis for the consultation. The following key activities occurred during this phase:

## 1. Quality Assurance Review Surveys

As part the Quality Assurance review process, two surveys were conducted to help identify key areas for consideration in the updated Shelter Standards:

- a. Shelter Provider Access Survey
- b. Client Satisfaction Survey

The *Shelter Provider Access Survey* focused on the performance of City-funded homeless shelter providers, Central Intake, Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre and 311 in providing intake or access services as part of the overall process to access shelter services.

The *Client Satisfaction Survey* focused on gathering feedback from shelter residents on their perspective of the effectiveness of the Toronto Shelter Standards in supporting them to end their homelessness and to identify where Shelter Standards fell short.

Findings from these two surveys and the Ombudsman's comments on them have fed into the update of the standards.

## 2. Environmental Scan

SSHA reviewed the shelter standards or equivalent documents from other jurisdictions in Ontario (including Ottawa, Durham, Waterloo, London, Peel and Hamilton), Canada (Manitoba) and the United States (Philadelphia and San Francisco) to determine whether there were any lessons or leading practices from other jurisdictions that could benefit Toronto's Shelter Standards in terms of content, form or structure.

## 3. Literature/Document Review

As part of this component of the review, SSHA reviewed all applicable laws, guidelines and other reference standards, as well as past Hostel Services Guidelines issued by the City for potential inclusion in the updated standards.

## **A Consultative and Inclusive Process**

Because of the impact of the Shelter Standards on the service users, shelter service providers and allied services, it was important to have a thorough, inclusive and consultative process. The following engagement activities were undertaken:

### 1. Work Groups

Ten external Work Groups were convened, each tasked with reviewing the Shelter Standards through a particular lens (e.g., LGBTQ2S youth, access, case

management and housing, health and safety, food and nutrition, etc.) and submitting proposals to update them. Approximately one hundred work group members participated, representing shelter providers, other homeless service providers, health care providers, social service practitioners, researchers, City divisions and other interested organizations.

The proposals from all Work Groups were reviewed and assessed, and provided the basis for the revised Shelter Standards.

## 2. Shelter Provider Focus Groups

In addition to the Work Groups, three focus groups with niche shelter providers (including transitional shelters, family shelters and shelters that serve newcomers to Canada) were convened to ensure their unique operational issues, challenges, and program limitations were adequately considered.

The Shelter Provider Reference Group, comprised of representatives from all shelter sectors and shelter access centres, and the Youth Shelter Interagency Network were also consulted on key proposals or aspects of the draft standards that required further consideration.

Additionally, an information session was hosted by SSHA to brief shelter providers on how the Shelter Standards update process was proceeding and to share key proposals from the Work Groups.

## 3. Shelter User Focus Groups

SSHA also sought service user input. Fifteen focus groups were arranged giving representatives of specific shelter client groups (e.g. LGBTQ2S youth, seniors, Aboriginals, people with disabilities and youth) the opportunity to review various aspects of the revised Shelter Standards and provide any other general input that could help to improve them.

## 4. Web-based Public Consultations

A draft of the revised Shelter Standards was released for public input over a four week period between May 6 and June 2, 2015. During this time, there were approximately 350 visits to the consultation web page and the draft document was downloaded approximately 300 times. More than 90 respondents submitted feedback.

## 5. City Review

The draft revised document was circulated to relevant City officials within Legal Services, Human Resources, Toronto Public Health, Corporate Information Management Services and the Ombudsman's Office to ensure that the document

did not contain requirements that would present issues from a legal, employment, public health, or privacy perspective.

## **The Revised Toronto Shelter Standards (2015)**

The engagement process described above generated over 900 suggestions for revisions to the existing Shelter Standards, all of which were given full consideration. The new edition of the Toronto Shelter Standards is attached to this report. Improvements over previous versions include:

- Clearly set principles of service delivery, staff code of conduct, client expectations
- New sections on case management and service planning focused on Housing First, sector specific requirements, client specific requirements, harm reduction, services to LGBTQ2S clients, facilities management, emergency preparedness and business continuity and human resources
- New mandatory training, such as: customer service, LGBTQ2S cultural competency, harm reduction, trauma-informed care, working with people who have disabilities
- Improvements to structure, organization, and layout to make it easier to locate information, reference and read
- Use of new technology: interactivity of content, searchable electronic format with live links, to facilitate use

## **Conclusion**

The Shelter Standards are used by a wide group of stakeholders. Shelter clients rely on the standards to better understand their rights and responsibilities, and as a basis for making a complaint about the service or treatment they receive during their stay at a shelter. Shelter providers rely on the standards for clarity and guidance in developing and providing shelter services, staff development and expectations and working with their clients. Advocates use the standards as a baseline expectation of services, measuring the City and agencies against these. Other jurisdictions in Ontario, Canada and North America have used the Shelter Standards as the basis of their own standards or to inform their delivery of shelter services.

Updating of the Shelter Standards complements other initiatives to support clients' transition to housing, fostering system stewardship and innovation, improving access and equity, delivering high quality shelter services and providing a platform for stakeholder engagement. The updated Shelter Standards are a set of minimum expectations for service delivery that will assist the City to establish a common set of operational

requirements creating a high degree of consistency in the delivery of shelter services while ensuring that they are client-centred and respectful of client diversity. The Shelter Standards are a valuable tool contributing to quality assurance, accountability and enterprise risk management.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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## **ATTACHMENT**

1. Draft Toronto Shelter Standards (2015)