

Report to Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

To: Chair and Members, Community and Protective Services Committee
From: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development
Subject: Update on the Alignment of Rent Supplement and Housing Allowances Programs to a Portable Benefit System
Date: December 02, 2024

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager of Social and Health Development, this report **BE RECEIVED** for information purposes and that the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to this report;

- a) Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to report back to the Community and Protective Services Committee annually about the Municipal Rent Assistance Program progress as part of the annual Housing Stability Action Plan.

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the October 2023 report, “*Alignment of Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance Programs to a Portable Benefit System*”. The recommendations of the report aimed to streamline the City’s rent supplement system and align it with portable benefit programs. The implementation of these recommendations, overseen by Housing Stability Services (HSS), is interconnected with other housing initiatives, including the Housing Waitlist Review, the Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System Response, Roadmap to 3000 affordable units, and new affordable housing developments.

The City of London offers several housing benefit programs, each with different criteria and processes. In 2022 – 2023, a review of these programs highlighted inefficiencies in the system. As a result, City Council endorsed a move toward a more unified rent supplement system, since named the Municipal Rent Assistance Program (MRAP). The MRAP consolidates various rent supplement systems and focuses on portable benefits to enhance consistency and accessibility for applicants. Developing a streamlined application process enhances transparency and tracking of benefit distribution across target populations.

Over the past year, significant progress has been made in transitioning to the new portable benefits system. This includes the development of a new Housing Assistance Application, which simplifies the process for households seeking housing support. The new system allows more flexibility, with portable benefits based on a household’s income or shelter allowance. The shift to the new rent supplement system requires ongoing process integrations as well as developing practices for different scenarios, such as addressing funding gaps for households that have exceptional needs.

In addition, the city is working to enhance the accessibility of housing benefit information, including updates to the Homeless Prevention and Housing webpage, to better inform residents about available support.

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 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.
- London's Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan, Housing Stability for All: The Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London 2019-2024 (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. Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) Waitlist Placement Ratio (CPSC: September 9, 2024)
- Alignment of Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance programs to a Portable Benefit System. (CPSC: October, 4, 2023)
- Single Source Award Recommendation for Housing Identification Program Expansion and Portable Housing Benefits Program. (SS-2022-061) (CPSC: July 26, 2022)
- Canada-Ontario Housing Initiative (COCHI (Canada Ontario Community Housing Initiative)) and Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) Approval of Ontario Transfer Payment Amendment Agreement (CPSC: May 31, 2022)
- Single Source Procurement – London Homeless Prevention Housing Allowance Program (CPSC: February 1, 2022)
- Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) and Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) Approval of Ontario Transfer Payment Amending Agreement (CPSC August 31, 2021)
- London Homeless Prevention Housing Allowance Program- Single Source Procurement (#SS 21-36) (CPSC: June 22, 2021)
- Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) Approval of Ontario Transfer Payment Agreement (CPSC: March 31, 2020)
- Municipal Council Approval of the Housing Stability Plan 2019 to 2024 as Required Under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* (CPSC: December 3, 2019)
- Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) and Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) Approval of Ontario Transfer Payment Agreement (CPSC – June 17, 2019)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Purpose:

In 2022 and 2023 a review of the City’s existing rent supplement system was conducted and resulted in recommended actions developed with the support of the community, to be actioned by the Housing Stability Services (HSS) team. These recommendations were endorsed by council in October 2023.

Over the past year, civic administration has begun implementing the actions recommended within the October 2023 report. Some recommendations are linked to other work happening within the housing and homelessness system. Examples of these include the review and work of the Housing Waitlist and Ratio Review, the Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System Response, and the development of several new supported and affordable housing projects.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the recommendations of the review findings presented in the Alignment of Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance programs to a Portable Benefit System Report. (CPSC: October, 4, 2023)

2.2 Background:

The City of London offers various housing benefits (see Table 1), each with different eligibility criteria, rent limits, and application processes. This complexity affected applicants, rent supplement administrators, and housing providers. To streamline delivery, civic administration has been aligning the application process and administration of these programs, as endorsed by City Council in October 2023.

Table 1: City of London Rent Supplement Programs and Funding Sources

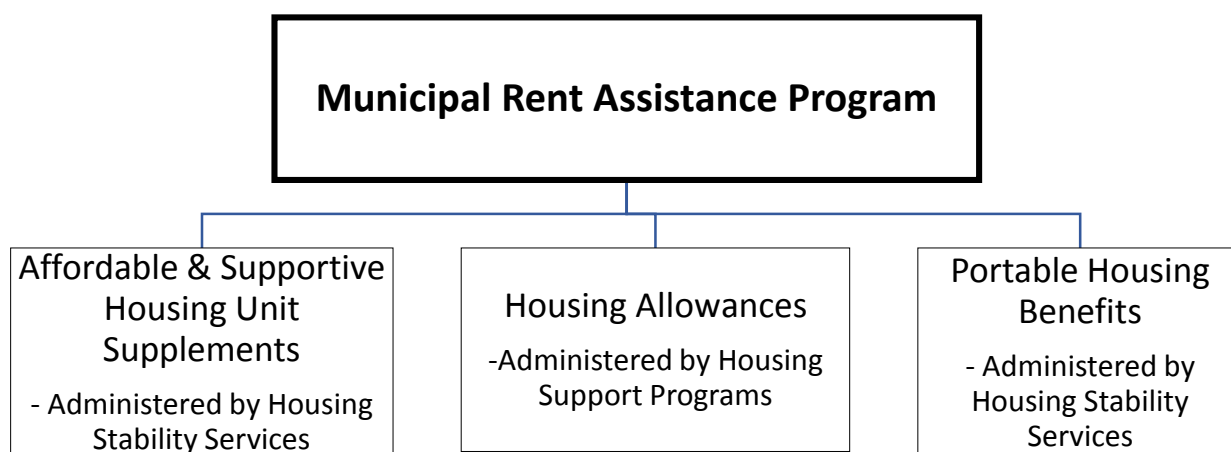
Program-	Type	Funding Source	Description
Housing Allowance Program	Portable	Municipal	Available to eligible participants of housing support programs, matched from Coordinated Access.
Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)	Unit-based	Provincial	Formerly the Strong Communities Rent Supplement, transitioned to HPP in 2022. Agreements are between private landlords and the City for units matched to households on the RGI Housing Waitlist.
Ontario Community Housing Assistance Program (OCHAP)	Unit-based	Provincial	Now known as the Rent Supplement Program, with agreements between private landlords and the City for units matched to households on the RGI Housing Waitlist.
Commercial Rent Supplements	Unit-Based	Federal & Municipal	Initiated in the 1980s with agreements for units matched to eligible households on the RGI Housing Waitlist.
Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI)	Portable	Provincial	Formerly a supplement bridging program for households on the RGI waitlist until RGI housing is available. Funding expired in 2024, and remaining participants choosing to be removed from the RGI waitlist were transitioned to portable benefits.
Roadmap to 3000 Portable Benefit	Portable	Municipal	Available to eligible participants of housing support programs, matched from Coordinated Access.

Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB): A partnership with the federal and provincial governments that provides a portable housing benefit for eligible households to assist with private market rent across Ontario. These benefits are allocated annually to the municipality for use in the City of London and County of Middlesex and are part of the rent supplements distributed by civic administration.

To enhance consistency, transparency, and efficiency, civic administration is working to integrate all municipally funded programs and, where possible, provincial and federal housing support into a single benefit system. This change simplifies processes for applicants and administrators, reducing barriers to access.

The new system, called the Municipal Rent Assistance Program (MRAP), uses a rent calculation outlined in the "Alignment of Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance Programs to a Portable Benefit System" report. Households on Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) contribute their maximum shelter allowance, while others pay 30% of their income. Figure 1 shows the programs currently supported under MRAP.

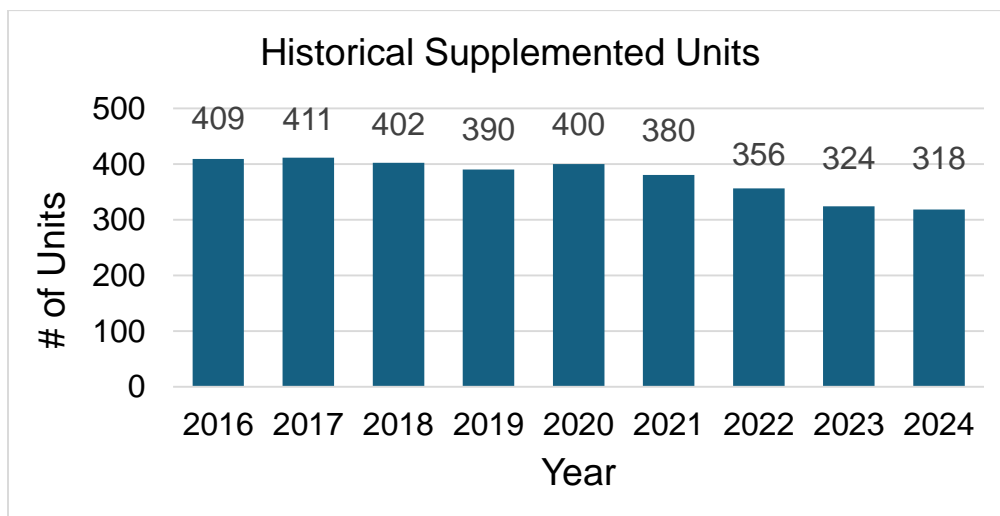
Figure 1: Municipal Rent Assistance Program



2.3 City of London Rent Supplement & Portable Benefit Recommendations Implementation

Over the past year, significant progress has been made toward enhancing the administration and effectiveness of housing benefits in the City of London. A key priority has been shifting the distribution of housing benefits toward a higher proportion of portable benefits. Figure 2 shows the trend of historical unit-based rent supplements, accessed through the Rent-Geared-to-Income waitlist system leaving the system. As some private, cooperative and not-for-profit housing providers exit agreements at the end of their term, the unused funds can be applied to the new supplements under MRAP.

Figure 2: Historical Unit-Based Supplemented Units



The process of implementing the new portable benefits system is connected to other changes across the housing system, including the identification and implementation of software, payment, and application processes. This includes the development of a new Housing Assistance Application, designed to streamline the application process and replace the previous RGI Housing Application Form. This will help households identify the type of housing support they need, including RGI housing, portable benefits, affordable or supportive housing.

Considerations in the development of the new processes include improved ability to track and report on how housing benefits are distributed across Council-approved target populations, as well as screening and assessment of households to help determine support needs and direct them to the right type of housing assistance. This approach is currently being piloted at the Sylvan Street affordable housing development and through the measured roll-out of the new portable benefit model.

Additionally, a maximum benefit system was established to ensure that housing benefit amounts were adequate across all parts of London. This was outlined in the October 2023 Rent Supplement System Alignment Report. The maximum benefit is based on Average Asking Rent Unoccupied (AARU) and includes guidelines for tenant insurance and utility costs.

A recommendation to create a top-up system for households receiving less than the maximum portable benefit was previously considered. However, after review, it was determined that COHB guidelines do not permit such top-ups. As a result, a different approach is required for other benefits. In certain situations, households with exceptional circumstances may need funding beyond the maximum allowable amounts. Guidelines for these exceptional circumstances are currently under review and are being updated with input from community partners. This review aims to support top-ups for households when exceptional circumstances necessitate benefits outside the existing practices.

Progress has been made in updating the City of London's Homeless Prevention and Housing webpage to enhance accessibility. Recent updates include the addition of informational videos and French language options. Future updates will be guided by community feedback and the City's Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Equity Tool to improve outcomes for equity-denied groups.

The website is also under review to improve how it directs visitors to non-housing supports. Although this component of the recommendations has not been finalized, applicants now receive additional information about available supports through communications from the Housing Access Centre, with a particular focus on those with Special Priority Status. Efforts to expand ongoing support for housing benefit recipients are underway, including the implementation and development of new roles such as Housing Support Workers and Rent Supplement Coordinators.

Work is also in progress to assist recipients with housing benefit renewals, although the component related to tax support has not yet been implemented. This includes the development of new annual review forms, seeking to understand the household's evolving circumstances as they wait for housing assistance. A referral form for organizations matching households to COHB has been developed and supports clearer messaging to applicants and support workers, related to the requirements to complete taxes, and meet the other program guidelines. This approach is aimed at helping households to remain in receipt of COHB, thereby reducing the strain on other areas of the housing support system.

Process mapping activities for the housing benefit system are ongoing, with the goal of simplifying access through a unified "one application" system. This work will also integrate recommendations from the September 2024 RGI Waitlist Placement Ratio Report. Community engagement, education, and training efforts have been a focus over the past year, with videos created to provide education to the public on the RGI system and assist housing providers in managing waitlist software.

Appendix 1 provides a status update of each recommendation from the Implementation Guide included in the Alignment of Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance programs to a Portable Benefit System report. (CPSC: October 4, 2023)

● 3.0 Next Steps

3.1 Affordable and Supported Housing

Several new affordable housing developments are underway in the City of London and are expected to become available over the next several years. A number of these units have been earmarked for matching through City of London - Housing Stability Services lists. Table 2: Affordable and Supported Housing Developments outlines these upcoming opportunities. When needed, rent supplements will be used to support the tenants in these units and will be administered by Housing Stability Services.

Table 2: Affordable and Supported Housing Developments

Project	Address	Expected Occupancy	Supplements
Sylvan St	345 Sylvan Street	Sep-24	42
Joan's Place	329-333 Richmond Street	Q2 2025	TBD
Elmwood Place	46 Elmwood Place	Jul-25	50
Homes Unlimited	51 Hill Street	Q2 2025	17
Zerin	370 South Street	Q2 2025	28
Chelsea Green	373 Hill Street	Q3 2025	12
London Affordable Housing Foundation	385 Hill Street	Q4 2025	18
Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS)	18 Elm St	Q4 2025	7
Residenza Affordable Housing	124 Colborne Street	Q4 2026	2
Indwell Health Services	346 South Street	TBD	96
Indwell War Memorial	392 South Street	TBD	42
Total Supplements:			314

3.2 Portable Housing Benefits

Portable housing benefits for households connected to housing support programs will continue as they have over the past several years. These include Housing Allowances and Roadmap to 3000 funded benefits, supporting 234 households. The new benefit calculation is applied to new portable housing benefits administered by support programs. Civic administration is working closely with housing support programs to support the implementation of the new utilities and tenant insurance aspects of the program.

Housing Stability services will continue to develop and implement the portable benefit system. Nineteen (19) portable housing benefits are being distributed in 2024, as approaches and systems are piloted before a more robust roll-out.

Portable benefits currently make up 38% of the portable benefits being offered in London, with a goal of reaching 50% by the end of 2025.

● 4.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

In 2024 funds were allocated from the Housing Stability Services budget to hire a new temporary Rent Supplement Coordinator. There is no additional expected budgetary impact resulting from this report's recommendations. All related expenditures will be funded through current operating budgets and existing council approved investments.

4.1 Conclusion

In summary, the City of London Rent Supplement System alignment is underway. Next steps over the coming year include:

- Continued roll-out of portable housing benefits, with additional benefits planned for 2025-2026,
- Completion of process mapping to integrate multiple housing benefit programs into a "one application" system.
- Ongoing development of new affordable housing projects, with rent supplements allocated to these units.

The connections between this work and other projects cannot be overlooked and must be approached in a thoughtful and coordinated manner. As these processes come together to form a more aligned system, increased opportunities to support the community with housing affordability and matching to the right housing and supports is anticipated.

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SUBMITTED BY:	Craig Cooper, Director, Housing Stability Services
RECOMMENDED BY:	Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development

Appendix 1: Implementation Guide Recommendations - Status Report October 2024

Recommendation	
A. Set an annual goal to transition the distribution of housing benefits away from unit-based housing benefits to provide a higher proportion of portable housing benefits.	
Status: In progress	<p>Details:</p> <p>Significant progress has been made in setting the foundation to implement and deliver portable housing benefits including the development of financial processes, a rent supplement agreement for households, and referral forms.</p> <p>Current: Actual proportion of municipally administered portable and unit- based housing benefits: 405 Unit-based (62%): 253 Portable (38%)</p> <p>2025 Target: 50% portable benefits</p>
B. Track the cost to the City to provide portable housing benefits and unit-based housing benefits administered by Housing Stability Services	
Status: In progress	<p>Details:</p> <p>Average cost per unit of a portable housing benefit (month/annual) \$613/month \$7356/year</p> <p>Average cost per unit of a unit-based housing benefit (month/annual) \$482/month \$5784/year</p>
C. Modify the intake process to assess whether the recipient of a housing benefit would benefit from it being paid directly to their landlord (rather than directly to the client).	
Status: Under Review	<p>The administrative requirements of this process are under review.</p> <p>As part of the rent supplement alignment, and the Waitlist Ratio Review, a screening and assessment system is being developed and incorporated into a new Housing Assistance Application, which will replace the RGI Housing Application Form.</p>
D. Track and report how housing benefit funds are distributed across the Council approved target population groups.	
Status: In progress	<p>Work is underway to create a process for collecting this data. The development of an application which includes target groups is well underway and was piloted at an affordable housing development.</p>
E. Establish maximum housing benefit amounts for City of London programs that ensure that the benefit amount is sufficient in all parts of London.	
Status: Completed	<p>The Actual Asking Rent for Unoccupied Units (AARU) is completed annually and was outlined in the October 2023 Rent Supplement System Alignment Report to CPSC, along with a</p>

	formula for supporting households with tenant insurance and utility costs.
F. Create a process for approving top-up housing benefit amounts for households approved for other housing supplement programs that do not achieve the maximum portable housing benefit amounts allowed by the City of London.	
Status: Cancelled	An exceptional circumstance system exists within the housing allowance program (for housing support programs) and is being reviewed as part of the rent supplement system alignment. This recommendation cannot be adopted for COHB recipients, the program which would most benefit from a top-up, as provincial COHB guidelines do not allow for additional rental assistance to be applied.
G. Work with the Province of Ontario to improve reporting to the City of London to identify which households are approved for COHB.	
Status: On hold	This recommendation has not yet been implemented due to the delay in receiving the 2024/25 COHB allocation from the province. In 2024, the Province implemented new processes and online features which have assisted in the translation of information provided by the province related to the identification of households approved for COHB.
H. Establish a system for updating the Homeless Prevention and Housing webpage on the City of London's website with accurate and up-to-date information on an ongoing basis.	
Status: In progress	Over the past year a number of updates have been made to the Housing Stability Services webpages. These include moving and editing information to make it easier to find and clearer, adding informational videos with subtitles to assist with accessibility and adding French language information. Additional community feedback and utilization of the City of London Equity Tool with help to support regular, more user-friendly updates.
I. Create a process map of the housing benefit system for London City staff.	
Status: In progress	Several process mapping activities took place over the past year. The housing benefit process map is being developed with the "one application" recommendation (Recommendation O.) and the recommendations of the Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) Waitlist Placement Ratio Report (CPSC: September 9, 2024)
J. Create a plan for how organizations with a separate waitlist will be integrated with the rental supplement system	
Status: Not started	This recommendation has not yet been implemented as other recommendations have been prioritized. The implementation is planned for 2025.
K. Continue to provide community engagement, education, and training with Council, community agencies, and landlords	
Status: In progress	Over the past year several videos have been created to assist the public with understanding the RGI system. These videos provide a more accessible format for some households to receive the information. Videos were also created to assist housing providers with utilizing the waitlist software and retrieving households from the waitlist.

	<p>Ongoing community engagement has taken place with housing providers, internal and external partners, and households on the waitlist. These engagements included presentations, surveys, and formal consultations.</p>
<p>L. Modify the website to better direct visitors to what types of non- housing supports an applicant may access</p>	
<p>Status: In progress</p>	<p>A review of the format and content of the website has begun and involves several teams and departments represented on the website.</p> <p>Housing applicants now receive additional information about available supports when the Housing Access Centre sends them communication related to Special Priority Status (SPP) or when responding to inquiries related to other matters that could benefit from non-housing interventions.</p>
<p>M. Explore expanding the ongoing supports provided to housing benefit recipients to include ongoing contact by a case manager or housing worker either from the City or a community agency.</p>	
<p>Status: In progress</p>	<p>This recommendation is in progress and includes the development of the Housing Support Worker and Rent Supplement Coordinator roles at Housing Stability Services, as well as partnerships with supportive housing providers and London Middlesex Community Housing to develop better support systems for housing benefit recipients.</p>
<p>N. Support recipients of housing benefits with the housing benefit renewal and with their taxes.</p>	
<p>Status: In progress</p>	<p>As noted in recommendation M above, this recommendation is in progress. The tax component of this recommendation has not yet been reviewed or implemented.</p>
<p>O. Revise the community housing application form so there is only one form when applying for community housing.</p>	
<p>Status: In progress</p>	<p>The recommendation is in progress and also aligns with the Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) Waitlist Placement Ratio Report (CPSC: September9, 2024).</p> <p>One housing assistance form will help support households to a variety of housing assistance programs including RGI housing, rent supplements, supportive housing and special needs housing.</p>