

Clarifying current criteria and proposed changes to the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF)

Date: December 12, 2016

To: City Council

From: General Manager, Employment & Social Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

At the November 29th, 2016 meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee, a *Motion to Amend* was put forward to further clarify current criteria and to expand eligibility for the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF). This report further clarifies the proposed changes for expanding eligibility for clients accessing the HSF.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no additional financial impacts resulting from this report. The financial impact remains unchanged as outlined in the Report for Action: *Update on the Delivery of the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF)*.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD16.6>

DECISION HISTORY

On November 29, 2016, Community Development and Recreation Committee adopted the *Motion to Amend*, stating "The General Manager, Toronto Employment and Social Services report directly to City Council at its next meeting, clarifying current criteria and expanding eligibility criteria for clients accessing the Housing Stabilization Fund."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD16.6>

COMMENTS

This report further clarifies the proposed changes to the HSF as outlined in the Report for Action: *Update on the Delivery of the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF)*. A number of changes have been noted that aim to more closely align the administration and delivery of the fund to core principles: reducing administrative complexity and

inconsistencies, providing integrated case management, and embedding transparency and flexibility into the overall administration of the program.

Below is a more detailed breakdown of the changes, including the anticipated timelines and the proposed approach that will be undertaken to bring these changes into effect.

| Current Status | Proposed Change(s) | Timelines |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <p>Prior to December 1, 2016 the City website did not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify how much is issued for the replacement of beds due to bed bug infestations; or - Identify a service standard for rendering eligibility decisions for HSF requests. | <p>Clarification / Transparency TESS to update City website (including the new Benefits and Services Finder) to reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific amounts for the replacement of beds as a result of bed bug infestations (\$300 for a single/twin bed and/or \$500 for a double/queen bed). • Service standard for processing applications within 4 business days of receiving required documentation. • Actively undertake outreach to community agencies and advocacy groups to ensure they are informed about the fund. | <p>December 1, 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Prior to December 1, 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TESS piloted approaches to improve the HSF application process for ODSP clients. | <p>Improving Service to ODSP Clients for HSF Applications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered HSF orientation sessions to all ODSP staff. • Implemented an HSF tool for ODSP caseworkers to better identify client need. • Streamlined the HSF application process for ODSP clients by dedicating a team of staff to manage requests to ensure more consistent decision making and provide better client service. | <p>December 1, 2016</p> |
| <p>Eligibility for HSF includes a financial assessment of income and assets.</p> | <p>Eliminate Financial Assessment of Income and Assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All low income residents who qualify for OW/ODSP will automatically meet the primary test of financial need. • As per the fund's intent, HSF will continue to be issued to OW or ODSP clients to prevent homelessness or address emergency housing needs. | <p>December 15, 2016</p> |

| Current Status | Proposed Change(s) | Timelines |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Documentation to verify client's emergency housing situation is required in order to determine eligibility for HSF (e.g., verification of pest control treatment, eviction notices). | Streamline Documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce or eliminate the need for specific documentation to process HSF applications. | Second Quarter 2017 |
| Clients receive funds for the replacement of beds, and are required to provide verification that two pest control treatments have been completed in order to receive HSF. | Address Bed Bug Infestations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On an interim basis, pending consultation with TPH, expand criteria for the replacement of furniture due to bed bug infestations to include soft furniture in addition to beds. Work with TPH to develop effective service responses to the issue of bed bug infestations impacting social assistance clients, including education, awareness and prevention. | First Quarter 2017 Second Quarter 2017 |
| Clients are issued HSF based on actual documented costs and need, up to a maximum (based on family size). | Introduce Flat Rates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement flat rates for the issuances of essential furniture and moving costs. | Second Quarter 2017 |
| HSF applicants receive letters identifying ineligibility and information about how to appeal to the Decision Review Committee is available. | Improve Communication of Decisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve communications to ensure clients are clearly informed of the reason(s) for eligibility / ineligibility (e.g. plain language client letters). Provide information about the Decision Review Committee (DRC) membership, functions and operations. | First Quarter 2017 |

Process and Approach

Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) will use information gathered from consultations, seek stakeholder input, and review internal practices to implement changes and further improve the delivery of HSF.

In relation to the implementation of flat rates, TESS will conduct a series of consultations with stakeholders (clients, community agencies) to help determine the

specific needs of clients related to essential furniture and moving costs. In addition, TESS will also use a range of data and information (e.g. client consultations, estimates of the costs of furniture items) to establish flat rates that best meet client needs, taking into account the HSF program's budget, which is capped. TESS will continue to improve online, in person and paper based channels to communicate information about the HSF to social assistance clients and the community.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS
