

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee
From: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health
Development
Subject: Data regarding Impacts of Asylum Claimants on London's
Emergency Shelter System
Date: April 29, 2024

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development the following actions be taken related to the Impacts of Asylum Claimants on London's Emergency Shelter System Report:

- a) That the following report on the Impacts of Asylum Claimants on London's Emergency Shelter System Report, **BE RECEIVED** for information;

Executive Summary

At the meeting of November 28, 2023, Council resolved;

a) the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to report back to Council on the impacts of Asylum claimants on our local shelter system. Based on the findings from the staff report, that staff apply if appropriate for Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) funding, if necessary, to address the impacts on local shelters;

Municipal Council Resolution attached as Appendix A to this report.

The purpose of this report is to provide existing available data from May 2023 through March 2024 with respect to the matter of the impact of Asylum claimants on London's emergency shelter system and seek direction to apply for Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) funding. The report outlines the ongoing challenges faced by asylum claimants and the additional strain it places on existing emergency shelter resources.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This report aligns with the strategic areas of focus in the 2023-2027 City of London Strategic Plan. The City of London Strategic Plan (2023-2027) identifies housing and homelessness as a key area of focus, and housing and homelessness work is identified throughout the Strategic Plan, impacting all areas of life for Londoners.

Some key outcomes that are supported through the investments outlined in this report include:

- The City of London demonstrates leadership and builds partnerships to increase quality, affordable, and supportive housing options.
- London has a robust community system of health, homelessness, housing stability services, policies, procedures, and by-laws in place to support individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness or in precarious housing consistent with Council's recognition of the health and homelessness emergency.
- The City of London enhances the confidence of Indigenous Peoples by furthering truth and reconciliation efforts.
- The City of London is a leader in becoming an equitable and inclusive community.
- London is an affordable and supportive community for individuals and families.

- The City of London demonstrates leadership by taking meaningful actions to address and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, gender-based violence, and sexual violence.

Housing Stability for All: The Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London (2019-2024)

London's Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan, Housing Stability for All: The Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London (Housing Stability for All Plan), is the approved guiding document for homeless prevention and housing in the City of London and was developed in consultation with Londoners.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

Asylum claimants are people who have been forced to leave their country of origin and who ask for safety in Canada either when they arrive at a border or online while already here. Their eligibility is decided by Canadian officials based on factors like fear of being persecuted for reasons such as race and sexual orientation. It's important to know that asylum claimants are different from resettled refugees. Resettled refugees go through checks before coming to Canada and become permanent residents upon arrival. Because asylum claimants and resettled refugees come to Canada in different ways, those seeking asylum at the border don't take the spots of resettled refugees or others coming through planned immigration programs.

Canada is a destination for asylum claimants for a variety of reasons, often related to seeking protection from persecution, violence, or other forms of harm in their countries of origin. Individuals are looking to find safety, security, and a better future for themselves and their families in Canada. Specifically, individuals may come to Ontario for the welcoming and inclusive community that exists in communities in Ontario. Toronto's status as a major city with nearby airports often makes it the initial destination for newcomers to Canada. Over the last two years, the federal government through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has covered the costs of hotel accommodation and meals for a short period for some asylum claimants arriving in large numbers to Toronto, Windsor, Ottawa, and Niagara Falls. However, given the lack of housing options, the emergency shelter system in Toronto has reached capacity, and some individuals choose to relocate to London due to proximity for alternative housing options and support. Additionally, some may have connections to friends, family, services and faith group supports already in the area, making it a natural choice for them to seek refuge and support in London.

As a result, beginning in the late spring of 2023 London has seen an increase of individuals identifying as asylum claimants attending the London's emergency shelter system, as well as an increase in interactions with community outreach supports in unsheltered situations. Refugees who are asylum claimants, meaning they are in the process of seeking protection in Canada, are generally ineligible for federal income and housing funds however they may access emergency shelters as a last resort for accommodation while their claim is being processed.

The influx of asylum claimants has necessitated ongoing collaboration among government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community programs to address their needs effectively. Through the provision of safe and supportive shelter for asylum claimants, emergency shelter systems can play a critical role in upholding human rights and providing refuge to those fleeing persecution and violence. As asylum claimants have freedom of movement, the number of asylum claimants to our city continues into early 2024.

2.1 Existing Emergency Shelter spaces within the City of London

The 2023 emergency shelter system in London provided up to 306 permanent emergency shelter spaces on any given day. From May 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024, there were 336 days during this period which translates into 102,816 available emergency shelter night stays.

The available spaces include:

Agency	Total permanent system spaces in 2023
Salvation Army Centre of Hope	138 (90 men; 48 women)
Men's Mission	80 (men only)
Rotholme Family Shelter	20 Rooms that support up to 64 people
Unity Project for Relief of Homelessness	38
Youth Opportunities Unlimited Youth Shelter:	30
Total Emergency Shelter Spaces	306

*The total number of Asylum claimants is reflected in the table below in section 2.2

As London's emergency shelter system has routinely operated at capacity, there has been a noticeable increase in asylum claimants experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

2.2 Impact of Asylum Claimants on Emergency Shelter Resources:

In 2023 the London community saw asylum claimants with limited financial and supportive resources come to the city. This has resulted in a notable increase in this population's utilization of London's emergency shelter spaces. To understand and quantify the impacts, multiple business practice updates were undertaken in mid-2023 to support a more enhanced information gathering process. This has allowed the Housing Stability Services team to be able to provide a better picture of the increase needs necessary in supporting with enhanced community resources. By using data from the Homeless Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS) database, Civic Administration collected information related to the occupancy of emergency shelter beds by individuals with immigration statuses designated in HIFIS that represents asylum claimants.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the data collected:

- Some asylum claimants experiencing homelessness may opt not to provide consent or disclose information and therefore would not be accounted for, as all data is self-reported.
- Data may not be captured in HIFIS for individuals accessing other types of emergency shelter from providers who do not utilize the HIFIS system.

According to the HIFIS data gathered from May 1st, 2023- March 31st, 2024, approximately 123 individuals who identified as an asylum claimant accessed permanent emergency shelter spaces. This accounted for 11,073 of 92,985 available emergency shelter night stays in permanent emergency shelter beds.

Additionally, there was a monthly average of 123 active participants who were not utilizing emergency shelter resources but reported having no housing status and were living unsheltered. The number of asylum claimants who were staying with relatives, friends or other temporary sheltering locations is unknown.

Reporting Period: May 1st, 2023- March 31st, 2024

	Unique Asylum Claimants in Emergency Shelter	Asylum Claimant Night Stays	Available Emergency Shelter Night Stays	% of Emergency Shelter bed usage
Total	123	11,073	92,985	11.91%

This data underscores the impact an increase in asylum claimants have had on the emergency shelter system already operating near capacity. This supports the need for a targeted response to effectively address asylum claimant sheltering needs. One challenge currently to a targeted response is, the lag in processing claims with the Federal government and the lack of specific service providers available to support the unique needs of this population in our community.

The impacts of the limited emergency shelter spaces have had a direct effect on asylum claimants in our community being turned away from emergency shelters and forcing many to live unsheltered. This has increased the desperation in community for those living unsheltered and increased the demand for basic needs services supporting those living unsheltered.

The HSS team is seeing increasing costs for the provision of short-term accommodations (hotel rooms) for asylum claimant families to bridge until space is available at the Rotholme family shelter.

In addition, an increase in costs related to the demand for translation services and ongoing staffing challenges within the sector related to recruitment are still being assessed. At this time, these impacts cannot be quantified, but is something civic administration is following and will be able to report back through a future update.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1. Ongoing Cost Considerations:

As asylum claimants continue to rely on London’s emergency shelter resources, civic administration provides an estimated financial impact to date in the table below.

As the city’s emergency shelter system is currently funded through Provincial funding from the Homeless Prevention program, eligibility for funding from the Interim Housing Assistance Program is unknown currently. Should Civic Administration be directed to apply for this funding, the amount of eligible funding will be determined through that application process.

The current monthly cost of emergency shelter and motel usage for asylum claimants is estimated in the table below and based on 11,073 nights stayed in emergency shelter.

Month	Approx Emergency Shelter Asylum Claimant Cost (\$96.66/day/space)	Total Emergency shelter cost (96.66/day/space)	Hotel Stay Costs
Total	\$1,070,316	\$ 9,938,195	\$31,456.26

The growing number of asylum claimants using emergency shelter spaces highlights the importance of expanding our current resources for emergency shelter services to better accommodate their unique needs. These needs may include additional support services such as language interpretation, cultural sensitivity training, mental health counseling, etc.

3.2. Available Resources for Additional Funding:

Through the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP), the Government of Canada provides funding to provincial and municipal governments, on a cost-sharing basis, to address extraordinary interim housing pressures resulting from increased volumes of asylum claimants. This program offers financial resources through a claim-based process to municipalities to address extraordinary or incremental costs incurred related to the provision of temporary housing for asylum claimants. Eligible costs include temporary

accommodations (motel, emergency shelter); triage and transportation operations; and other indirect costs related to the provision of interim housing for asylum claimants.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will make the final decisions on claims. The agreement will include the amount of funding. Amounts will be informed by a formula that multiplies an average number of days asylum claimants spent in emergency shelter by an average lodging cost per day. Amounts with provinces will take into consideration any IRCC funding already provided to their municipalities for the program's purpose.

Any claims made by the City of London for IHAP funding will help to support asylum claimants to have access to essential sheltering services and support during their time of need as they complete the asylum claimant process.

4.0 Key Issues and Considerations

4.1. Ongoing Challenges in Addressing Asylum Claimants' Needs:

Continued challenges in the emergency shelter system to address the needs of asylum claimants include:

- **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Many asylum claimants may have limited proficiency in English or French, which can pose challenges in communication and accessing services. Cultural differences may also affect the delivery of culturally sensitive care and support.
- **Trauma and Mental Health:** Asylum claimants often have experienced traumatic events in their home countries or during their journey to Canada. Addressing their mental health needs requires specialized training and resources, including trauma-informed care and access to mental health professionals.
- **Lengthy Refugee Claim Process:** The lengthy process of obtaining refugee status can result in prolonged stays in emergency shelters, leading to increased pressure on emergency shelter resources and potential disruptions in service provision.
- **Legal and Documentation Issues:** Asylum claimants may face legal complexities and challenges related to their refugee claims, documentation status, and eligibility for government support programs. Navigating these legal processes can be daunting without adequate support and guidance.
- **Limited Access to Supportive Housing:** The shortage of affordable and supportive housing options can make it difficult for asylum claimants to transition out of emergency shelters and into stable housing. This can perpetuate their reliance on emergency shelter services and prolong their stay in the emergency shelter system.

Federal financial support to address the ongoing challenges will assist in the provision of a comprehensive and holistic community approach that considers the unique needs and vulnerabilities of asylum claimants. This work involves collaboration between government agencies, community organizations, and programs to develop tailored solutions and ensure equitable access to safe and dignified emergency shelter and housing for all residents of the community.

Conclusion

While asylum claimants contribute to the cultural, social, and economic vitality of London, the increasing number of asylum claimants and the demand on social services locally poses challenges that require coordinated efforts from various community partners, including government agencies, community organizations, and residents, to address this issue effectively. Through collaboration, London continues to welcome and support asylum claimants, recognizing the importance of upholding human rights and providing refuge to those fleeing persecution and violence.

Civic Administration will report back to committee and council once the result of the IHAP application is complete.

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