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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Chief Administrative Officer
Report: #2023-INFO-32
Date: April 28, 2023

Subject:

Advocacy Strategy and Engagement Plan to Address Homelessness and Related Challenges

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Council on the coordinated action to develop a federal and provincial Advocacy Strategy and Engagement Plan (Plan) to address homelessness and related challenges.
- 1.2 This report is part one of the response to the motion from April Health and Social Services Committee requesting that staff develop an engagement plan that encourages the federal government to declare homelessness, mental health, and opioid addiction a national emergency and to work with provinces to ensure that the proper actions are taken to appropriately address the emergency.
- 1.3 A second report which provides the details of the Plan will be submitted to Health and Social Services Committee in June.

2. Background

- 2.1 Durham Region, along with cities and towns across the country, have seen an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. The increasing rates of homelessness are outpacing the ability to create new housing units and wrap-around support programs.

- a. In 2022, approximately 42 per 100,000 Durham residents experienced homelessness which is projected to increase to approximately 62 per 100,000 Durham residents who will be experiencing homelessness in 2025.
 - b. Unsheltered homelessness in Durham increased by 67 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021. There are now more than 100 people across Durham experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- 2.2 In Ontario, the impact of mental health, mental illness, and addictions on life expectancy, quality of life, and health care utilization is more than 1.5 times that of all cancers and more than 7 times that of all infectious diseases.
 - 2.3 Each year, Lakeridge Health has more than 100,000 mental health visits for adults, more than 12,000 visits for children and youth, and more than 14,000 visits to its emergency departments related to mental health and substance use.
 - 2.4 The impacts of the challenges related to homelessness, mental health and addictions are often felt most acutely in downtown neighbourhoods, affecting residents, local businesses and community safety and well-being.
 - 2.5 Homelessness, mental health and substance use are among the seven priority risk factors of the Region's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan. The development of the provincially mandated CSWB Plan was an opportunity to bring together the community to identify priority risk factors, identify programs and strategies to address these factors; and develop data points as trackable performance indicators.
 - 2.6 To address the CWSB priority risk factors, collaboration with the provincial and federal governments will be critical.
 - 2.7 The 2023 Property Tax Supported Business Plans and Budget included expanded Regional investments totalling \$75.5 million in 2023 towards housing and homelessness support programs.
 - 2.8 Despite expanded Regional investments, a restricted municipal revenue stream and senior-government responsibility for healthcare including mental health, the criminal justice system and social supports, limits the effective role that the Region can play on its own.
 - 2.9 Addressing the homelessness, mental health, and addictions crises will require partnership with upper levels of government.
 - a. At its meeting on March 29, 2023, Regional Council [unanimously voted](#) to support the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) motion to call on the provincial government to acknowledge the homelessness crisis, commit to ending homelessness in Ontario and work with the and other partners to develop, resource, and implement an action plan.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 Durham Region Government Relations Update Report [#2023-COW-5](#).
- 3.2 City of Oshawa Request for Cost Sharing for Dedicated Downtown Patrol Enforcement – Regional Response [#2022-COW-23](#). An updated report on this request will come to Council at the May 2023 Committee of the Whole meeting.

4. Upcoming Reports to Health and Social Services Committee

- 4.1 The provincial budget released on March 23, 2023, included an additional investment of \$202 million for the Homelessness Prevention Program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program. To provide the most up to date information on funding and allow for additional consultation for this new investment, Health and Social Services Committee will be receiving a report in May and a subsequent report in June that represent a full update on Durham's homelessness support and coordinated access system.
- 4.2 There will also be two reports to the May and June Health and Social Services Committee that represent a comprehensive update on the local trends and strategies to address mental health and opioids in Durham Region. The reports will also outline the many local front-line mental health and addictions services offering acute and long-term support for those experiencing mental health issues or requiring crisis intervention, including the services provided by the Region of Durham.

5. Development of the Advocacy Strategy and Engagement Plan (Plan)

- 5.1 The Plan to address homelessness, mental health, opioid addictions and related challenges will consider the information enclosed in the series of reports to Health and Social Services Committee in May and June.
- 5.2 The Plan will clearly define desired advocacy outcomes, recommended approaches to deliver impactful engagement with upper-level government and detailed actions with near-term timelines.
- 5.3 The Plan will consider recent provincial and federal investments including:
 - a. The 2023 Ontario Budget which provided municipalities across Ontario with an additional \$202 million in Homeless Prevention Program funding and \$425 million in mental health programs.
 - Durham Region will receive funding for homelessness prevention programs and the details will be provided in a report to Health and Social Services Committee in June 2023.

- b. The federal Building Safer Communities Fund, which will provide the Region of Durham up to \$4.3 million towards the underlying conditions that give rise to crime.
 - c. The federal Housing Accelerator Fund, available for local municipalities to apply, which may support collaborative affordable housing projects.
- 5.4 The Plan will be focused on the challenges experienced in Durham and will include the following three streams of work:
- a. Policy solutions
 - This stream of work will identify programming that is having a meaningful impact in Durham and identify upper-level government policy initiatives that would improve outcomes.
 - The policy solutions will be identified in a Durham Policy Paper and will identify tactics to promote the Policy Paper with senior-level governments.
 - b. Communications
 - This stream of work will focus on a solutions-first narrative and a public relations plan to share facts, stories of success and proposed policy solutions with the public.
 - c. Stakeholder engagement
 - This stream of work will map a plan to engage stakeholders and leverage existing partnerships and networks to coordinate advocacy to the provincial and federal governments.
 - The Plan will also consider the role of advocacy partners including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.
 - d. Staff will work with Mayors, CAO's and staff at local area municipalities and community partner organizations in the development and implementation of the Plan.
 - e. Strategy Corp, the lobbyist retained by the Region, will actively support the development and implementation of the Plan.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:
- a. Goal 2 Community Vitality: Objective 2.2 Enhance community safety and well-being.
 - b. Goal 5 Service Excellence: Objective 5.1 Optimize resources and partnerships to deliver exceptional quality services and value.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Staff will develop a federal and provincial Advocacy Strategy and Engagement Plan to address homelessness and related challenges and report back to Health and Social Services Committee in June.
- 7.2 The Plan will clearly define desired advocacy outcomes, recommended approaches to engagement and list specific action items with corresponding near-term timelines.

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Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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