

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members, Community and Protective Services Committee Meeting
From: Kevin Dickins, Acting Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home
Subject: Update – City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program For Unsheltered Individuals
Date: April 20, 2021

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Acting Managing Director, Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home, this report **BE RECEIVED** for information purposes and that the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to extending supports for unsheltered individuals to:

- (a) **ENDORSE** and **APPROVE** this proposed report dated April 20, 2021, “Update - City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals”: and
- (b) that Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to undertake all administrative acts which are necessary in relation to this report.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this information report is to provide an update and overview of the actions taken as part of the Winter Response for individuals experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, including Day and Overnight Spaces, Cold Weather Alert activations and Covid-19 Responses.

In addition, civic administration is recommending for approval the extension of day space services and the implementation of a temporary supportive housing model strictly to build on the stability and progress being made with actively participating individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness for the concentrated purpose of transitioning to more stable housing.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

2019-2023 Strategic Plan for the City of London

The City of London identifies ‘Strengthening Our Community’ and ‘Building a Sustainable City’ as strategic areas of focus.

Londoners have access to the supports they need to be successful.

Londoners have access to the services and supports that promote well-being, health, and safety in their neighbourhoods and across the city.

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

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals (CPSC: December 1, 2021)

- Municipal Council Approval of The Housing Stability Plan 2019 to 2024 as Required Under the Housing Services Act, 2011 (CPSC: December 3, 2019)
- Core Area Action Plan (SPPC: October 28, 2019)
- Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan 2010 – 2024 (CHLC: November 18, 2013)
- Homeless Prevention System for London Three Year Implementation Plan (CPSC: April 22, 2013)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Background

The Winter Response was implemented as a response to the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on the Emergency and Family Shelter system. As new requirements and limitations were imposed as a means to protect vulnerable individuals living in congregate living settings, some service providers were faced with the unfortunate requirement to modify their capacity resulting in reduced bed spaces, in order to accommodate for physical distancing requirements. This meant that a higher volume of vulnerable individuals would be faced with sleeping rough during the winter. The focus of the Winter Response was to support these unsheltered and marginalized individuals of London over the coldest months of the year. The response helped to meet individuals' basic needs, ensure life saving measures were in place, increase system connectivity and provide a solution to assist vulnerable Londoners to get in out of the cold both during the daytime as many program spaces had closed or were inaccessible, as well as overnight accommodations with supports.

Programs included the following responses:

- Hamilton Road Seniors Centre Day Space December 21st, 2020 to date.
- Talbot Street Church Day Space January 28th, 2021 to March 19th, 2021
- 652 Elizabeth Street Day and Overnight Space December 23rd, 2020 to date.
- 415 York Street Day and Overnight Space January 19th, 2021 to date.

In addition, these programs supported additional community needs during Cold Weather Alerts.

Beyond the available **200** shelter spaces, **132** hotel rooms and **15** resting space beds, the Winter Response implemented **62** additional overnight spaces and daytime spaces to accommodate **65** individuals per day.

The Winter Response spaces maintained provincial and local COVID-19 guidelines as determined by the Middlesex London Health Unit, inclusive of screening, cleaning protocols, mandatory wearing of masks, and social distancing. Well established community policies and procedures were adhered to and a referral was made to the established community Isolation Spaces anytime a participant had a positive COVID screening.

Day Spaces

Day Spaces were focused on providing a warm space for individuals to get out of the cold, access basic needs and build a sense of community in a socially distanced environment. Locations were staffed by Impact London, City of London building attendants, third party security, and community volunteers.

Hamilton Road Seniors Centre (525 Hamilton Road)

- Opened December 21, 2020 and is still operational
- 10:00am to 5:00pm, 7 days a week, including holidays
- Hours were extended to include **overnight** space for a Cold Weather Alert in February, supported by Ark Aid Mission
- **3341** individuals were served from opening to March 30, 2021: averaging **35** people daily
- **46** direct referrals to other service agencies including medical professionals, legal assistance, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), addictions treatment, Resting Spaces, Shelter, and more.
- **6** failed COVID screenings were appropriately referred to the established community Monitoring Space for further testing and to await test results.
- **3700** hot lunches provided by The London Area Food Bank (prepared by RBC Place), were delivered daily by 519 Pursuit
- **600** baked goods were provided weekly by Fanshawe Culinary Arts

- The space also allowed for participants to connect with a variety of support workers from community support agencies such as Coordinated Access, St. Leonard's, London Intercommunity Health Centre, CMHA, etc.

*Due to unforeseen delays, the Dundas Field House was not available in time for the Winter Response. Recognizing the need for this emergency response in the community, an agreement was entered into with the Talbot Street Church and Impact London to operate a downtown day space for the coldest months of the program.

Talbot Street Church (513 Talbot Street)

- January 29 to March 19, 2021; Operational for a total of **46** days
- 10:00am to 5:00pm, 7 days a week, including holidays
- Extended hours to 9:00pm for two weeks to assist with Cold Weather in February
- **2436** individuals in total were served, averaging **53** people daily
- **20** direct referrals to other service agencies were made including medical professionals, legal assistance, CMHA, Addiction Services Thames Valley, Resting Spaces, Shelter, employment agencies, and others.
- **7** positive screenings all appropriately referred to Monitoring Space
- **2500** hot lunches provided by The London Area Food Bank (prepared by RBC Place) delivered daily by 519 Pursuit
- **600** baked goods weekly provided by Fanshawe Culinary Arts
- **9** participants were assisted with applications to Ontario Works
- Participants were also able to connect with a variety of support workers from community support agencies

Day Spaces with Overnight Resting Spaces

Overnight resting spaces are low barrier spaces for individuals who were sleeping unsheltered to rest, access basic needs and build stability for a plan toward housing options. The two temporary locations are staffed by Winter Interim Solution to Homelessness (W.I.S.H.) and volunteers and provided a place for participants to stay during the winter. Security staff have provided 24/7 coverage for both sites. The two-day space and overnight resting spaces were located at 652 Elizabeth Street and 415 York Street.

The combination day space with overnight resting spaces at these two locations are being provided through heated temporary structures enclosed by construction fencing. Services provided to the participants included access to washrooms, showers, and basic needs items within a community setting.

652 Elizabeth Street, operational since December 23rd, 2020.

415 York Street, operational since January 19th, 2021.

These spaces were offered to a community of chronically homeless individuals with high acuity, who did not, or could not, stay in our traditional shelter system.

1 individual had experienced **406** short-term stays in shelter since January 2018.

1 individual had experienced **266** short-term stays in shelter since November 2017.

12 individuals have not been previously successful at staying in shelter for more than one night

11 individuals have experienced stays in shelter for under 10 days

12 individuals have experienced stays in shelter for under 20 days

Units not typical of the traditional shelter system succeeded as, unlike traditional shelter or motels, this design allowed for low barrier sheltering. Individuals had their own secure rooms that they exited to eat, to shower, and to engage; this promoted community development and relationship building amongst the staff and other residents. Many individuals were able to demonstrate stabilization from addiction, mental health, and/or trauma. They built relationships, trusted staff, and community members, connected to health care, and many connected to housing services.

In total, **75** individuals have been supported by the Winter Response overnight space throughout the duration of the program.

Of this group, **52** individuals have resided at Winter Response for a period of time spanning between 20 and 99 days

Of which, **43** individuals have stayed at the Winter Response greater than 50 days.

There have been successful outcomes achieved within a very short period of time. Personal, mental, financial, health and housing stability has proven to be a catapult from living unsheltered on the street to housing for some. Some individuals who would otherwise not benefit from the traditional shelter system seem to be excelling in this low barrier setting.

- **25** individuals were deferred to more appropriate housing options through the City of London's Coordinated Access program
- **5** individuals have been housed
- **10** individuals moved on either by choice or request
- **46** individuals are currently still residing at both Winter Response sites as of April 8, 2021.
- **37** individuals are currently paper ready: remaining individuals partially ready
- **23** individuals are matched to housing support programs, will continue to refer others
- **23** individuals currently are in consideration for housing units this month
- **22** individuals have moved to a safe supply regimen while at Winter Response
- **1** resident was COVID positive and was properly isolated with no spread
- **3** individuals failed COVID screenings, went to the monitoring space, were tested, and returned safely

Challenges Experienced

The project did not come without its challenges. Frigid temperatures caused many mechanical concerns for the trailer plumbing at the York street site. Daily operations meetings with the WISH providers and the City helped ensure these challenges were mitigated. While mechanical issues were more concentrated to the York Street site, the Elizabeth Street site faced many challenges with displeased neighbours as it was located on City property within a typically quiet, low- traffic community.

City staff were in constant contact with London Police Service throughout the operation of the winter response shelters. LPS have advised that for the area immediately north of the Elizabeth street location during the winter response shelter operations, that call and occurrence data compared year over year have indicated that occurrences are in line with previous years for the same time periods. However, calls for service were higher than previous years.

Service London records for the immediate vicinity of Elizabeth street from Dec 2020 to April 1, 2021 indicate that there were 7 issues logged through the City's Service London portal. In the 3 months prior to the operation of the site, there were 9 issues logged through the Service London portal.

While incidents involving damages or disturbances directly impacting the immediate neighbourhood near Elizabeth Street or York Street were low, when an incident did occur it was dealt with immediately, including involvement from LPS, and if determined necessary, individuals were permanently removed from the site(s) and LPS would determine if charges were required.

Throughout the Winter Response, the Coordinated Informed Response team increased needle sweeps of the neighbouring park on Elizabeth Street, the nearby skate park and the area around Carling Heights Optimist Community Centre area to two times per week as a result of increased community inquiries. Needle counts during the winter response have been in line with historical needles counts of the area. (approx. 6 needles per week)

Ultimately, increased monitoring by the Coordinated Informed Response and corporate security, promptly addressed neighbour concerns during the operation of the winter response shelter.

Cold Weather Alert Response

When the Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU) issues a Cold Weather and Extreme Cold Weather Alert for London and Middlesex County a response is activated by multiple Service Areas at the City of London, including the Homeless Prevention team. A list of community resources for residents and individuals experiencing homelessness to access to get in out of the cold is shared broadly. In collaboration with our community partners who extend their current capacity to accommodate additional people or longer hours, our Talbot Street Day Space had extended its capacity to 50 individuals while still adhering to COVID-19 social distancing

protocols and its hours to 9:00pm. This provided a solution to the gap between Day Space hours and community overnight options during the coldest days this past winter.

2.2 Proposal for Daytime Support Space and Overnight Transition Services

While it had been expected that the conclusion of the winter months would bring about reduced COVID risk in the community and greater access to the many daytime coffee house style services that have typically operated prior to the pandemic, continued health measures are still in effect and many services remain temporarily closed or their capacity greatly reduced.

As such, Civic Administration is recommending the continuation of the day space at 525 Hamilton Road until June 30, 2021. This daytime drop in service will provide a continuity of care for those that otherwise are unable to attend other community programs and services. The cost of this continued service can be found below and is 100% funded through phase three of the Social Services Relief funding for COVID-19.

In addition to the daytime program space, Civic Administration is seeking Municipal Council approval to shift the Winter Response to a condensed and more focused transitional supportive housing model as opposed to a winter safety and wellbeing approach. This approach will ensure that the 652 Elizabeth Street site is no longer operational and a reduced number of individuals (those that are highly engaged and making progress towards their housing goals) are supported at 415 York Street.

As to not lose momentum and trust that has been slowly established, additional time is being sought to focus on the individuals who do not have housing options but are willing to continue engaging. Residents will continue following healthcare and treatment regimens, safe supply, harm reduction, mental health supports and engaging in developing supportive housing programming. On site supports will focus on connecting individuals with broader system supports (Development Services Ontario, Health, Mental Health, Criminal Justice, income, etc.)

This response is being proposed as approximately 25 winter response participants made significant strides in their housing stability journey but could not secure permanent independent housing. Unfortunately, there continues to be limited appropriate housing options that these remaining individuals could be matched to with a level of support that would be required to sustain their placement and be successful in their housing tenancy. For many of the remaining individuals, housing with supports will not be enough. Many of these individuals would be more successful in a focused supported housing model.

The two months of transitional supported housing is expected to bridge the gap in finding suitable housing for the up-to 25 individuals and connecting them to a longer-term supportive housing option.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Procurement

Procurement for this extension will be supported through section - 14.2 of the Procurement of Goods and Services Policy. The urgent nature of the procurement is a result of the continued reduction of capacity in emergency shelters and homeless serving programs related to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.

3.2 Funding

Funding for the extended day time space and the temporary transition supported housing is from provincial and federal one-time COVID relief funding.

Hamilton Road Day Space May 1 – June 30, 2021

Item	Forecasted Cost
Staffing	\$51,509
Food	\$13,300

Covid cleaning and supply	\$8,200
Capital	0
Contingency	\$26,991
TOTAL:	\$100,000

York Street Day with Overnight Space May 1 – June 30, 2021

Item	Forecasted Cost
Property Lease	\$18,950
Property maintenance and supply	\$15,738
Staffing including cleaning	\$277,194
Food	\$15,160
Covid supply	\$2,400
Capital	0
Contingency	\$45,558
TOTAL:	\$375,000

Conclusion

The Winter Response was approved with a projected end date of April. 30th, 2021. Throughout December 2020 to April 2021 the initiative provided a warm and safe space for people living unsheltered to get in out of the cold. The initiative provided this life saving temporary intervention to individuals that have traditionally been the hardest to serve. The goals and outcomes of the winter response have been met.

In recognition of the continued day space need in the city during the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, Civic Administration is proposing the extension of the day space at 525 Hamilton Road until June 30, 2021. The Hamilton Road Senior Centre would continue to operate a community drop in Day Space with current services and supports.

Additionally, Civic Administration is seeking approval to adjust and re-prioritize services at the 415 York Street site to support a reduced occupancy capacity as means to provide a temporary transitional supported housing model until June 30, 2021.

The York Street site would evolve to operate a 24/7 transitional supported housing model that focuses on participant stability, and system support connections. The advancements made through the Winter Response will be used for strategies and actions to strengthen the next steps for participants. A model of transitional community support focused through a housing stability plan will be introduced for certain remaining individuals with services to be provided by the current service provider.

Many positive strides have been taken at the personal level for the participants targeted for the transitional supportive housing model, and the risk remains that if returned to a life sleeping on the street at this particular time, there is a strong likelihood that these individuals could experience setbacks to their improved mental wellness and physical health gains, as pre-existing restrictions or limitations from the shelter and social service agencies in our community would significantly limit most if not all options for support.

From the outset, the Winter Response efforts were intended to be temporary and established to provide an emergency response to a larger group of unsheltered individuals that had nowhere else to go. The Winter Response would not solve the challenges that lead to someone experiencing homelessness, and while there were challenges throughout the Winter Response, many positives were experienced.

While maintaining the newly created relationships and trust between tenants and service providers will help some continue their positive and healthy progression towards housing, the conclusion of the Winter Response and any re-prioritized extension will inevitably still leave some Londoners with no place to go, and challenges will continue to be seen through street involved activity such as loitering, sleeping rough, visits to Emergency services, Police interactions, and CIR engagement; as services transition and as some participants disengage.

The Winter Response was a valuable learning opportunity that will inform future responses from the homelessness serving sector. The Winter Response benefitted from an enterprise-wide approach from every Service Area at the City. The prioritization of this initiative allowed for many vulnerable Londoners to experience life stabilization, some for the first time in a long time. Many of the participants of the Winter Response have shared their appreciation for the efforts of the City, the community, and the WISH Coalition.

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