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## Report 2022-112

**Report Title:** Homelessness System Response

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**Reviewed by:** Jennifer Moore  
CAO  
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**Approved by:** Jennifer Moore, CAO

**Council Meeting Date:** July 20, 2022

**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:** ☐ Economic Prosperity and Innovation  
☐ Sustainable Growth  
☒ Thriving and Inclusive Communities  
☐ Leadership in Change

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### Recommendation

**“Whereas** delegations regarding homelessness and encampments were heard at the July 6, 2022 Social Services Committee; and

**Whereas** the Committee directed County staff to provide a report to the July 20th 2022 Council meeting regarding Northumberland County programs and services that support housing and homelessness; and

**Whereas** the Committee directed staff to continue their collaborations and discussions with the Town of Cobourg to investigate potential options and proposals; and

**Whereas** staff prepared Report 2022-112 'Homelessness System Response', for Council's consideration at its July 20th; 2022 meeting.

**Be It Resolved That** Council direct staff to continue engagement with the Town of Cobourg and Cobourg's Police Service's Homelessness Addiction Resource Project (HARP), in response to concerns of individuals living unsheltered in Cobourg; and

**Further Be It Resolved That** County Council direct staff to continue engagement with the member municipalities and staff, including By-law enforcement, Fire, and Police Services."

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## **Purpose**

A report following a motion by the Social Services Committee on the programs and services that Northumberland County delivers regarding housing and homelessness supports and recommending ongoing collaboration with Town of Cobourg.

## **Background**

At its meeting on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Social Services Committee approved the following motion:

"That the Social Services Committee direct staff to prepare a report for consideration at the July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Council meeting regarding the programs and services that Northumberland County delivers regarding the housing and homelessness supports; and

Further That the Committee direct County staff to continue their collaborations and discussions with the Town of Cobourg staff, to investigate potential options and various proposals, and provide information to County Council at the July 20<sup>th</sup> meeting"

## **Understanding Unsheltered Homelessness**

*People that are unsheltered, generally fit into one of three categories of unsheltered living:*

- 1. Those that remain at or near a fixed location of the encampment. These tend to be situations where there are structures and an encampment.*
- 2. Those that move from location to location frequently while remaining unsheltered. People living in vehicles frequently fall into this category, as do some people that live in tents; however, many people in this category will assess different options for where to sleep rough nightly such as an ATM vestibule, alcove of a business, under awning, in laneways, and sometimes the likes of park benches.*
- 3. Those that were unprepared for being unsheltered and are more likely to be unsheltered for just a night or two until other services are accessed or other temporary solutions are found to accommodate the person.*

*(Excerpt from It takes a Village Practical Guidance for Authorized Homeless Encampments)*

*Amongst people living in more structured encampments, data and research suggest that the following characteristics are frequently encountered:*

- *Chronic homelessness*
- *Greater lengths of homelessness*
- *Substance use disorder*
- *Brain injury*
- *Mental illness*
- *PTSD*
- *Chronic disease*

*These characteristics can be a challenge for engagement and relationship building to examine solutions to living outdoors. As such, timelines to take action to resolve encampments either voluntarily or through forced closure need to account for the potential complexity of engaging with the population to be served*

*(Excerpt from Greater Sudbury Encampment Response Guide)*

### **Increasing Challenges within all Communities of Northumberland County**

- Increase in the level of client acuity and service restrictions
- No 24/7 health funding for the highest community need – permanent supportive housing
- Lengthy wait times for Community (Social) Housing along with mental health and addiction services
- Limited rental options especially those that are affordable with social assistance rates
- Increased anti-social behavior within the shelter response system and drug poisoning requiring intervention
- Concern for encampments with individuals staying outside and concern for individuals' safety particularly during winter

Further information about these challenges and about the County homelessness population are contained in [Social Services Committee agenda October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Enumeration presentation.](#)

### **Northumberland County's Role as a Service Manager**

The County of Northumberland is the Service Manager and funder for many local homelessness responses. The County collaborates with community providers to support additional grant applications to increase housing and homelessness investments into the County.

The County works collaboratively with community health and social service providers on short-term and longer-term strategies to support ending homelessness. This work continues to be supported through tables such as, the Homelessness Leadership Table and will be further enhanced with the implementation of the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

Further information about this work is contained in [Standing Committee Report 2022-087 Housing and Homelessness Annual Report.](#) This report highlights the progress, trends and metrics related to these efforts in 2021, including updates on the implementation of action items identified in the Northumberland County Affordable Housing Strategy – a strategy focused on increasing the supply of housing throughout Northumberland at various levels of affordability.

Included in this report is Appendix A Northumberland County Homelessness System Map

## **Emergency Sheltering Options Update**

Transition House is the system entry point for those seeking sheltering services, and is funded by service agreement to provide diversion services and/or emergency shelter for up to 24 spaces. This includes 18 at the emergency shelter and 6 in motel for a total of 24 spaces for singles.

Transition House also provides Family Shelter Diversion for families with children, there are an additional 2 motel rooms set aside for this service. This brings a total of 24 spaces for singles and 2 for families totally 26 spaces.

In April of 2022 the County in collaboration with Transition House applied for a Reaching Home Grant to increase sheltering capacity within the system across Northumberland. This application was successful and starting this summer there will be a further increase of 10 shelter spaces. These locations are fluid and to be determined and will be managed by Transition House. The grant award has also provided funding for an additional staff member at Transition House to support individuals in the motel spaces and in Family Diversion.

This brings the total shelter spaces available through Transition House, as the entry point to sheltering options to 36. The risk associated with the funding for the additional 10 shelter beds and shelter worker that Council should be aware of, is that this funding comes to an end March 31st, 2023.

These numbers do not reflect the shelter spaces at Cornerstone Family Violence Centre or Alderville Women's Shelter.

## **Emergency Sheltering Occupancy Based on Beds Per Night Q1**

### **Overflow Motels Q1 2022**

- Capacity= 1080
- Overflow beds used= 211

### **Emergency shelter beds at Transition house**

- Capacity= 1521
- Emergency shelter beds used= 1239

These numbers do not reflect the shelter spaces at Cornerstone Family Violence Centre or Alderville Women's Shelter.

County staff recognize that some individuals prefer not to access services in shelters or through local service providers. If the shelter is at capacity, staff and service providers work together to seek alternative accommodation options. Engagement efforts continue with those living outdoors to encourage them to access services and seek more permanent solutions based on what they choose.

Community partners continue to work together to address issues of homelessness, poverty, mental health, and addictions. These collective efforts during Covid lockdowns resulted in the formation of the Northumberland Advisory Group (NAG) that helped to identify key priorities for investments through versions 1-5 of the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF).

The NAG has been dissolved, and membership now forms the Homelessness Leadership Table, which is a strategic planning table of senior leaders within the homelessness serving sector.

## **Impacts of Covid on Homelessness**

*Throughout Canada, Homelessness has changed as a result of COVID. In the first wave, community after community saw reductions in shelter space, temporary motel or shelter space added, decreased capacity in the sector due to physical distancing, and an increase in unsheltered homelessness. Throughout the second and third waves of COVID, community responses changed. Even with more funding brought into the sector by different orders of government, much of the investment throughout the country was used to support interim, emergency, COVID- related measures. As this wound down, without shelter space being replaced, the overall system capacity shrunk. The result? Even more unsheltered homelessness by the second, third wave (and into the fourth wave) of the pandemic than there was at the start of the pandemic.*

*The pandemic has disrupted, and perhaps permanently altered, the homelessness response and housing support system. It has changed the way existing services operate and resulted in the introduction of new services. It has changed the ease with which some resources like income supports are accessed. It has changed service capacity. It has changed the processes by which people view and secure rental accommodation. It has changed access to substances like opioids. It has changed access to health care. It has changed the labour market.*

*(Excerpt from Greater Sudbury Encampment Response Guide)*

In Northumberland County, we have been able to utilize SSRF funds and other grant dollars to increase shelter space capacity during this public health emergency. Now without increased investment from all levels of government, spaces and services will begin to decrease by end of 2022 when provincial SSRF funds end.

## **Consultations**

As the Service Manager for system planning related to Housing and Homelessness, County staff will consult with member municipalities, social and health agencies, people with lived experience and residents.

On the issue of homelessness and housing, engagement strategies were employed when developing the 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, the Affordable Housing Strategy and the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan to help identify priorities and strategies.

During COVID, representation from the social, health, municipal and justice sectors were engaged to help identify priorities for the various rounds of Social Services Relief Funds.

The 2021 Enumeration Count was a collaboration between community partners who contributed to planning, training, and delivery of this important work.

The County continues to align system planning and service orientation with the stated priorities defined in various strategies. Ongoing engagement, planning and case conferencing continues at various working tables and committees. Some examples include the Community Safety and

Wellbeing Collaborative, and the associated action tables, the Homelessness Leadership Table and Affordable Housing Strategy Implementation Working Group.

### **Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations**

There are risks associated with funding for homelessness and social services that Council should be aware of and need to be considered with any recommendations that may come forward following this report, and they are as follows:

- All additional COVID homelessness funding coming into the community is scheduled to end December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. This includes funding for additional shelter spaces, winter warming room, isolation services, health and safety measures, outreach services through contracted service agreements and additional food security measures now in place. This represents approximately a loss of \$ 1,046,400 annually.
- Funding a service on a temporary basis is a concern if ongoing funding is not approved at all other levels of government
- The 7 Lower tier municipalities within Northumberland County have the jurisdictional and legislative authority to establish by-laws related to use of public outdoor spaces within their municipality along with levels of enforcement. The system level response needs to seamlessly align and link into the decisions by the municipalities.
- Effective responses to homelessness require carefully trained, highly professional staff who know both the technical aspects of the job, as well as the service orientation, and practice it seamlessly as part of a system of supports.
- Engaging with people experiencing homelessness without training on trauma informed care, may inadvertently be inflicting more trauma upon people.

### **Discussion / Options**

As outlined in the 10 Year Annual Housing and Homelessness Report the system is responsive to the needs of all residents, providing safe, appropriate, and affordable options within healthy and inclusive communities. Discussions occurring within local and provincial planning tables regarding homelessness and housing indicate that there are several factors influencing the increasing number and complexity of issues faced by those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

These include, but are not limited to scarcity of supportive housing, the rental market out of reach for many, growing use of Opioids, COVID and the extent of trauma experienced by an individual.

Investments towards solving these factors need to occur through all levels of government.

### **Options**

In aligning with the current housing and homelessness systems and strategies options include,

- County staff will continue to engage with the Town of Cobourg and the Cobourg Police Homelessness Addiction Resource Project, and with each of the member municipalities around homelessness. To jointly advance the understanding of the role and authorities of the lower and upper tier municipality, the role of the system to link into the communities, and associated costs, best practices, and impacts.

- Homelessness Community Response Table (HCRT) has a membership that is made up of service providers representing social, health and justice sectors. Cobourg police currently are listed as a member of HCRT and further collaboration and planning specific to Town of Cobourg and HCRT members can be tabled at future meetings.
- Homelessness Leadership Table can table discussions for planning specific to the Town of Cobourg.
- Increased staff engagement with lower tier municipalities around the needs of the system and further contributions to be considered, such as access to land for affordable builds, access to municipal space to provide local services and municipal commitments to provide training to staff on trauma informed care and poverty.
- A Request for Proposal issued in June 2022 by the County for a Homelessness System Framework review. This review will be looking at funding models, partnership opportunities, core emergency shelter service level standards and strategies supporting impactful program delivery and coordinated access.

Attached to this report as Appendix A is a flow chart of the current system response that is in place for Northumberland County service providers. While this flow chart helps to demonstrate how individuals can become connected to local services if they choose, it does not mean that individuals give up their rights and freedoms, nor can an individual be legally required to access services or shelters. If an individual does not want to seek services or shelter, then trained professionals can work with that individual to review diversion options and/or a safety plan.

Engagement and the provision of support services by professionals should incorporate specific service orientation, and would include training for all professionals who are engaging with homeless individuals, such as a social worker, by-law enforcement, police, fire, or health care worker.

## **Financial Impact**

### **Investments within the 2022 Council Approved Budget**

Homelessness Prevention Program 2022/23 totals \$1,535,700.00

This is a combination of two formerly separate programs Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) \$1,288,677 and Strong Communities Rent Supplement \$247,053.

County Levy \$261,050

Unbudgeted Investments through Social Service Relief Fund in 2022 totaled \$1,046,400.

The Social Services Relief Fund investments come to an end effective December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022, representing a loss of \$1,046,00 for 2023.

Risks associated with this reduction are outlined in the Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations section of this report

### **Examples of Unbudgeted Costs for 2022 Covered by SSRF**

Warming room from December 2021 to April 2022, cost was \$230,000.

This included rental space, staffing, security, sanitization, and sundries

Homelessness Mental Health Worker program x2, one position from January to December and one position from July to December 2022, total cost estimated at \$150,000.

Emergency Shelter Solutions that include additional shelter spaces in motel, estimated cost \$118,500.00 for April to December 2022

### **Member Municipality Impacts**

Service Manager system planning and service response across all of Member Municipalities are considered when undertaking planning and engagement. The 2021 Enumeration Count, Affordable Housing strategy engagements and Community Safety and Wellbeing engagement are examples of that.

Increase or decrease in capacity, service, or investments into the system to respond to priorities and needs directly impacts individual member municipalities and its residents either positively or negatively.

### **Conclusion / Outcomes**

Social Services Committee directed staff to provide a report on the programs and services that Northumberland County delivers regarding the housing and homelessness supports. In addition, directed County staff to continue their collaborations and discussions with the Town of Cobourg to investigate potential options and various proposals. This report responds to that direction, recommending continued engagement with Town of Cobourg, as well as Cobourg Police's Homelessness Addiction Response Project (HARP), in response to concerns of individuals living unsheltered in the Town of Cobourg. This report also recommends County staff continue engagement with member municipalities and their staff, including By-Law Enforcement, Fire, and Police.

### **Attachments**

Appendix A – Homelessness System Map