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Report 2024-102

Report Title: Homelessness and Encampment Response Report

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Council Meeting Date: August 14, 2024

Report Not Considered by

Standing Committee Because:

- Time-sensitive Issue (information received too late for Committee consideration)
- Urgent Matter (issue arose after this month's Committee meeting)
- Other

Strategic Plan Priorities: Innovate for Service Excellence
 Ignite Economic Opportunity
 Foster a Thriving Community
 Propel Sustainable Growth
 Champion a Vibrant Future

Recommendation

"That County Council receive Report 2024-102 'Homelessness and Encampment Response Report' for information."

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the broader County's approach and response to homelessness, and the services provided to residents at the Brookside Encampment as requested by Council on June 19, 2024.

Background

The County as Service Manager oversees the housing and homelessness system as outlined in the *Housing Services Act, 2011* and is guided by the 10-year housing and homelessness plan.

County's Response to Homelessness

Northumberland County's response to homelessness recognizes that every individual is unique and has their own variety of needs at varying degrees. It should be noted that a formal strategy document has not been created but is under consideration for implementation in the future, following the renewal of the 10-year housing and homelessness plan.

The County's response to homelessness is guided by Northumberland County's core values:

- **Accountability** – Human and financial resources used to address homelessness are investments in our community that reduce public costs in other areas.
- **Care and Support** – Individuals and their experiences remain at the center of all planning and development of next steps. Acknowledging that everyone has autonomy over their choices.
- **Collaboration and Communication** – Recognition that the private, public, lived experience, and volunteers are all needed parts to ensure we remain authentic in our work.
- **Honesty and Integrity** – Recognition that everyone in our community deserves access to supports and that homelessness is a housing status only.
- **Innovation and Excellence** – Creating more opportunities for housing options including new transitional units, rent supplements, and diversion options.
- **Mutual Trust and Respect** – Effective relationships built on mutual trust are the foundation for moving someone forward.

The County is committed to addressing homelessness through a people-centered service approach that emphasizes compassion, collaboration, and operational excellence, ensuring that all individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, regardless of their situation or location within the County, receive equitable and comprehensive support.

Implementing the response

The County's current response to homelessness includes the following measures to ensure that every individual in the County has access to the necessary supports and services:

- Enhanced Outreach Initiatives
- Housing-focused conversations
 - Diversion (exploring alternate housing options on an individual basis)
 - Eviction Prevention Interventions
 - Understanding current and previous housing arrangements and current housing goals
- Flexible Scheduling (responding quickly, place-based services)
- Increased Collaboration
 - Community partners
 - Local businesses/community members
- Building Trust
 - Individuals experiencing homelessness

- Local community members/businesses
- System navigation and support
- Shelter engagement
- Wrap-around case management for individuals
- Continued follow-up after engagement for continued success

Community and Social Services staff, in coordination with other community services, assist individuals living outdoors or precariously housed in accessing shelter or permanent housing. This includes guidance on navigating the system to ensure seamless access to resources.

Specific examples of the direct services clients are able to receive through the homelessness response system include:

- Developing a housing plan
- Accessing income
- Completing housing applications
- Accompanying to unit viewings
- Assisting with lease signings
- Connecting with health care
- Substance use supports and referrals to treatment
- Referrals for mental health supports
- Referrals to legal supports
- Referrals to financial assistance (including opening bank accounts)
- Assisting with replacing ID

Additionally, staff will coordinate ongoing support when individuals transition to shelter or permanent housing to ensure their continued success.

Homelessness response is not a linear process and requires all supports to be considered on an individual basis, some individuals will require more support than others, and the services sought may change on a day-to-day basis. Success in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness is contingent on meeting people where they are at, without judgement.

Brookside Encampment Response

In July 2023, a private residence was vacated and residents were required to leave the premise due to safety concerns flagged by the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit and Town of Cobourg authorities during site inspections. Upon notification of this pending order to vacate from the Town, County staff worked with the Red Cross on this emergency evacuation, who provided legal tenants of the residence with temporary motel accommodations. County staff and Northumberland Hills Hospital-Community Mental Health Services – Mental Health Outreach staff, and other community partners supported displaced individuals with regular visits and connections, offering individual supports, including diversion, referrals to shelter and supporting food security needs.

Immediately following the order to vacate the property, County staff worked with the Town of Cobourg, along with community partners to coordinate a response to those displaced. Actions taken by the County included:

- Advocated to the Town of Cobourg for a temporary increase of bed capacity at Transition House. This was granted by the Cobourg Fire Services and capacity was expanded from 18 to 22 beds (this increased capacity continues presently).
 - All individuals accommodated by the Red Cross were referred directly to the shelter and spaces were temporarily held for these individuals.
- Continued outreach with individuals to support individualized housing plans.

Following the end of Red Cross emergency response, some of the displaced individuals chose not to access shelter supports and set up an encampment at the West Beach in Cobourg. Again, shelter and outreach services were offered to individuals at the West Beach. The Town of Cobourg issued a No-Trespass Order and the encampment relocated to 600 William Street.

Shelter and outreach services continued to be provided to residents at the encampment at 600 William Street on an individual basis, including shelter system navigation (to both Transition House and Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre). System supports for these residents transitioning from the encampment continued to expand to include:

- Transportation to shelters or alternate housing options.
- Rental of a sea-can for storage of belongings while individuals were in transition from 600 William.
- Secured an additional 8 sheltering spaces at a motel (still available currently).
- Provided portable washroom facilities.

In addition, the County employed security at this site, recognizing that this was a 24/7 operating Paramedic base, and Paramedics required secure and quick exit and entry to site when responding to emergencies.

In September 2023, a No-Trespass Order was issued and individuals relocated from 600 William Street to the former Brookside Youth Detention property, informally known in the community as the Brookside Encampment, where they continue to reside.

Since September, outreach services that include case management with community social and health agencies have been consistently provided on-site and in community multiple times per week (including County, NHH-CMHS, Cobourg Police Services-Homelessness Addiction Recovery Program (HARP), Help Centre, and others).

Services provided to individuals at Brookside include:

- **Diversion and Housing:** Facilitating successful diversion options such as returning individuals to families, accessing emergency shelters, treatment programs, and permanent housing, as well as reconnecting with home communities for additional support.
- **Treatment and Support:** Assisting with treatment intakes, including one individual who completed a 30-day program and transitioned to a 4-month program in Western Ontario, applied for Ontario Works financial assistance, and reconnected with family.
- **Housing and Financial Assistance:** Supporting applications for both market and rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing, as well as rent supplements.
- **Medical and Personal Services:** Helping individuals find doctors, re-establish family relationships, provide cell phones, and offering wound care through Northumberland County Community Paramedicine.

- **Victim and Food Support:** Assisting victims of intimate partner violence and addressing food insecurity.
- **Assessment:** Conducting Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) assessments.

These efforts continue to ensure that individuals who are residing at Brookside, receive the same comprehensive support and services as individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness across the County.

In addition, the County has continued to fund additional shelter spaces at a motel to support individuals looking to leave the encampment and have supported individuals in diversion options to secure housing and shelter.

It is estimated that the additional costs associated with Brookside encampment support provision (not including costs incurred for response at 600 William Street, or staff time) is approximately \$170,000 (a detailed cost breakdown is identified in the Financial Impact section). These costs are a combination of redirected provincial homelessness funding and direct unbudgeted impact to the County levy.

Consultations

The information provided was compiled from information provided by County staff and community outreach teams.

Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations

The Housing Services Act, 2011 (HSA) is the legislative authority guiding the County's response in governing the provision of housing and homelessness services.

Risk Considerations

Throughout the County's response to the encampment at Brookside, potential risks have been considered. Some of the key risks that have been factored into the response include:

- **Safety at Brookside:** The County as an employer has obligations to ensure workers are safe in the completion of their work, staff have been provided with proper PPE and consider other safety protocols to ensure safety on-site (currently outreach staff are required to double up). In addition, the County has worked with partners to support the safety of residents at the encampment, where it is within the County's jurisdiction – this includes wellness clinics, provision of cell phones, supporting safety planning, etc.
- **System Capacity:** The homelessness system within Northumberland, like many across the Province, is working to ensure that there is capacity in the system to meet the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness throughout the County. It is anticipated that 310 Division Street will reduce identified barriers to shelter access for individuals living rough across the County, including at Brookside. This also includes financial limitations within funding allocations from the province and balancing the impact to the County levy to fund the system. In addition, staff across the sector are approaching burnout, it is critical that all system partners are supported to ensure quality services are provided effectively.

- **Neighbours/Community:** The County acknowledges and recognizes the legitimate safety concerns neighbours to Brookside have. The County continues to encourage neighbours with immediate safety concerns to contact the Cobourg Police Services. In addition, outreach workers continue to engage with local businesses as required to address concerns.
- **Compounding Systems:** A response to homelessness, and specifically Brookside, is greatly impacted by compounding systems outside of the County's jurisdiction that impact individual capacity to seek housing and other support services. These systems include: social assistance, availability of supportive and transitional housing (including operating dollars to run these programs), and the availability of mental health and addictions supports.
- **Stigma:** At present, there is a growing vocal opposition to individuals experiencing homelessness in Northumberland and across the province, this has the potential to impact the willingness and ability of individuals experiencing homelessness to seek supports within the sheltering system, in attempts to avoid the stigma or hurtful remarks being made publicly. The County is working to support all community members in feeling safe in their community, including those without permanent housing.

Addressing these risks will require careful planning, ongoing monitoring, and proactive management to ensure that the response remains effective and sustainable.

Discussion / Options

Continued Response to the Encampment at Brookside

The County remains committed to ensuring the homelessness system can respond to the needs of individuals residing at the Brookside encampment. The County continues to push forward with an expedited opening of 310 Division Street to offer modernized sheltering options to individuals in the County. In addition, the County is continuing to consider options to build more permanent capacity to support more individuals experiencing homelessness including:

- The extension of the warming hub services to a year-round drop-in centre for individuals without safe shelter 24/7.
- Increased sheltering spaces to approximately 35.
- Continued ability to offer alternate sheltering spaces on an individual and ad-hoc basis in motels.
- Introduction of more supportive and transitional housing opportunities, including at 310 Division Street and in other locations, including advocacy for additional funding to build these critical housing supports.
- Enhanced outreach services across the County to offer services to individuals living rough.

The County has heard through media reports that Brookside is in the process of being sold, the County continues to work with community partners to continue supporting individuals residing at Brookside. Should the sale proceed, and individuals are removed from the site, the County will work with Infrastructure Ontario to seek notification of timing for this removal and will convene system partners in planning a response on-site and in the community to support diversion, shelter admittance and other services required by those at Brookside.

Next Steps: Longer Term Planning

To effectively address homelessness and mitigate associated risks, Northumberland County's Community and Social Services, in collaboration with county partners and key stakeholders, will lead the development and implementation of a comprehensive Homelessness Response Strategy and will bring forward a request to Council to seek dedicated funds to implement this initiative. This broad system strategy will build off the renewal of the County's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, that will develop a set of principles to guide the work of the County and will include community engagement, including those with lived or living experience of homelessness.

The plan will need to align with provincial direction related to the legislative Housing and Homelessness Plans, including funding provided through the Provincial Homelessness Prevention Plan.

The strategy will be County-wide and include key service areas such as: social services, police, health, mental health, addictions, housing, emergency shelter services, food banks, meal programs, crisis programs, employment services, by-law, community members and businesses.

It will require further integration of services, role clarity between organizations, enhanced collaboration and communication, stakeholder engagement, information sharing, budget management and resource allocation. This plan will service to enhance Northumberland County's response homelessness, managing associated risks effectively, and improving outcomes for individuals in need.

Financial Impact

The financial impact of this report includes broader homelessness system response considered within the annual budget process and unplanned costs related to the response to the encampment at Brookside.

Annual Costs and Associated Service Agreements for Homelessness Response

Transition House Emergency Shelter	\$506,000
Transition House Stabilization Plan	\$100,000
Transition House Motel Overflow	\$115,000
Transition House Family Diversion	\$192,000
Transition House Warming Hub	\$90,000
St. Peter's Warming Hub - Rent	\$63,700
St Peter's Warming Hub - Ad Hoc	\$7,500
K9 Security Warming Hub	\$284,608
NHH-CMHS Mental Health Outreach (2 positions)	\$220,000
The Help Centre Housing Support Worker	\$80,000

NCSS – Outreach (3 positions)	\$299,286.96
Total	\$1,958,308.96

The following table provides a high-level breakdown of costs related directly to the response to the encampment at Brookside)

Client Supports (including transportation, food security initiatives and cell phone purchases)	~\$8,700
Wellness Days (July 2024)	~\$5,000
Extra motel spaces (since September 2023)	~ \$155,000
Total	~\$168,700

These expenses reflect some of the additional financial impact of supporting individuals residing at Brookside. While these costs are documented, there are additional, less visible expenses that may not be fully captured including:

- Social Service Support Costs: Expenses related to operational adjustments necessary to support the encampment.
- Other Budget Impacts: This report does not provide a breakdown at this time of potential other costs related to County departments including Community Paramedics, Legislative and Legal services, Corporate Services and Public Works.

Member Municipality Impacts

Encampments (including the one at Brookside) and broader homelessness services impact member municipalities countywide. The increased demand for services and support has placed additional strain on local resources and infrastructure. This situation necessitates a collaborative approach to managing resources effectively and ensuring that the needs of all residents, including those experiencing homelessness (living rough, precariously sheltered, residing in emergency shelters or at risk of homelessness), are adequately met across the County.

Conclusion / Outcomes

That the Council receive this report for information as an update on the County’s homelessness system response.

Attachments

NA