



The Corporation of the City of Stratford Social Services Sub-committee MINUTES

Date: June 15, 2021

Time: 3:30 P.M.

Location: Electronic Meeting

Sub-committee Present: Councillor Henderson - Chair Presiding, Councillor Bunting - Vice Chair, *Councillor Burbach, Councillor Ritsma, Councillor Vassilakos

Staff Present: Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Eden Grodzinski - Manager of Housing, Alex Burgess - Manager of Ontario Works, Chris Bantock – Deputy Clerk, Jodi Akins - Council Clerk Secretary

Also present: Member of the public

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the Meeting to Order.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature of Pecuniary Interest

No disclosures of pecuniary interest were made by a member at the June 15, 2021, Social Services Sub-committee meeting.

3. Delegations

None scheduled.

4. Report of the Director of Social Services

4.1 Community Income Tax Clinic (SOC21-007)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report on annual Community Income Tax Clinic activities and outcomes (SOC21-007) be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services advised this program has been running since 1989 and thanked the three accounting firms who donated their time.

100 time slots were reserved, and some amendments were made to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions. On average, the program has served 137 individuals a year. Staff attribute the lowered interest this year to COVID-19.

Motion by Councillor Vassilakos

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report on annual Community Income Tax Clinic activities and outcomes (SOC21-007) be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

Carried

5. Report of the Manager of Housing

5.1 2020 Annual Report (Year 7) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys (SOC21-005)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the 2020 Annual Report – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys (2020-2024) be endorsed by Council.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Housing advised this is the 7th year of the 10-year Housing and Homelessness plan and this year was the first year it was based on the new update adopted in 2020.

The highlights of the report were outlined as follows:

- Continued collaborative planning efforts to prevent and end homelessness, including the establishment of a Coordinated Access System Leadership table;
- A 10% increase in new attainable housing options using rent support programs in private market rental units, including the introduction of the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB);
- 83 households experiencing homelessness moved into permanent housing;
- 78 households on the Centralized Waiting List moved into permanent geared-to-income units;
- Relaunch of the Affordable Homeownership Loan Program;
- The distribution of \$320,000 in Canada Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) capital funding to community housing providers for health and safety repairs and renovations; and the
- Preparation and training of community partners on legislative changes to the *Housing Services Act, 2011*.

The AODA-compliant graphic version of the report will be ready by June 28th and needs to be submitted to the Ministry by the end of the month.

With respect to home ownership affordability, concern was expressed with the average resale price, the lack of available housing on the lower end of the market and the associated ripple effect into the rental markets. The Manager echoed the concern, noting that an individual or family needs to be in the 80th percentile income bracket to afford a home in the City with the average home price being \$550,000. As part of the City's strategic priorities, Social Services staff are working with the City's partners in planning and investStratford to determine what the supply in the private market is.

It was questioned how the 22% of applicants on the housing waitlist from outside of Perth County are handled. The Manager advised the wait list is

heavily regulated by the Housing Services Act and is managed by chronological order. It was noted that Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County residents are likely on waitlists outside of the county as well. It was also noted that introduction of an online application increased applications from outside the area.

In response to why the length of time someone spends on the waitlist is not included in the reports, the Manager stated that the waitlist is not an accurate indicator of housing need and the time someone spends on the list varies for different reasons. It was suggested to look at the turnover of the waitlist instead.

*Councillor Burbach now present at the meeting at 3:44 p.m.

In response to whether the service managers discuss policies requiring builders to have a percentage of affordable housing, the Manager explained the difference between permanent social housing and affordable housing. Permanent social housing that is rent-geared to income is homes for those who are on social services housing waitlists and is legislated under the Housing Services Act and subsidized. Inclusionary zoning for affordable housing is something that is done through the planning department.

Discussion was held on the affordable homeownership program and how it works when the homes are sold. Challenges for new applicants using the program and finding homes that meet the qualifications were also discussed.

It was noted that the average length of emergency night stays was 29 nights and that was higher than normal policy. The Manager of Ontario Works advised that additional funding was received through the Social Services Relief Fund. There was an increased need for stays due to the provincial lockdowns and the lack of "secondary" options such as couch-surfing with family or friends. It was noted that those numbers are not likely to continue into 2022. Staff are currently analyzing the best uses of the third iteration of the Social Services Relief Funding.

It was stated that a study was completed which showed people had better outcomes in hotel stays versus a shelter.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the 2020 Annual Report – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys (2020-2024) be endorsed by Council.

Carried

6. Report of the Manager of Ontario Works

6.1 Centralized Intake Implementation (SOC21-006)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled “Centralized Intake Implementation” (SOC21-006) be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Ontario Works advised this program has a "go-live" date of June 21, 2021 to participate in the centralized intake program. 35 of the 47 service managers in the province will be onboarded by June 21, with the rest to follow in the fall.

The biggest change is that most applicants will apply for Ontario Works online using a risk-based eligibility determination. It pulls in third-party checks from multiple sources and will be able to grant files that provide proper identification. Clients may receive their first payment before meeting with a local caseworker for supports.

Staff are working on changes to the website and messaging to their community partners and current clients on how to complete the applications. There are no financial implications to the City at this time.

Motion by Councillor Vassilakos

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled “Centralized Intake Implementation” (SOC21-006) be received for information.

Carried

6.2 Electronic Document Management Implementation (SOC21-008)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled “Electronic Document Management Implementation” (SOC21-008) be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Ontario Works provided some background information on electronic document management for Ontario Works’ programs.

It is a centralized, automated file management process that is uploaded to their provincial database. Files will be stored completely electronically and

can pull directly from OW to ODSP. Staff currently have to manually pull documents to transfer files.

The system will interact with the provincial MyBenefits program and feedback received has been positive from clients and frontline staff.

Staff are looking at the vendor-of-record from the province as they are cleared to work with the provincial database and familiar with the processes. Staff feel that the on-site scanner will offer the best customer service to their clients and the most minimal turnaround time for uploading to SAMS within 24 hours. If there are documents that need to be actioned immediately, they can be.

In response to whether all of the kinks are worked out with the SAMS program, the Manager advised that most of the issues have been ironed out, but there are some workarounds still built into the system. As to why some files have more problems, the Manager advised the IT requirements are very specific and the problems that occur are usually due to back-end errors.

Motion by Councillor Bunting

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled “Electronic Document Management Implementation” (SOC21-008) be received for information.

Carried

7. New Business

7.1 Social Services Modernization

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services stated that social services modernization is going full-force in the next year or two. The centralized intake is being implemented in June, the electronic document management implementation in October and employment transformation will be coming quickly. She referred to the road map that Council was given and advised that the changes are coming and coming quickly.

In response to how the changes align with the end of CERB and the potential caseload increase, the Director advised staff do anticipate a strong increase. Some of the pressure at the local level will be relieved due to the centralized intake.

It was questioned whether the number of homeless persons is rising. The Manager of Ontario Works advised that the increase in visual homelessness is due to less options available for various reasons such as COVID-19 restrictions. There are expectations and rules in emergency housing programs that may lead to someone being asked to leave, however, staff remain in contact and continue to try and find suitable housing. Service managers across the province are seeing an increase in individuals sleeping rough. It is partially attributed to less turnover in "entry-level" apartments and lack of options due to COVID-19.

In response to what concerned citizens should do if they see someone living rough, the Director advised that during the hours of 8:30 a.m., to 4:30 p.m., they can call 519-271-3773 extension 200 and outreach will go out and meet with the person. Afterhours support is available from Shelterlink at 519-272-2294 and if there is an immediate safety need, the police should be contacted.

8. Next Sub-committee Meeting

The next Social Services Sub-committee meeting is Tuesday, July 13, 2021 at 3:30 p.m.

9. Adjournment

Motion by Councillor Vassilakos

Sub-committee Decision: THAT the Social Services Sub-committee meeting adjourn.

Carried

Meeting Start Time: 3:30 P.M.

Meeting End Time: 4:16 P.M.