



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: February 13, 2024
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Shannon Archer, Business and Integration Manager
Jeff Wilson, Manager of Housing
John Ritz, Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor
Report Number: SOC24-003
Attachments: None

Title: 2023 Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance Review

Objective: To provide the Mayor and Council with an update of City initiatives relating to housing and homelessness programs, including rent supplements and housing allowances provided during 2023.

Background: The Social Services Department of The City of Stratford serves as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for social services programs in the City of Stratford, the Town of St. Marys, and the County of Perth. The department is responsible for addressing housing and homelessness by offering various programs and services to community members who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The Housing and Homelessness and Housing Stability divisions within the Social Services Department jointly administer housing allowance and rent supplement programs within the service area. These programs receive funding from both the Municipal and upper tier government levels. In recent years, there has been a shift towards streamlined funding to provide service managers with flexibility in targeting the greatest community need. For example, the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) was launched in April 2022, combining several other provincial programs to more directly address homelessness.

To expand the rent supplement and housing allowance programs, staff actively pursue applicable program grants as they become available. In 2023, an unsuccessful application was made to the Veterans Homelessness Program, which aimed to provide rent supplement funding to a targeted population within our service area. The application was not successful due to high program interest and limited funding.

Analysis: The City of Stratford is committed to ending chronic homelessness by 2025, aligning with the Government of Ontario's target. Increasing the range of housing options is a crucial step in achieving this goal, as outlined in the Housing and Homelessness Plan. Housing allowances and rent supplements play a significant role in assisting community members in securing appropriate housing.

In 2023, a total of \$1,108,222 in housing allowances and rent supplements was provided to 243 households in the CMSM service area. Additionally, with the assistance of the Housing Division, eighteen households were referred to the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) program administered by the Province of Ontario.

Housing Allowances

Housing allowance agreements are made directly with the household members and are a fixed monthly subsidy intended to assist in bridging the gap between current market rents and the household's calculated ability to pay. Because the allowance is tied to the household the benefit is portable provided the client remains within the CMSM service area and continues to meet eligibility requirements. During 2023 there were ninety-six households assisted through housing allowances.

Rent Supplements

Rent supplement agreements are made directly with property owners and are based on the difference between the private market rent charge and the rent-geared-to-income calculation for the household. Because the supplement is tied to the property, the benefit remains with the unit should a client relocate. A new eligible household would be referred to that unit and the benefit may be adjusted based on the new rent-geared-to-income calculation. During 2023 there were 147 households assisted through rent supplements.

Canada Ontario Housing Benefit

The Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) is a housing allowance program administered by the Province of Ontario. Agreements are made directly with the household and are based on a calculation between the area's average market rent and the household's calculated ability to pay. Because this benefit is administered at the provincial level, the benefit is portable anywhere in Ontario provided the client continues to meet eligibility requirements. Since the inception of the COHB in 2020 there have been a total of 124 households referred from the City of Stratford CMSM area to this program.

Financial Implications:

Not applicable:

There are no financial implications resulting from this report. Future financial impacts may result from any changes in upper tier government funding, changes in private property owner participation or changes in community need.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Widening our Economic Opportunities

Strengthening Stratford’s economy by developing, attracting and retaining a diversity of businesses and talent.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Culture and Community

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, “2023 Rent Supplement and Housing Allowance Review” (SOC24-003), be received for information.

Prepared by:

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Recommended by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer