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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

To: Health and Social Services Committee
From: Commissioner of Social Services
Report: #2019-SS-11
Date: September 5, 2019

Subject:

Summary report of 2018 homelessness and short-term rent support programs

Recommendation:

That the Health and Social Services Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on homelessness programs funded through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and short-term rent support programs funded through the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) Program.

2. Background

2.1 In 2018, \$8,016,010 in 100 per cent provincial funding and \$72,150 in Regional funding was committed to CHPI services in Durham Region. Funds were flowed to community partners to support programs to assist households experiencing homelessness obtain housing and help households at risk of homelessness with eviction prevention.

2.2 The Region enters into service contracts with local agencies for the administration of CHPI programs that assist households obtain and/or retain housing in four service categories including: emergency shelter solutions; housing and related supports; services and supports; and homelessness prevention. Program expenditures are reconciled in each quarter and agencies complete regular project outcome reports as part of an ongoing evaluation of service conducted by

the Housing Services Division. Regional staff compile these reports and analyze the data to identify trends in community needs.

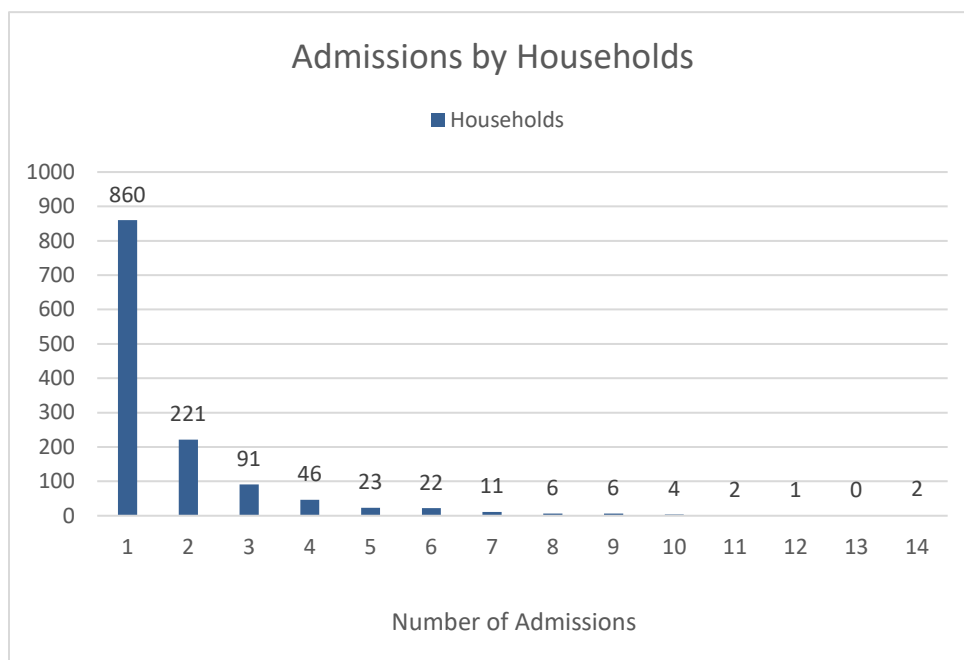
- 2.3 In addition to CHPI funding, \$2,678,365 was provided to low income households through the 100 per cent federally and provincially funded Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) program to improve affordability conditions within market rent accommodations. This funding is split between the Durham Housing Benefit (DHB) (\$1,897,165) and the Housing Allowance Program (HAP) (\$781,200).
- 2.4 The DHB provides short-term flat rate rent assistance directly to landlords on behalf of market rent tenants. Assistance is provided through two IAH program streams:
 - a. Direct delivery – the Region approves and monitors tenant eligibility and makes payments on their behalf to landlords who have entered into service agreements with the Region. In 2018, 211 households were assisted under this program stream.
 - b. Shared delivery – the Region provides funding to partner agencies who manage tenant eligibility and landlord payments on behalf of the Region. The Region has partnered with 8 agencies in a shared delivery DHB program. These agencies administer the benefit on behalf of their clients. In 2018, 159 households were assisted under this program stream.
- 2.5 The IAH Housing Allowance program provides short-term flat rate rent assistance directly to tenants through a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Finance. In 2018, 209 households were assisted through this program.
- 2.6 CHPI and IAH funds are leveraged to ensure investment strategies support the goals of At Home in Durham, the Durham Region Housing Plan 2014-2024, including End Homelessness in Durham, Affordable Rent for Everyone, Greater Housing Choice, and Strong and Vibrant Neighbourhoods.

3. Emergency Shelter Solutions

- 3.1 Shelter services are provided to households experiencing homelessness through the Emergency Shelter CHPI stream. Emergency shelter is provided by three non-profit agencies serving Durham residents:
 - a. Cornerstone Community Association – single men with or without children, couples with children, seniors with high medical needs that can't be accommodated in shelter
 - b. Muslim Welfare Home – single women with or without children
 - c. Joanne's House – single youth (ages 16-24 years)
- 3.2 The number of households using shelter services has remained consistent, averaging just under 1,400 households per year since 2014. The ratio of families to singles has also remained consistent with approximately 90 per cent of shelter

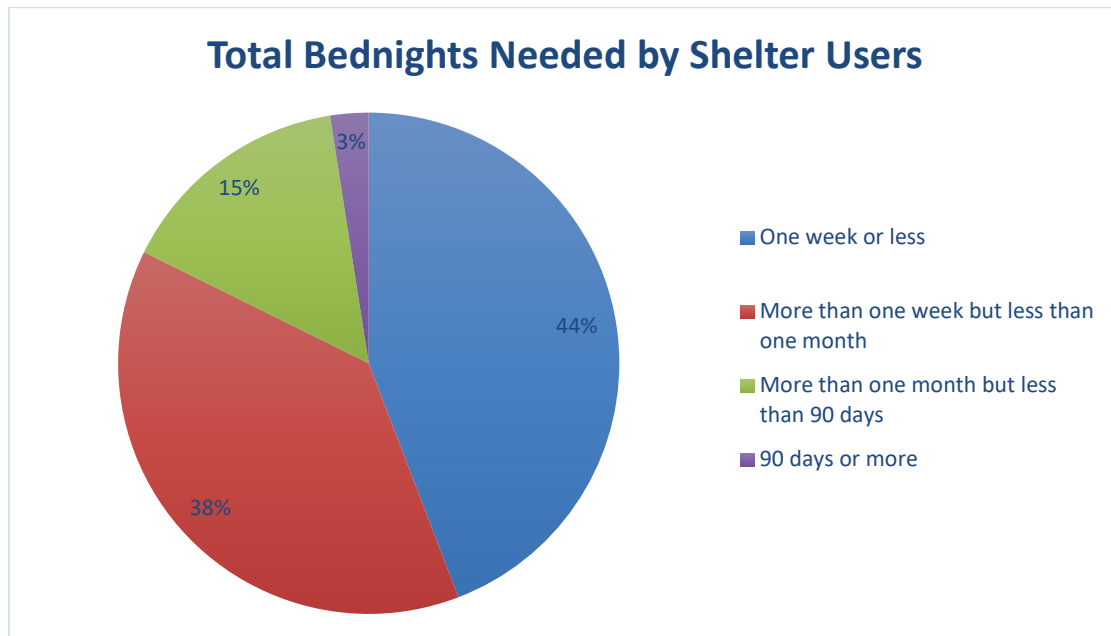
users being single people with no children.

- 3.3 Although the number of households using shelter services has remained consistent, there was a decrease in the average length of stay from 11.12 nights in 2017 to 7.62 nights in 2018, reflecting a shift in household use from longer stays to shorter stays.
- 3.4 Shelter occupancy rates across all three emergency shelters averaged 76 per cent in 2018 which is consistent with prior years. January had the highest occupancy rate at 90 per cent, and May and June had the lowest occupancy rates at 68 per cent. Shelter occupancy rates below 100 per cent do not necessarily mean that beds are underutilized. Beds may be offline due to shelter repairs/renovations or room composition where a household may occupy a whole room but not all beds in the room.
- 3.5 A small group of households were episodically¹ homeless and accessed emergency shelter services several times throughout 2018. Most of the frequent shelter users were single males:



- 3.6 In 2018, the Emergency Shelter Standards were amended to provide up to 90 days of accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness. Most shelter users (82 per cent) accessed emergency shelter services for less than one month. Only 3 per cent of shelter users needed to utilize the full 90 days.

¹ Episodic homelessness refers to individuals or households have had three or more instances of homelessness in the past year.



- 3.7 In 2018, emergency shelter programs facilitated 1,236 housing placements from shelter to long-term housing through:
- a. engagement with landlords and community agencies to build positive relationships with the goal of facilitating housing move-ins
 - b. partnerships with community agencies that have supportive housing for clients with high-acuity that need on-going support to remain stably housed
 - c. transitional or permanent housing opportunities within their organization.
- 3.8 There are four Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters in Durham Region that receive funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) for shelter and outreach programs:
- a. Bethesda House – 18 MCCSS funded beds, 24 total beds
 - b. Denise House – 22 MCCSS funded beds, 27 total beds
 - c. Herizon House – 30 MCCSS funded beds, 33 total beds
 - d. Y's Wish – 15 MCCSS funded beds, 20 total beds.
- 3.9 Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) and Durham Mental Health Services coordinated a Point in Time (PiT) Count and Registry Week in 2018 to identify the nature and extent of homelessness in Durham. This initiative was funded through the federal Homelessness Prevention Strategy and provincial CHPI program.
- a. Households were surveyed on various demographic characteristics as well as service needs. A total 188 individuals were surveyed on the night of the PiT Count or during the following four days of the Registry Week.
 - b. Of the 188 individuals surveyed, 91 per cent were single and the remainder had children in their care. Of the families surveyed, more than half were in a

VAW shelter with the remainder split evenly between the emergency shelters and provisional accommodations². There were no unsheltered children identified.

4. Housing and Related Supports

- 4.1 Housing and related supports are offered through two types of programs: housing with supports attached to the accommodations; and supports to individuals living independently.
- 4.2 The Region partners with four community agencies to provide housing and related supports: Community Living Durham North, Cornerstone Community Association, Durham Mental Health Services, and Participation House. These partners assist households adjust to their supportive housing accommodation and provide ongoing support to ensure that program participants remain stably housed.

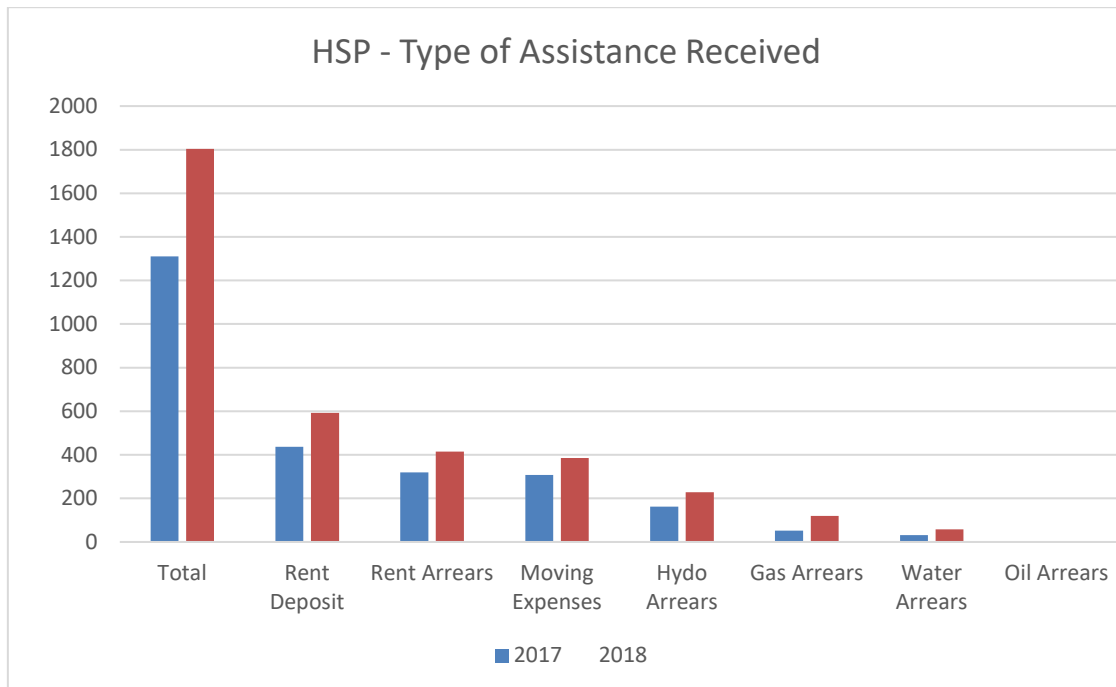
5. Services and Supports

- 5.1 Housing outreach workers provide supports to households who are not using shelters but are also homeless. This group included people who are provisionally accommodated meaning they live in temporary accommodation or lack security of tenure (e.g. staying temporarily with friends or family).
- 5.2 Outreach services are provided by Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) in Ajax and Pickering, John Howard Society Durham Region (JHS) in Oshawa, Whitby and Clarington, and North House and Community Living Durham North in Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge. In 2018, housing outreach agencies helped 511 unsheltered or provisionally accommodated households secure permanent housing.

6. Homelessness Prevention

- 6.1 The Housing Stability Program (HSP) provides one-time financial assistance to households to help them secure housing or maintain their tenancies. Assistance can be provided for rent or energy arrears, rent deposits, or moving expenses.
- 6.2 In 2018, 1,812 households received HSP assistance, representing a 38 per cent increase from 2017. Of the approved applicants, the two largest groups were singles (34 per cent) and female sole-support parents (37 per cent) followed by couples with children (17 per cent).
- 6.3 Assistance with rent deposits (33 per cent) and rent arrears (23 per cent) continue to be the most requested HSP benefits.

² Provisionally accommodated refers to individuals or households that live in temporary accommodation or lack security of tenure.



6.4 Housing outreach and eviction prevention workers also assisted 2,623 households at-risk of homelessness maintain their housing stability through this program stream.

7. Challenges

- 7.1 The average market rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Durham (\$1,153) exceeds the total Ontario Works assistance for a single person (\$733) and is almost equal to the total Ontario Disability Support Plan (ODSP) rate (\$1,169) for a single person. Single people receiving social assistance have limited affordable housing options in Durham Region and often rely on rooming houses – many of which are either unregulated and potentially unsafe or not protected by the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) because the tenant shares a bathroom and/or kitchen with the owner of the property.
- 7.2 Time-limited rent support programs like the Durham Housing Benefit (DHB) and Housing Allowance Program (HAP) do not allow sufficient time to stabilize households. Without long-term sustainable funding, households will be at risk of homelessness when the program funding ends. The DHB and HAP end on March 31, 2023 and March 31, 2024 respectively.
- 7.3 Vacancy rates in Durham remain very low (2.4 per cent) and demand for available rental units is increasing. It is challenging to build partnerships with landlords to rent to low-income households when the demand for available units is high.
- 7.4 Unsheltered homelessness is becoming more visible in Durham. Many of those living unsheltered have complex healthcare needs and require comprehensive supports to stabilize. Many of these individuals choose to live unsheltered rather

than use the shelter system, which may limit their access to other support services.

8. Successes

- 8.1 The Region has partnered with community agencies to address unsheltered homelessness in Durham.
- a. Cornerstone Community Association's Housing First programs showed success in 2018 with 25 high acuity clients moving from shelter to more permanent housing. Once stably housed, program participants continue to work with Housing First workers to meet self-identified goals, as well as attend ongoing social engagement events.
 - b. The Region also partnered with Cornerstone Community Association to create and implement two new initiatives in 2018:
 - The Bridges Street Outreach program provides a dedicated street outreach team to build relationships with unsheltered individuals and connect them to available supports and services in the community. The Bridges Street Outreach program began in the second quarter of 2018 and successfully housed 15 individuals who had been living unsheltered. This program worked collaboratively with the Region's Primary Care Outreach Pilot (PCOP) program to maximize the resources available to this population.
 - The Out of the Cold warming center program is a low barrier alternative to the conventional shelter program which provides accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness during the winter months. The pilot will be evaluated to determine the efficacy of the warming center model during periods of extreme cold.
 - c. Regional staff established a task force to specifically address unsheltered homelessness in Oshawa. The Oshawa Unsheltered Residents (OUR) Task Force includes representation from the Region, the City and community partners. This collaborative table develops and implements strategies to address the needs and barriers of those living unsheltered in the city of Oshawa.
- 8.2 The Region also partnered with the Salvation Army to create the Housing Retention Program. This program facilitates positive relationships with landlords to increase the supply of affordable housing through a roommate matching process and supported accommodations. The program provides ongoing transitional supports to ensure stable tenancies. In 2018, the program helped 19 households obtain and retain housing through this collaborative model.
- 8.3 The Region facilitated the implementation of the Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS 4.0) across funded homelessness serving partner agencies. This new web-based software allows all partner agencies to access the same database and provides universal information sharing through a

common consent form. Partner agencies can now facilitate wrap-around supports and build on the services already provided to clients. Information is then fed back into the system to build stories around individuals, track changes over time and inform future decision making.

- 8.1 Council previously approved approximately 30 additional rent-geared-to-income (RGI) subsidies above the Region's legislated service level standard to address those who are homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless (refer #2017-COW-257). In addition to partnering with local landlords for the provision of units, the Region is partnering with Cornerstone Community Association to increase the availability of housing opportunities for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- 8.2 The Region became the Community Entity to administer federal homelessness funding through Reaching Home on April 1, 2019. All available sources of funding for homelessness initiatives will be coordinated to close gaps in service and build synergy among housing and homelessness programs.
- 8.3 The Region is working with local agencies to provide portable housing benefits to at-risk youth. This targeted intervention will reduce homelessness by preventing the in-flow of youth into the homelessness system in Durham.

9. Next Steps

9.1 Coordinated Access

- a. The Region is working with the HIFIS Community Coordinator to continue the rollout of HIFIS 4.0 across Durham.
- b. The implementation of HIFIS 4.0 was the first step taken by the Region working towards the development of a Coordinated Access System. A Coordinated Access System streamlines the process for households experiencing homelessness to access housing opportunities and supports by standardizing the intake, assessment and referral processes across Durham.

9.2 Increased focus on eviction prevention programs

- a. It is becoming more difficult for low-income households to find affordable housing. If a household has housing that is even moderately affordable and suitable, agencies are focusing their efforts on assisting tenants to maintain that housing. This assistance can be mediating or negotiating with the landlord, supporting the tenant at the Landlord and Tenant Board, or financial assistance for rent or energy arrears.
- b. Non-senior single people receiving social assistance income are often limited to rooming house accommodations when not provisionally accommodated or using shelter programs. To assist these households to become and stay stable, agencies are supporting them in knowing and exercising their rights as rooming house tenants. It is hoped that this activity in conjunction with the landlord engagement described above will result in more housing stability for this marginalized group.

- 9.3 The Region is working with the Durham Advisory Committee on Homelessness (DACH) and the Community Advisory Board (CAB) to develop a community plan to maximize the benefits of federal Reaching Home funding to reduce chronic³ homelessness in Durham.
- 9.4 Staff will continue to explore innovative partnerships and models to address the needs of unsheltered residents that connect them with housing outreach supports, harm reduction services, employment support opportunities and income supports.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by:

Stella Danos-Papaconstantinou
Commissioner of Social Services

³ Chronic homelessness refers to individuals or households that have experienced homelessness for six months or more in the past year.