



## REPORT FOR ACTION

**2017-18 Out of the Cold Operations**

**Date:** July 6, 2018

**To:** Community Development and Recreation Committee

**From:** General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

**Wards:** All

**SUMMARY**

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At its meeting on June 13, 2018, the Community Development and Recreation Committee (CDRC) considered a report submitted by the Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness (ICFH) regarding the operation of the Out of the Cold (OOTC) sites during the 2017/2018 winter season (CD29.10). The Committee directed the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) to consult with OOTC site coordinators and other stakeholders on concerns brought forward by the ICFH, and report back to CDRC at their meeting on July 11, 2018. This report responds to that request.

As directed, SSHA consulted with key stakeholders through a meeting with members of the ICFH, an online survey of OOTC site coordinators, and a meeting with site coordinators organized by Dixon Hall. Discussion was centred on how to improve client outcomes through provision of additional harm reduction resources, health and housing services and the continuation of safe and welcoming spaces through the provision of appropriate cleaning and site staffing resources.

Building on the feedback received on the 2017/2018 season, SSHA will work closely with Dixon Hall, site coordinators, and the ICFH, to improve programming supports for the OOTC in advance of the 2018/2019 winter season. Additionally, SSHA will engage with appropriate stakeholders, such as Toronto Public Health (TPH) and the Toronto Central LHIN, to identify opportunities to further health services for OOTC service users.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. Community Development and Recreation Committee direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to increase the frequency of meetings with Out of the Cold site coordinators, and identify other opportunities for site coordinator engagement;

2. Community Development and Recreation Committee direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to work with Dixon Hall to improve the consistency, quality, and responsiveness of both the Out of the Cold cleaning and on-site staff supports and monitor effectiveness of implementation; and

3. Community Development and Recreation Committee direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to engage with the Out of the Cold coordinators, Dixon Hall, Toronto Public Health, and the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network to assess opportunities to further health services and supports for Out of the Cold service users.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

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

## **EQUITY IMPACT**

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Services for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto serve equity-seeking groups including seniors, women, members of LGBTQ2S communities, people with disabilities, individuals with mental health and/or substance use issues, the working poor, and other vulnerable groups. Effective operation of the shelter system and its allied services including 24-hour respites sites and Out of the Cold sites is important in ensuring that temporary emergency accommodation is available to equity seeking-groups, and that these vulnerable residents are assisted to move into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting of June 13, 2018, Community Development and Recreation Committee (CDRC) considered item CD29.10 “Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness - Out of the Cold Shelters.” The Committee requested that the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration consult with Out of the Cold site coordinators regarding the issues outlined in the report, with a view to improving City supports, and report back to CDRC at its July 11, 2018 meeting on the development of a 2018-2019 support strategy for the OOTC program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD29.10>

## **COMMENTS**

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The Out of the Cold (OOTC) program is a seasonal (November to April) meal and overnight program that is delivered by inter-denominational faith-based groups across the City of Toronto. It has been operating for over 30 years through the work of dedicated volunteers.

The OOTC program is coordinated by Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services (Dixon Hall), which receives funding from Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA). Dixon Hall is responsible for providing each site with the appropriate level of resources, including staffing, cleaning, and other supports as needed. Dixon Hall's main point of contact at each OOTC site is the site coordinator, a lead volunteer from the faith-based group.

The capacity of each OOTC location ranges from 15 to 80 spaces, with up to four sites operating per night. On average, each night 97 spaces are available. Service users consistently report a very high level of satisfaction with the programs they use during the winter.

Given clients' high levels of satisfaction with the OOTC program and that they are low-barrier programs, the OOTC sites tend to be well-used over the course of the winter. For the 2017/2018 season, SSHA, through Dixon Hall, made an additional \$80,000 in funding available to the OOTC sites: \$30,000 to subsidize the cost of food and \$50,000 for repairs and maintenance costs.

### **Consultation with OOTC Site Coordinators**

The ICFH report, presented to Community Development and Recreation Committee on June 13, 2018, raised several issues related to the 2017/2018 season including: cleaning, infection prevention and control, harm reduction and opioid-use, health care supports, housing supports, the OOTC staffing model, and financial supports provided to the OOTCs.

In response, between June 21, 2018 and June 25, 2018, SSHA staff conducted an online survey targeting the OOTC site coordinators and seeking their feedback on the issues identified in the ICFH report. The survey's purpose was to better understand what types of supports were available at each site, what worked well and what could be improved during the 2018/2019 season. Unfortunately due to the short time frame, only two survey responses were received.

On June 27, 2018, SSHA senior management met with members of the ICFH to better understand the issues raised in the report and seek clarification as needed. In addition, SSHA attended the regularly scheduled site coordinator meeting at Dixon Hall on June 28, 2018 to provide site coordinators with another opportunity to offer feedback about the 2017/2018 OOTC season.

Although there are many issues raised in the ICFH report, the preliminary consultations also indicated some positive program components to build upon, including:

- Dixon Hall staff on site provided excellent support to guests and volunteers;
- Support from a dedicated client intervention worker at Dixon Hall has made a significant difference in housing outcomes for guests at OOTC sites with over 160 guests housed since January 2016; and
- The provision of funding to offset food and repair costs was recognized as an improvement for the 2017/2018 season.

Other program components recognized as strengths by some program coordinators were not operationalized consistently from site to site, including:

- There are a variety of staffing models for the provision of cleaning services, which results in the level of cleaning support varying by site;
- Dixon Hall staff who work at OOTC sites were trained in harm reduction and overdose response prior to the 2017/2018 season and carried naloxone kits with them at all times while onsite. In addition, sharps containers were provided by Dixon Hall staff to OOTC sites on some occasions. However, it was clear from the consultations that not all site coordinators knew these supports were available; and
- While some OOTC sites were provided with consistent, effective health supports, including doctors and nurses, there was inconsistency across sites in the frequency and types of supports available.

Overall, financial supports, cleaning supports, infection prevention and control, and health supports were priority program areas in need of improvement ahead of the next OOTC season. Some preliminary actions were identified through the consultations:

- SSHA will coordinate a training session for site coordinators prior to the 2018-19 season and additional supports in infection prevention and control will be assessed following the training;
- At the meeting on June 28, site coordinators agreed to request sharps containers from Dixon Hall in advance of the 2018-19 season, recognizing the value in having containers available for guests; and
- A key issue with respect to obtaining adequate financial resources is donor fatigue. The site coordinators will work with Dixon Hall to discuss options for a coordinated fundraising model for the program, rather than ongoing reliance on site-specific donors.

## **Preparation and Planning for 2018/2019 OOTC Season**

Given the issues raised through the ICFH report and the subsequent consultations with the OOTC site coordinators, SSHA will enhance engagement with the OOTC site coordinators in order to address concerns in a more timely way. The frequency of site coordinator meetings, prior to, during, and post season, will increase, and staff will identify other engagement opportunities as needed.

Specifically, SSHA will work with Dixon Hall to improve the consistency, quality, and responsiveness of both cleaning and on-site staff, and explore opportunities to enhance service supports at OOTC sites.

TPH the Works continues to make both training and supplies for drug-related harm reduction available to the OOTC sites through Dixon Hall. This includes naloxone and sharps containers. All OOTC operators will be provided with sharps containers for use at their site.

TPH has created an infection prevention and control (IPAC) guidance document that provides evidence-based best practices for shelters and shelter-like settings. Dixon Hall has already received "train the trainer" training on the guidance document and will be prepared to build upon their existing IPAC practices. SSHA will work with the OOTC sites, Dixon Hall, and TPH on translating the IPAC guidance document into a concise IPAC cleaning guide for OOTC sites that is clear and easy to understand.

Lastly, SSHA will continue to engage with the OOTC, Dixon Hall, TPH, and the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) to assess opportunities to improve health-related supports for the OOTC program. The Toronto Central LHIN has expressed their commitment to working with the City and service delivery partners to deliver health services to individuals experiencing homelessness in shelters and shelter-like settings such as the OOTC sites.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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