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Report 2023-077

Report Title: Vink Shelter System Review

Committee Name: Social Services

Committee Meeting Date: June 7, 2023

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Council Meeting Date: June 21, 2023

Strategic Plan Priorities: Economic Prosperity and Innovation
 Sustainable Growth
 Thriving and Inclusive Communities
 Leadership in Change

Information Report

That the Social Services Committee receive Report 2023-077 'Vink Shelter System Review' for information; and

Further That the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information."

Purpose

To provide the Vink Shelter System Review report including recommendations for continuous improvement of the homelessness system.

Background

The goal of the review was to develop recommendations for advancing a community-wide response model of infrastructure and services to support those experiencing – or at risk – of homelessness. This is based on a holistic view of the homelessness system.

The review includes an assessment of present state, along with best practice and sector trends, so that data-based plans for effectively meeting the needs of the community over the long-term can be developed. The review looked at:

- funding models
- partnership opportunities
- core emergency shelter service level standards, and
- strategies supporting impactful program delivery and coordinated access.

Homelessness system partners in Northumberland have a history of co-designing community strategies and services like collaborative enumerations, winter warming rooms, and the Northumberland Eats initiative.

This review represents the next step in strengthening the coordination of services and supports, ensuring people have access to the right types of supports, when they need them, and wherever they enter the system.

Consultations

The review was informed by County staff, community partners, persons with lived experience, data, existing literature, and practices in other communities, and involved:

- Background document review
- Interviews with 7 County staff
- Interviews with 26 community partners involved in the homelessness service system
- Interviews and focus groups with 28 persons with lived experience, including a focus group at Transition House (8 participants), interviews at Salvation Army's Tuesday evening dinner (6 participants), interviews in the community with individuals engaged in outreach services (14 participants)
- Review of reporting and other administrative data from funded programs as well as systems level data
- Interviews with five comparator Service Managers in Ontario about their service level capacity and funding levels and models
- A review of published information on best practices.

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

Northumberland County and its partners believe in ensuring all Northumberland residents have safe, appropriate, and affordable housing choices and an end to chronic homelessness (functional zero is achieved).

The County of Northumberland receives Homelessness Prevention Program funding from the Province of Ontario to provide affordable housing and support services for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The objective of the program is to prevent, address and reduce homelessness, including chronic homelessness. Service Managers have discretion to allocate funding among different service categories, including supportive housing; community outreach and support services; housing assistance; and emergency shelter solutions. They are encouraged to support a shift away from emergency responses towards prevention and permanent housing and contribute to a reduction in chronic homelessness. The County uses the funds to invest in a range of services in the homelessness support system. Homelessness services are also funded through investments from the local tax levy.

Discussion/Options

44 recommendations are presented in the homelessness system review and outlined below.

Recommendations Related to Shelter Services

Adjust Service Delivery to Support Effective Shelter Services

It is recommended that Northumberland County shift emergency shelter services to better address emergency needs in the community:

Immediate and low-barrier access

1. In the short term, the County should require Transition House to work towards eliminating real or perceived barriers that prevent or inhibit client access to shelter services, including limiting service restrictions and unplanned discharges.

The County should emphasize the importance of Transition House's new Executive Director focusing on this shift.

The County should either establish County directed service restriction standards or require County approval of a Transition House board approved policy related to service restriction.

The County should conduct monitoring of service restrictions.

Diversion supports

2. The County should require Transition House to implement consistent, standardized practices related to diversion screening to determine the most appropriate service and provide diversion supports where appropriate. Diversion screening should use a standardized script, along with problem-solving and advocacy. Short-term case management and follow-up support should be provided where required. To support effective diversion screening and

support, it is recommended that Transition House have a dedicated staff person to support diversion.

3. The County should consider requiring Transition House to participate in Common Ground to support its efforts to deliver effective diversion and housing focused services.

Common Ground is a collaborative approach led by the RAFT in Niagara Region that provides access to tools and training to get a customized evidence-based prevention process and housing focus up and running. The RAFT also supports service providers in measuring and analyzing their progress and provides strategies to adjust as necessary to achieve better outcomes.

Housing-focused, rapid exit services

4. The County should require Transition House to ensure it meets key expectations related to housing-focused services.

Practices that promote dignity and respect

5. The County should require Transition House to have clear policies, eligibility criteria and practices aligned with Housing First principles, promoting inclusion, cultural safety, dignity, and respect.

Data and performance measurement

6. It is recommended that Northumberland County establish targets and develop regular monitoring of key performance measures for Transition House. Suggested output and outcome measures and targets have been provided in a separate document.

Funding

7. It is recommended that the County provide funding to support adequate staffing levels at average salaries for the non-profit sector, and at a minimum, support a living wage for all staff.

It is estimated that Transition House would require approximately \$693,000 to cover the total costs of emergency shelter, including a dedicated diversion and housing support worker. It is reasonable to assume that the shelter could fundraise for approximately 10% of the costs, and the remaining be covered by funding from the United Way and the County.

External Supports

8. In addition to supports provided by shelter staff, it is recommended that County Outreach provide approximately 0.5 FTE adaptive case management to emergency shelter/motel clients as well.

Future Emergency Shelter Needs and Facilities

9. In part to reduce demands for shelter, it is recommended that the County increase supportive housing and/or Housing First Intensive Case Management spaces along with rental assistance for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with high acuity. At a

minimum 15 spaces (1 FTE) should be added, preferably 30 spaces (2 FTE), with another 15 spaces added within two years (3 FTEs total).

Future Facilities

10. It is recommended that the County look to support to transition the current spaces used for emergency shelter to a more appropriate space. The space should be sufficient for approximately 23 beds, should allow opportunities for housing support services to be accessed during the day by both shelter users and other individuals experiencing homelessness, and the space should be appropriate for low barrier services.

Future Service Delivery Models

11. Given that Transition House and Cornerstone are the access points for shelter, it could be appropriate for them to provide diversion service in a consistent and in-depth manner, if they have the capacity to do so. If Transition House is unable to provide satisfactory services, the County should consider having another service provider take on this role.
12. Given the transition in leadership of Transition House from a governance perspective and a new Executive Director, it is recommended that the County monitor Transition House's progress in improving its capacity. There are limited other service providers in the community that would be willing to take on this role.

Recommendations Related to Homelessness Prevention Services

The consultants' recommendations related to homelessness prevention services in Northumberland County are outlined below.

Access to Services

13. It is recommended that the County work with its community partners to increase communication about where to go to access homelessness prevention services.

Recommended Service Delivery Levels and Model

14. It is recommended that diversion supports for singles be enhanced to provide diversion for singles seeking shelter and supports to singles in hotels. It is anticipated that 1 FTE could deliver this service.
15. The County should consider establishing a dedicated homelessness prevention position for youth.

Targeting of Homelessness Prevention Services

16. The County should work with the Help Centre to ensure its Housing Support service is targeting people at imminent risk of homelessness and monitor the outcomes of the service.

Monitoring of Performance

17. It is recommended that Northumberland County establish targets and develop regular monitoring of key performance measures for prevention services in general and diversion specifically.

Recommendations Related to Street Outreach Services

The consultants' recommendations related to street outreach services in Northumberland County are outlined below.

Recommended Service Delivery Levels and Model

18. It is recommended that the County have 1 FTE dedicated to street outreach.

19. If more than one service provider is involved in providing street outreach to individuals living rough, it is recommended that the County work with street outreach service providers to document a systematic approach to street outreach services.

Communication with the Public about Outreach

20. It is recommended that Northumberland County prepare communication materials for the public about what they should do in various situations when they see someone sleeping rough. It is also recommended that the County designate and promote the phone number for the County's Outreach services as a number that residents can call if they see someone experiencing homelessness in the community who may need supports.

Services Working as Part of a Homelessness System

21. It is recommended that Northumberland County have discussions with Northumberland United Way about opportunities to encourage or require service providers providing outreach and funded through the United Way to align with a Housing First system approach to addressing homelessness.

Expectations Related to Effective Service Delivery

22. The County should outline standards for staff or external service providers in delivering street outreach services. Recommended key expectations have been provided in a separate document.

Monitoring of Performance

23. It is recommended that Northumberland County establish targets and develop regular monitoring of key performance measures for street outreach services. Suggested output and outcome measures and targets have been provided in a separate document.

Recommendations Related to Adaptive Case Management Supports

The consultants' recommendations related to adaptive case management supports in Northumberland County are outlined below.

Recommended Service Delivery Levels and Model

24. Northumberland County should consider modest increases to adaptive case management services (<0.5FTE)
25. Northumberland County should consider whether vacancies for adaptive case management services should be filled through Coordinated Access (ie. the service provider could get referrals from the List). If coordinated access does not prioritize referrals, re-housing providers should have clearly defined criteria and procedures of how to prioritize applications for re-housing supports.

Expectations Related to Effective Service Delivery

26. The County should outline standards for staff or external service providers in delivering adaptive case management services. Recommended key expectations have been provided in a separate document.

Monitoring of Performance

27. It is recommended that Northumberland County establish targets and develop regular monitoring of key performance measures for adaptive case management services. Suggested output and outcome measures and targets have been provided in a separate document.

1.1 Recommendations Related to Intensive Case Management and Supportive Housing

The consultants' recommendations related to Intensive Case Management and supportive housing services in Northumberland County are outlined below.

Recommended Service Delivery Levels and Model

28. (as discussed above), it is recommended that the County add additional supportive housing/Housing First Intensive Case Management spaces along with rental assistance for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with high acuity. At a minimum 15 spaces (1 FTE) should be added, preferably 30 spaces (2 FTE). Three FTEs should be added within two years.
29. It is recommended that the County fill vacancies for supportive housing / Housing First Intensive Case Management spaces through Coordinated Access (ie. get referrals from the List).
30. The County should advocate for funding and partnerships with the health sector to provide five spaces of intensive supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness with the highest acuities (14+).

Expectations Related to Effective Service Delivery

31. The County should outline standards for supportive housing / Intensive Case Management service delivery.

Monitoring of Performance

32. It is recommended that Northumberland County establish targets and develop regular monitoring of key performance measures for Intensive Case Management services.

Recommendations Related to Access to Affordable Housing

The consultants' recommendations related to access to affordable housing are outlined below.

Recommended Service Delivery Levels and Model

33. Northumberland County should ensure that landlord engagement services are structured to focus on finding units for households to be housed through the By-Name List, and those with high levels of acuity receiving supportive housing or Housing First Intensive Case Management supports.

34. It is recommended that Northumberland County consider opportunities to provide financial assistance to incentivize landlord's participation.

Expectations Related to Effective Service Delivery

35. It is recommended that the County outline standards for landlord engagement service delivery. Recommended key expectations have been provided in a separate document.

Monitoring of Performance

36. It is recommended that the County actively monitor the implementation of the restructuring of the landlord engagement services to align with updated key expectations; monitor the effectiveness of the restructured services; and adjust as necessary.

37. It is recommended that Northumberland County establish targets and develop regular monitoring of key performance measures for rent subsidies for people on the By-Name List.

Recommendations Related to Coordinated Access

The consultants' recommendations related to access to affordable housing are outlined below.

Next Steps to Support Implementation of an Effective Coordinated Access Model

38. It is recommended that the County work with the Homelessness Leadership Table to develop prioritization criteria to determine which order households on the By-Name List should be offered housing resources. Households should then be sorted in order based on how many of the prioritization criteria they meet (priority list). With the implementation of supportive housing / Housing First Intensive Case Management supports, Northumberland County should use the Priority List to match and refer clients to housing and housing-related supports.

39. Northumberland County and its partners should increase efforts to ensure households are being added to the By-Name List and updated on the list.

40. It is recommended that the County prepare a complete inventory of housing and housing-related support resources in the community to match with people on the By-Name List.
41. The County should continue to work on building trust in relationships between homelessness service providers and the County.
42. Northumberland County should clearly define the role of the Homelessness Leadership Table as the lead for system planning.
43. The County should continue to prioritize the implementation of HIFIS across the homelessness support system.
44. The County should re-establish/continue collaborative homelessness support system training efforts to strengthen the capacity of service providers in delivering effective services.

Monitoring of Performance

45. In addition to monitoring the performance of individual homelessness support service components, it is recommended that the County monitor the performance of Coordinated Access overall.

Financial Impact

Northumberland County has a current levy of \$261,000 and has approved an additional \$350,000 in the 2023 budget for homelessness services.

Further, Northumberland County, through its role as Consolidated Municipal Service System Manager, receives an annual provincial investment and is responsible for system planning and managing a broad range of housing and homelessness services with these funds.

Homelessness services are primarily delivered through service agreements with third party organizations, although some services are directly delivered by the County. Northumberland County currently funds the following supports and services delivered by community partners:

- Emergency shelter
- Emergency overflow in motel
- Warming room (seasonal)
- Housing support to low-income households to enable them to maintain their housing.
- Diversion support
- Outreach
- Housing-focused case management to support households to obtain and retain housing.

Member Municipality Impacts

Social services management was downloaded to municipalities by the province in 1998. This led to the creation of 47 Service System Managers, who are Consolidated Municipal Service System Managers (CMSMs), or upper-tier (regional) and single-tier municipal governments across Ontario.

The County of Northumberland, as the upper tier, is the local (CMSM) for Social Assistance, Children and EarlyON Services, as well as Housing and Homelessness.

Specifically, the Community Services division, is responsible for system planning to administer and manage a broad range of housing and homelessness services on behalf of and by direction of County Council for all of Northumberland County

Services are planned, coordinated, and delivered in a streamlined and integrated way, in conjunction with local community supports. This review presents multiple recommendations that will be implemented to improve programs and services across all 7 Northumberland County lower-tier municipalities.

Conclusion

The Vink Shelter System Review will be available to the public through the County website.

Staff will evaluate and implement recommendations.

Attachments

- 1) Vink Consulting - County of Northumberland Homelessness Support System Review, dated May 15, 2023
- 2) Current Priorities of the Homelessness Support Review