
Subject: Homelessness Services System Review
Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee
Report date: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Recommendations

That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- To support system planning in this area, Homelessness Services (HS) contracted Whitesell & Company Inc. (Whitesell) to complete a review of the homelessness service system in Niagara (see Appendix A: Niagara Region's Homelessness Services System Review).
- Currently, Homelessness Services funds 22 service providers in the community to deliver programs and services across four key areas: Outreach, Prevention, Emergency Shelter, and Transitional and Supportive Housing.
- From April 2018 to January 2019, Whitesell engaged in various methods of data collection and analysis to complete the review, including: a literature review (together with grey literature supplied by service providers), an environmental scan of best and emerging practices, service provider workshops, key stakeholder interviews and surveys, semi-structured interviews of those with lived experience (consumers of homelessness services), and regular meetings and engagement with HS staff.
- Within the report, Whitesell proposed ten recommendations to support the evolution to a more streamlined, efficient and effective homelessness services system that is proposed to better enable clients to obtain affordable, safe and appropriate housing that meets their needs.
- In a follow-up survey (60% response rate) administered to service providers, a Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing representative, and internal and community partners, it was found that survey respondents either strongly agreed (56%) or agreed (44%) that the review and its recommendations should act as a guide to help design and develop the proposed new 'System 2.0'.

Financial Considerations

Initial implementation of the recommendations contained within the report will be managed within the 2019 Operating budget. Further financial considerations of any of the subsequent steps will be estimated and included within the 2020 Operating budget for Committee and Council consideration.

Analysis

The ten recommendations contained within Whitesell's "Niagara Region's Homelessness Services System Review" are identified below along with responses from Community Services' Homelessness Services division:

1. Clarify the homelessness services system vision and mission as it relates to "A Home for All: Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan" (HHAP) and ensure it is grounded in Housing First philosophy.

The HS division agrees that a shared vision for change and a joint approach to engaging in the change (or shared mission) are critical factors to ensuring an appropriate response to address homelessness in Niagara. In addition to ongoing, regular engagement with homelessness service providers, HS is committed to facilitating a community consultation with providers to develop a shared vision and mission for the system as it relates to the HHAP (which identifies a system vision for the housing *and* homelessness system) and is grounded in the Housing First model. Housing First is defined as a program model (currently implemented in Niagara as a supportive housing program funded in part by HS), systems approach and philosophy. The primary goal of Housing First is to end chronic homelessness by providing immediate housing to individuals ('house first'), followed by flexible, community-based, wraparound supports to promote recovery, housing stability and wellbeing.

2. Capture all system components through a system-mapping process in order to model and understand the complex components and identify where there may exist opportunities for intervention to enhance client outcomes.

Homelessness Services agrees that system-mapping is an effective tool to support future system planning by making sense of client touchpoints within the system, identifying the role of internal and community partners, identifying opportunities to meet service gaps, and is a foundational precursor to implementing 'coordinated access'. HS recognizes that system-mapping should also be understood as an ongoing process, and commits to prioritizing this work within the role of Service Manager of the homelessness services system. Additionally, HS system-mapping will look to build from work already completed through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative which captures neighbourhood-based interventions targeted at Niagara residents living in poverty in the areas of housing, health and employment.

3. Implement the System 2.0 model for program and service delivery, leveraging the expertise of high-performing service providers.

Homelessness Services commits to considering all recommendations contained within this review and will work to support the evolution of a more streamlined, efficient and effective homelessness services system (or 'System 2.0' which is the redesigned

system subsequent to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report). HS will ensure that execution of this work will align with the timing of the next phase of procurement for homelessness services, as contracts are to be in place for March 2020.

4. Strengthen key components of the system with a particular focus on the areas of Outreach, Housing Help (a service within Prevention), and Housing First (a program within Supportive Housing).

Homelessness Services is committed to ensuring that Outreach, Housing Help and Housing First programs or services are strengthened as key components of the system, through a collaborative process of engagement with providers, clients and also system partners not funded by HS. As such, HS commits to continuing to draw from best and emerging practices in these respective areas, consider local needs identified through Niagara-specific data (e.g. 2018 Point-in-Time count) and elicit feedback/input from key stakeholders. This work will inform the next round of procurement within these priority areas of the homelessness system.

5. Develop standards, key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets for each program/service area: Outreach, Prevention, Emergency Shelter, and Transitional and Supportive Housing with the engagement of the community of service providers.

Homelessness Services agrees that in order to ensure effectiveness of the homelessness system, program/service standards, KPIs and performance targets should guide service delivery and system management. While HS has made some progress in this area (e.g. recently established Emergency Shelter Standards), it will continue to engage in this work drawing from evidence-informed research, local needs and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, HS will continue to work with providers to maximize the use of HIFIS 4 (a federal database used to track client information and support service data such as shelter admissions, case management and client assessments), and identify key data elements to support the use of KPIs and targets within system planning.

6. Improve contract management and performance measurement to ensure appropriate monitoring of the effectiveness of programs/services within the system.

Homelessness Services welcomes the opportunity to consider additional strategies to improve contract management and performance measurement of the programs/services within the homelessness services system. HS will continue to work with Niagara Region's Internal Control and Organizational Performance division to ensure that contract design used to procure homelessness services allows for active contract management of successful providers in the next round of procurement.

7. Work to understand the depth of need related to mental health and addictions, and their impacts on the homelessness system, in order to improve client access to available health care.

Homelessness Services supports this recommendation and presently regularly seeks opportunities to strengthen linkages between health and homeless-serving sectors. For example, HS has recently initiated a pilot project to further understand mental health and addictions support needs within the homelessness system. Launched in January 2019, this pilot project is funded by HS, and through partnership with Niagara Region Mental Health, placed a social worker within Niagara's emergency shelters to work with clients with prolonged stays to offer a comprehensive assessment of concurrent disorders (mental health and addiction), develop individualized treatment plans, and refer to appropriate health services and supports. Outcomes will include capturing fulsome data on the needs and acuity of clients within shelters to inform future health service needs and funding proposals within emergency shelters, and to identify appropriate training and capacity building opportunities for shelter staff.

8. Improve decision-making through the enhanced use of technology, communications and tracking.

Homelessness Services is in the process of building a new performance dashboard of data metrics, which will draw from and expand the use of HIFIS 4 within the homelessness system. Currently 82% of homelessness service providers are actively utilizing HIFIS 4, including **all** emergency shelter providers. Therefore, HS will continue to support providers in adopting and maximizing their use of HIFIS 4 to support enhanced understanding of system-wide performance.

9. Improve system capacity through ongoing, service provider training.

Homelessness Services offers regular training to service providers. To date, the training delivered has included: Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, human trafficking awareness, effective use of the vi-SPDAT (a common assessment tool used to understand the acuity of individuals with housing and related support needs), effective communications training through 'Crucial Conversations' and 'Motivational Interviewing', and Housing First training offered through the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. HS will continue to engage providers to determine and fulfil training needs across the homelessness system.

10. Increase affordable housing stock and strengthen the linkages between homelessness and housing services.

Homelessness Services works to support this recommendation as the lead for the Region's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (a legislated requirement of municipalities through the *Housing Services Act*), and through HS participation in the

Affordable Housing Steering Committee (a working group comprised of staff from Community Services, ERMS, Planning & Development and Niagara Regional Housing, which aims to support better alignment and increased communication with work related to affordable housing). HS looks forward to exploring all opportunities to increase rental and affordable housing stock in Niagara through collaboration and innovation by partners across the sector.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Not applicable.

Other Pertinent Reports

None.

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Appendices

Appendix A Niagara Region's Homelessness Services System Review 6