

## Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

**To:** Chair and Members, Community and Protective Services Committee Meeting  
**From:** Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development  
**Subject:** COVID-19 Response Update and Program Funding Wind-down  
**Date:** March 1, 2022

## Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development that the following action be taken with respect to the COVID-19 response Update and Wind-down report BE RECEIVED for information proposes and that;

- a) the Mayor **BE DIRECTED** to write a letter to the applicable Ministries with respect to the continuation of Provincial Social Services Relief Funding (SSRF) and Federal Reaching Home COVID response funding.

## Executive Summary

This report provides an update regarding the winding down of Provincial Social Services Relief Funding (SSRF) and the federal COVID-19 relief funding, and the associated temporary relief measures that have been in place. COVID It is noted that to receive SSRF phase 4 funding from the city, each program had to submit a program wind-down plan that contributed to the approval of the City's SSRF investment plan by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The Service Manager wind-down plan was previously communicated to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Civic administration will be bringing a more detailed report to committee in Q3 of 2022 reporting on the outcomes for the entire SSRF and Reaching Home-COVID funding received since early 2020.

The City of London has been clear in the sustained advocacy efforts with the Province of Ontario on the need for continued funding related to homeless prevention services at the SSRF levels as a permanent funding threshold.

The current and still operational SSRF 4 funded programs supporting people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness include:

- COVID Isolation and monitoring spaces for individuals that fail an active screening, are determined to be a high-risk close contact (awaiting test results), or are a confirmed positive case
- Social distancing hotel response for a targeted group of individuals that had been living in congregate living settings
- Family overflow hotel response
- 2021-2022 multi-pronged Winter Response
- Additional emergency shelter beds
- Additional community resting space beds
- Additional staffing and resourcing capacity in various housing support programs

Provincial and federal one-time funding for COVID-19 related support will come to an end March 31, 2022, resulting in the Provincial and Federal wind-down of programs funded through these one-time funding sources.

## 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.

Council and civic administration continue to recognize the importance of actions to support the Core Area, and in the development of its 2019-2023 - Strategic Plan for the City of London. Specifically, the efforts described in this report address the following Areas of Focus, including:

- Strengthening Our Community
- Building a Sustainable City
- Safe City for Women and Girls
- Leading in Public Service

### ***Links to Community Recovery***

The City of London is committed to working in partnership with the community to identify solutions that will drive a strong, deep and inclusive community recovery for London as we move out of and beyond the global COVID-19 pandemic. This report, and the items within, are linked to supporting Londoners experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic to attain and retain permanent housing. This work supports recovery efforts through a coordinated COVID-19 Response that will support the transition of homeless individuals and families who have been provided with temporary shelter in Isolation and Monitoring Spaces and Social Distance Spaces into permanent housing.

## **Analysis**

### **1.0 Background Information**

#### **1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter**

- Housing Stability Services – Social Service Relief Fund Phase Four Allocations (CPSC: November 23, 2021)
- The City of London 2021-22 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals (SS21-40, SS21-41, SS21-42, SS21-43) (CPSC: November 2, 2021)
- Homeless Prevention COVID-19 Response (SSRF Phase 3) – Single Source Procurement - #SS21-29 (June 22, 2021)
- City of London Additional Short-Term Supports for Unsheltered Individuals (CPSC: June 1, 2021)
- Update – City of London 2020-21 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals (CPSC: April 20, 2021)
- Homeless Prevention COVID-19 Response Extension, April to June 2021 (CPSC: March 30, 2021)
- Sole Source Award for the Implementation of The Giwetashkad Indigenous Homelessness Strategic Plan (CPSC March 2, 2021)
- City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals (CPSC: December 1, 2020)
- Homeless Prevention COVID-19 Response and Funding Overview (CPSC: April 28, 2020)
- Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan Funding Agreement (CPSC: April 28, 2020)
- Homeless Prevention COVID-19 Response (CPSC: October 6, 2020)
- Municipal Council Approval of the Housing Stability Plan 2019 to 2024 as Required Under the Housing Services Act, 2011 (CPSC: December 3, 2019)

### **2.0 Discussion and Considerations**

#### **2.1 Purpose**

The City of London along with all Service Managers in Ontario received allocated funding for COVID-19 related supports through the Federal Reaching Home program and the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund. These short-term one-time funding streams were intended to support vulnerable individuals and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding was a measure to allow for municipalities to be able to maintain a service system that was drastically changed as a result of COVID-19 impacts and ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and individuals being served.

As these provincial and federal funding streams come to an end March 31, 2022, a number of COVID-19 response programs and services funded to provide supports throughout the pandemic will wind-down. This wind-down is aligned with the ramp up of several existing programs as health restrictions are being relaxed.

It is noted that given the temporary nature of the COVID programs, service managers were limited in the ability to establish longer-term solutions or plan for the continuation of these programs. The criteria for the funding provided options however throughout the various installments between operating and capital expenditures, these were considered and implemented where possible, recognizing the funding for the programs was specific to COVID related costs. The expectation from the initial release of the SSRF funding was that existing base supports, and services would continue to be operated through existing base funded programs for prevention, diversion and emergency shelter. This included existing programs to support people to find and retain housing.

The current Housing Stability System has been designed in a way that if additional permanent funding is made available through Provincial or Federal programs, the current system would be able to expand a number of existing programs to assist in addressing the current need in community, including more permanent initiatives to address and make efforts to end chronic homelessness. The time limited Provincial and Federal funding allowed for interim and life saving measures to be developed and implemented. Several community agencies received funding and offered overwhelming support, advice, and commitment to caring for marginalized individuals throughout the pandemic.

Civic Administration has continued to advocate to the provincial and federal governments for increased funding to support the local community need. Avenues of advocacy include aligning the City's voice with municipal associations, such as AMO and OMSSA, advocacy at provincial program tables related to various reviews as well as supporting community advocacy through the London Homeless Coalition. Municipal Council has taken opportunity through various AMO delegations, conversations with various Ministers, and very recently as part of the City's pre-budget submission to the Province of Ontario. These efforts include a recognition of the pre-pandemic reality of the housing and homelessness crisis, that the current system is chronically underfunded and that the impacts of COVID-19 have only increased demand on services that are already at capacity. The opportunity for these advocacy efforts to be recognized does exist through the upcoming Provincial and Federal budgets expected in the Spring. The budget announcements create the environment for tangible action by senior levels of Government to help those experiencing homelessness in Ontario.

## **2.2 Background**

In 2021/2022 provincial and federal funding supported the implementation of temporary responses for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, including responses aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19 in emergency shelters, congregate living settings and amongst individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Through this funding the Housing Stability Services team has been able to implement a number of COVID specific responses to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness. With the decision of the Provincial and Federal government to wind-down this funding and considering the increase in demand for service as a result of COVID-19, it is anticipated there will be a significant impact on the availability of supports for individuals and families experiencing homelessness as service shift back to a pre-pandemic model of care.

The following programs operating at this time will end March 31, 2022 (unless otherwise specified):

### COVID Isolation and Monitoring Spaces (London Cares)

This program provided private rooms and supports for individuals experiencing homelessness who have screened positive, are a close contact, or tested positive for COVID-19. This program was started in response to a quickly evolving pandemic in early 2020, and since then more than 8000 individuals have utilized this space for COVID-19 isolation and monitoring needs. Individuals would be referred to the space from a number of sources including from Emergency Shelters, Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre, from community programs, from outreach teams, from hospital, or through a contact with the Health Unit.

As noted, this program submitted a wind-down plan as part of receiving SSRF phase 4 funding. Within the wind-down plan, strategies were articulated which included targeted steps to increase vaccination efforts within the homeless population, including education and training for individuals and programs supporting individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, as a result of improved infectious disease protocols within the emergency shelter system, approved outbreak plans for every program funded by the City, and opportunities to isolate in place within the emergency shelter system, the service has met the conditions of an approved wind-down plan.

### Hotel Rooms with Supports (Unity Project)

This program is an extension of the emergency shelter system and provides rooms and supports for those with increased health risks from COVID-19. As part of the ongoing work within the emergency shelter system, the operation and oversight of this space is shifting to Unity Project. Unity Project is unable to return to their original location as a result of COVID-19 protocols and best practices to keep individuals safe, and therefore this organization will now be responsible for all day-to-day operations of the hotel space and will continue to support individuals who are currently staying at this location.

Moving forward, as people leave the space, new matches will be made through the City's Coordinated Access program and will support the broader homeless population versus only those who have identified health risks to COVID-19. To date, 271 unique individuals have utilized this space. Work will continue to focus on connecting individuals to supports and housing opportunities available within community.

### Hotel Rooms with Supports – Violence Against Women Sector (CMHA Thames Valley Addiction & Mental Health Services)

This program provides 13 private rooms and supports for individuals who identify as women with increased safety risks. This program will be winding down for March 31 and those staying in space are being moved out of the program in accordance with the wind-down plan submitted as part of receiving SSRF phase 4 funding. To date, 136 women have utilized this space. Work will continue to focus on connecting individuals to supports and housing opportunities available within community as the program winds down. At this time 11 women are in the program and being supported to find safe and appropriate housing in community by the end of March.

### Family Overflow (Coordinated Access)

Coordinated Access has provided hotel rooms for families who could not be successfully diverted from an experience of homelessness while Rotholme Family Shelter was at capacity because of COVID restrictions. As the family shelter is returning to full capacity, these hotel rooms will be wound down in accordance with the Provincial funding requirements and families will continue to be supported by the current family shelter response.

For all hotel responses noted above, additional costs that will be winding down include cleaning, pest control, damages, and other miscellaneous costs.

### Food Costs for Hotel and Community Programs (Hotels and Safe Space program)

Food costs include meals and snacks for individuals and families residing in hotel spaces and the Safe Space program which has provided hot meals to support food security for individuals experiencing homelessness and sleeping unsheltered in the east end of the Core Area.

As the hotel programs wind-down, the provision of community meal programs continues to reopen with the easing of COVID restrictions. As such, program and individual connections are being made to those resources as well as any other opportunities in community for additional meals being provided after March 31, 2022.

#### Wish to Be Home

This program provides transitional supportive housing for individuals who had previously slept unsheltered and resided in the 2021 Winter Response sites. Additionally, this program offered a drop in space, access to food and basic needs. A Building Coordinator is in place to support all individuals residing in the building, providing de-escalation and communication with various service agencies and supports.

As this program winds down as part of the Provincial funding requirements, work continues to connect individuals to support programs and to move towards continued housing stability. Many of the remaining participants are securing housing and efforts will continue to try and ensure additional participants can be supported by existing housing programs beyond March 31, 2022.

#### Resting Spaces (London Cares)

London Cares Resting Spaces provide individuals and couples the spaces needed to rest and access basic needs during the day or at night. An additional 5 spaces were funded at this location as part of SSRF phase 4. This location will return to its original funded capacity limit after March 31, 2022.

#### Additional Rapid Housing Support Program Capacity (Various Programs)

Housing Support Programs assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness to secure and maintain housing. Additional program spaces were funded to create short term capacity to assist individuals with low or moderate support needs find housing. This program will return to existing funded capacity after March 31, 2022.

#### Community Comfort Stations

Comfort Stations have been located throughout the Core Area providing access to bathrooms and hand sanitizer for people experiencing homelessness. As COVID restrictions ease and community programs begin to open, it is anticipated that access to washrooms will increase, and these facilities (3 in total) will be discontinued after March 31, 2022.

#### Winter Response Day and Overnight Drop In (Ark Aid Mission)

The Day drop-in program operates in the YMCA Centre Branch location. This program provides space for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness to come inside out of the elements, access a place to rest and meet basic needs, including a meal program.

This program is part of the broader services that the Ark Aid Street Mission offers and will be continued past March 31, 2022 fully funded and operated by the Ark.

The overnight Drop in operates from First St. Andrews Church. This program provides space for up to 50 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness to come inside out of the elements, rest and meet basic needs. This program will be wrapping up as of March 31, 2022 with individuals accessing existing program supports as available.

#### Wiigiwaaminaan Indigenous Winter Response (Atlohsa)

The Indigenous Winter Response program is located at Parkwood Institute and provides up to 30 spaces (24/7) for Indigenous individuals who are sleeping unsheltered. This program has supported 26 individuals with culturally specific programming, shelter and basic needs. The continuation of this program is being explored by the organization and will need to utilize existing funding already provided by the City through other funding sources.

#### Fanshawe Winter Response (London Cares)

The Fanshawe Winter Response Program is located at Fanshawe Golf Course and provides up to 30 spaces (24/7) for individuals who are sleeping unsheltered and working towards securing housing. This program is closing Feb 28, 2022. To date, two (2) individuals have transitioned into permanent housing with another twelve (12) anticipated to move before the end of February. The remaining participants in the program will be supported within existing housing stability and emergency shelter programs after February 28, 2022 to find safe and appropriate housing in community.

### **3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations**

At this time, provincial and federal base funding for 2022-23 has remained the same as pre-pandemic level. Civic administration notes that the SSRF and Reaching Home COVID-19 funding have identified a gap in services in our community. Civic Administration recognizes that given this funding is provided by other levels of Government and that there is no indication they will be stepping in to continue the funding, Council would not be counted on, nor would they be in the position to step-in based on the City's key financial principles and acknowledging the opportunity and responsibility rests with the budgets of other levels of government. -

The total one-time SSRF and Reaching Home COVID-19 funding received in 2020-21 was \$12.16M and in 2021-22 was \$14.9M. This funding has been used for a number of responses beyond those identified in this report including the creation of 100 long term affordable housing units and various capital and operating contributions to shelter providers, support agencies, and Middlesex County. As noted, civic administration is planning to bring a future report to council that outlines all of the many outcomes achieved from all installments of SSRF and Reaching Home COVID-19 funding.

In general, through various contract negotiations, service providers have identified that their operating costs to maintain pre-pandemic service levels have risen and will impact future service provision. Therefore the attention to sustaining on-going advocacy efforts by the City remains paramount leading up to the launch of both the Federal and Provincial budget.

Civic Administration has received inquiries regarding a Winter Response for 2022/2023. At this time there is not an identified source of funding for this program following the end of the one time provincial and federal funding. In the spring and summer months the Coordinated Informed Response team shifts their focus in how they manage situations and an increase in complaints that emerge related to supporting those living unsheltered, including responding to the needs of those living unsheltered in encampments as well as responding to the need of individuals during summer heat alerts. There are no planned discussions about a Winter Response for 2022-2023 beyond working with existing service networks and seeking out investments from the Provincial Government to maintain service levels in the community for the years to come.

## **Conclusion**

Civic Administration follows the Council approved Housing Stability Action Plan as the guiding document for the delivery of Housing Stability Services in the community. The primary focus of that plan is reducing homelessness through the implementation of affordable housing and housing with supports. Civic Administration will continue to pursue advocacy efforts and emphasize the need for continued Provincial and Federal funding to support a person-centred system that has experienced an increase in both service demand and service cost during the COVID-19 era. While it is not confirmed, it is anticipated that individuals impacted by the Provincial and Federal COVID relief wind-down will continue to have access, if capacity permits, to pre-established supports available through the housing stability service system.

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Development**