



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	WARDEN AND LAMBTON COUNTY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT:	HOUSING SERVICES HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND SOCIAL PLANNING ONTARIO WORKS
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MEETING DATE:	November 6, 2024
INFORMATION ITEM:	Homelessness Prevention and Affordable Housing Update

BACKGROUND

At its meeting dated April 3, 2024, Lambton County Council asked that staff *provide brief monthly updates on its affordable housing projects and homelessness prevention efforts within the community.*

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (“**CMSM**”), the Social Services Division is responsible for the delivery of homelessness prevention services as well as housing services.

This report is an update on the current state of each program area.

DISCUSSION

Ontario Works

Ontario Works (“**OW**”) provides financial assistance to those in financial need including emergency assistance to individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless. Financial assistance is provided to assist with living expenses including food, rent and utilities. OW is often the first point of contact for someone who is at risk of becoming homeless and in addition to financial support, action plans are developed, and referrals are made to prevent homelessness. This plan may include housing applications, childcare applications, life stabilization supports and employment readiness activities. Hundreds of households receive these supports monthly.

For the month of September 2024, the OW caseload was 3,013. During the same time frame, the number of OW emergency applications received were 73. In addition to this, 66 households were supported through the Housing Stability Assistance benefit. This includes households in receipt of OW, Ontario Disability Support Program (“**ODSP**”), low-income families not in receipt of social assistance and seniors. OW data is extracted from the provincial database called the Social Assistance Management System (“**SAMS**”).

Housing Services

The Housing Advocacy Program is an eviction prevention program. Community Support Workers (“**CSWs**”) within this program provide outreach and supports to tenants and their families by advocating on behalf of tenants to improve their quality of life while maintaining their housing. The CSWs have caseloads that consist of many hard to serve individuals with complex needs.

During the month of September:

- 122 unique tenants were assisted to maintain their tenancy.
- 244 visits/contacts were made.
- 21 evictions were prevented.
- Eight applicants were housed from the centralized housing wait list.
- 57 applications were received for the centralized wait list.
- 926 households remain on the centralized wait list.
- 48 months is the average wait time on the list for a one-bedroom unit.
- One Lambton Renovates conditional letters of approval was issued.

Kathleen Avenue Development

Pre-development work is progressing on Kathleen Avenue. A completed zoning application has been submitted for this property. Housing Services staff held a public information session on October 8, 2024 to share information on the development with the neighbourhood.

By-Name-List

The By-Name List (“**BNL**”) is a comprehensive, real-time list of every known and consenting individual experiencing homelessness. This number includes individuals experiencing absolute homelessness (i.e. living rough) as well as individuals or families without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring housing. As of September 30, there were 326 individuals on the BNL. This represents an increase of five individuals or 2.6%. There were 229 individuals who were experiencing chronic homelessness, which represents an increase of 19 individuals. Chronic homelessness refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness and have a total of at least six months of homelessness over the past year.

Integrated Homelessness Prevention Team

The County's integrated homelessness team contains CSWs that serve as either Intensive Housing Case Managers or Rapid Rehousing Workers. Intensive Housing Case Managers support lower caseloads of households that are experiencing chronic homelessness, often facing concurrent complex mental health and addictions challenges, to secure and retain permanent housing.

Rapid Rehousing Workers support larger caseloads of households that are newly or episodically experiencing homelessness, to retain or quickly resecure permanent housing. Both forms of CSW offer life stabilization supports, and work in close partnership with several local multidisciplinary teams to ensure the health and social needs of these households are supported.

During the month of September:

- 162 unique individuals received services from a CSW.
- 602 visits/contacts were made.
- 16 individuals/families were moved into more permanent housing.
- 10 rent supplements were approved to assist individuals move into more permanent housing.

Community Outreach Workers

The Community Outreach Workers provide assertive community outreach to households experiencing homelessness. The team's efforts are primarily directed toward individuals that are experiencing absolute homelessness. The housing case management provided through this team is brought to households experiencing homelessness, wherever they are, and is often delivered outside. Assistance is concentrated on progressing the household along the housing continuum for long-term success. While addressing the basic needs of this vulnerable population is a vital component of the service, the primary goals of engagement are housing centric. Tools for engagement are commonly used to meet immediate needs including food security, temporary shelter, hygiene, health, and sanitation.

During the month of September:

- 69 unique individuals were served.
- 108 contacts/visits were made.
- Two individuals moved from the street to more permanent housing (some individuals may have entered the shelter system for several nights).
- Four successful referrals to external services were made.

Top three reasons 69 individuals provided for sleeping rough:

Reason for sleeping rough	Proportion
Chose not to stay in shelter, personal relationships	17%
Chose not to stay in shelter, substance use	30%
Chose not to stay in shelter, mental health	26%

Emergency Shelter

The County provides funding to the Inn of the Good Shepherd to operate the following shelter services:

- The Good Shepherd's Lodge – 35 beds. 88.7% occupancy during September.
- Out of the Cold Program – 35 temporary beds (increased from 28 to 35 beds in September). 89.7% occupancy during September.
- Haven Youth Shelter – 9 beds. 43.3% occupancy during September.
- Overall system occupancy for the month of September was 86.1%.

In addition to the above, the County has secured additional beds through local motels and hotels to provide greater capacity and flexibility within the emergency shelter system, should the need arise. There are several families experiencing homelessness presently placed within motels.

At its October 2, 2024 Council meeting, Council considered a Notice of Motion and accompanied correspondence that enquired whether the County has looked at the restrictions as it relates to couples and other issues that would remove any court challenge. At this same meeting, Council asked staff to provide a report at its next meeting on the cost to upgrade the shelter to meet some of the court requirements, specifically accommodating couples.

The emergency shelter system aims to be responsive to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness with the provision of necessary social supports and the County Social Services' team will continue to monitor and evaluate these supports. All individuals seeking assistance have their needs assessed and reasonably accommodated. This includes, among other accommodations, couples and families, as well as individuals experiencing homelessness who own a pet. Every situation is evaluated individually.

Couples may be accommodated through local motels and hotels. It is not possible to alter the existing emergency shelter locations to accommodate couples at these locations, and so utilizing motels is the only current option. Notwithstanding this, staff have explored other locations in the City of Sarnia for a congregate care emergency shelter, however each possible location would be required to undergo a rezoning process and application to permit a congregate care use; this process typically takes approximately 3-5 months.

Discussions have been exploratory in nature, as such leasing costs are unknown at this time, though expected to be significant.

Since the spring of 2023, through inter-agency coordinated efforts but driven by the County of Lambton's integrated homelessness team, nearly 50 families, comprised of almost 150 individuals have been progressed from an experience of homelessness into permanent housing. Individualized emergency housing accommodations have also been used to reasonably support exceptional needs. The current monthly cost to support existing households is more than \$30,000. This monthly cost has been as high as \$65,000. The demand for this intervention is highly variable, driven by families newly experiencing homelessness.

On a monthly basis, and identified in this report, the County of Lambton homelessness outreach team identifies uniquely, by client, the primary reason why individuals are living unsheltered. In this most recent month, 12 individuals identified personal relationships as this primary reason. This includes choosing to avoid individuals staying in shelter, choosing to stay outside with another individual, or personal conflicts that supersede their choice to access shelter. Currently, there are greater than six but fewer than 12 households identified as a couple. This includes individuals self-identifying as couples on a temporary basis and not necessarily intending to be permanently housed together. The relationship dynamics among these individuals change frequently making the provision of shelter spaces challenging. Notwithstanding this, the emergency shelter system aims to provide accommodations to couples that demonstrate an intent to be permanently housed together or exhibit other factors that require couple accommodations. If individualized couple accommodations were offered by way of motel rooms to temporary couples, this cohort of self-identified couples would inevitably increase. This phenomenon was experienced across the pandemic when motel spaces were utilized for isolation and resulted in a significant increase in households asking for motel rooms from situations of provisional accommodation.

The cost of implementing this expansion of services will be significant. Utilizing existing known couples experiencing unsheltered homelessness, it is anticipated that the monthly cost would increase to a minimum of \$65,000 but could exceed \$100,000 due to anticipated sought demand, based upon trends experienced during the pandemic. In addition, costs associated with damages from individuals staying in motels would need to be considered. Averages from historical service indicates a minimum increase of 20% of the costs associated with the rooms. This results in a minimum total monthly cost in excess of \$78,000.

As noted above, based upon our engagement with individuals living rough, those choosing to not attend shelter spaces is not because of an accessibility barrier, but rather because of external factors influencing their decisions, like substance use or mental health.

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the current process of utilizing local motels and hotels as noted above continue. The emergency shelter system aims to be

responsive to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness with the provision of necessary social supports.

Landlord Engagement Worker

The County Integrated Homelessness team contains a landlord engagement support worker role. This position focuses on directly engaging local property managers and landlords for the purposes of strengthening communication and cooperation related to households supported by case managers. This work better enables mediation to maintain existing tenancies and securing private market rental opportunities for housing case managers.

During the month of September:

- 52 landlords were engaged.
- 24 tenancy concerns were addressed.
- 42 client appointments to discuss housing needs.
- Three apartment units were viewed with individuals experiencing homelessness.

The total number of unique individuals experiencing homelessness that progressed into more permanent housing with assistance from the integrated homelessness prevention team during the month of September was 16.

Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre

- 137 unique individuals were provided supports at the centre.
- 739 visits were made to the centre.
- 87 referrals were made to support services and community partners.

During the month of September referrals included but are not limited to, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Legal Assistance Services, assisting with ODSP and OW issues, connecting clients with their doctors and setting up telephone and virtual appointments, meeting with clients and possible landlords, referrals to Bluewater Health mental health and addictions services, calling The Lodge for beds (male and female), assisting client with reconnection of hydro, assisting with income tax preparation, and connecting with IMPACT for wellness checks on clients that have not been seen or staff have concerns about, and referrals to the County's CHIC team for medical and health related concerns.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

CONSULTATIONS

Not applicable.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The activities of the Division support the Community Development Area of Effort #3 in the County of Lambton's Strategic Plan, specifically:

- Strengthening the County's advocacy and lobbying efforts with other levels of government to raise the profile of the County and its needs to secure improved senior government supports, funding, grants, and other resources to meet emerging infrastructure and service needs;
- Consulting with the community and stakeholders on ways to increase housing options and affordability, and innovative programs and initiatives that focus on poverty reduction and promote social belonging;
- Supporting the development of a variety of affordable housing to meet demand;
- Implementing, monitoring and updating community health and wellness-related plans and priorities, including, but not limited to, the *Housing and Homelessness Plan*, *Community Safety & Well-Being Plan*, the Long-Term Care division's mission, vision, and values, *Age Friendly Community Planning* framework, Lambton Public Health's strategic priorities, *Lambton Drug & Alcohol Strategy*, *Lambton EMS Master Plan*, and *Child Care and Early Years 5-Year Service System Plan*; and
- Advocating for, and supporting access to, mental health and addiction services.

CONCLUSION

This report provides a snapshot of the work that three departments within the Social Services Division delivered through an integrated program delivery approach. It includes the outputs and outcomes of each program. It does not include the longer-term systems related to planning occurring within the Division and with community partners on an ongoing basis to address the underlying issues of homelessness.