



## **SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION**

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	<b>Melissa Fitzpatrick, Manager Ian Hanney, Supervisor</b>
<b>REVIEWED BY:</b>	<b>Valerie Colasanti, General Manager Stéphane Thiffeault, Chief Administrative Officer</b>
<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	<b>October 18, 2023</b>
<b>INFORMATION ITEM:</b>	<b>Out Of the Cold Program</b>

### **BACKGROUND**

In September 2023, Lambton County Council received a report which provided an overview on the County of Lambton's Homelessness Community Outreach Services. The report provided an update on the multitude of positive outcomes resulting from the new initiative including strengthened partnerships, lower-barrier service delivery, and tremendous housing outcomes for unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness.

Despite this success with moving individuals to permanent housing, there continues to be elevated demand for homelessness community outreach services. Across the month of September, the County homelessness outreach team engaged 66 unique individuals who slept outside at some point. While this is in line with previous months in 2023, it poses a more pressing challenge as evenings become colder. Of those individuals currently on the community By-Name List of all individuals known to be experiencing homelessness, more than 40% have slept outside at some point since July 2022.

### **DISCUSSION**

Despite the necessity to shift available local programming from emergency services towards preventative solutions, cases of homelessness and the consequent need for emergency services continue to increase. Therefore, emergency housing solutions must temporarily be made available to meet these elevated needs. Unsheltered households face a significantly increased risk for harm during the colder months. Consequently, offering temporarily expanded emergency housing solutions is crucial during this time.

In January 2023, Lambton County Council received a Homelessness Prevention Update advising that the County of Lambton Social Services Division partnered with the Inn of the Good Shepherd to offer a temporary Out of the Cold congregate care site that offered

shelter for up to 28 men at a time. Due to the continued elevated demand for emergency housing services, an Out of the Cold congregate care site will be opened again on October 23, 2023.

This site will be operated and overseen by the Inn of the Good Shepherd but supported closely by the County of Lambton Social Services Division. As with the Out of the Cold congregate care site last winter and the current Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre, the former Laurel-Lea St. Matthew's Presbyterian Church on Exmouth Street will be utilized. One side of the site will be operated for the purposes of emergency housing, while the other will continue to operate the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre for the afternoon hours that the shelter portion is closed, Monday to Friday from 12:30 p.m. until 4:00 p.m.

During the Resource Centre hours of operation, County staff will continue to offer on-site intensive case management and rapid re-housing services, and local service providers with specialized expertise will be leveraged for additional on-site supports. To date, these providers offering dedicated on-site support have included The Canadian Mental Health Association, North Lambton Community Health Centre, Rapids Family Health Team, County of Lambton community paramedics, Lambton Public Health harm reduction team and Sarnia Lambton Native Friendship Centre.

For those individuals and families requiring emergency shelter services the intakes will not be conducted directly at this congregate care location. To reinforce existing preventative diversion practices, the Good Shepherd's Lodge will facilitate all intakes for this site. To further reduce impact on the nearby community members, trained security services will support the site 24/7, including multiple guards on certain overnight shifts. Further, as per a report received by Lambton County Council on September 6, 2023, Lambton Public Health has installed a community sharps disposal bin at this location. Increasing access to safe disposal options has proven to successfully reduce the prevalence of improperly discarded sharps both locally and across the province. A joint letter between the Inn of the Good Shepherd and The County of Lambton Social Services Division will also be offered to nearby community members detailing these plans and contingencies.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no financial impact on the County of Lambton Budget as a result of this report. Funding for the Out of the Cold congregate care site will come from the Housing Prevention Program and was included in the approved 2023 budget. The Social Services Division will continue to utilize existing staff to operate the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre.

### **CONSULTATIONS**

Consultations have taken place with members of the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the General Manager of Social Services, internal Social Services Division staff, and numerous social services agencies in the community.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

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

- Advocating in a manner that raises the profile of the County and its needs in order to secure improved government supports, funding, grants, and other resources.
- Developing programs and initiatives that address poverty reduction and promote social belonging.
- Planning for and responding to the ever-changing needs of an aging population, homelessness and retaining young people in the community while supporting their transition to being employed community members and future leaders.
- Actively pursuing joint opportunities with community partners that contribute to the well-being of the Lambton Community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Lambton County continues to experience drastically elevated rates of homelessness that outpaces the collective capacity of the community to progress those experiencing homelessness into more permanent and stable housing. This includes elevated rates of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. In partnership with the Inn of the Good Shepherd, a temporary congregate care site will be opened in late October 2023 to create 28 additional temporary emergency housing beds for the impending cold months. This necessary contingency will assist staff in continuing to meet the goals and objectives of the County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan.