INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 22, 2014
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Co-ordinated Access System for Social Housing (CES14052) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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Council Direction:

Not Applicable

Information:

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding changes to the co-ordinated access system for social housing in Hamilton.

Introduction:

The City of Hamilton, as Service Manager for social housing, is responsible for meeting provincial requirements under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* (HSA) for the establishment and maintenance of a co-ordinated social housing access system to manage the application process for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) applicants requesting to live in a social housing unit. There are approximately 14,600 social housing units and within that, over 43 social housing providers.

Background:

The co-ordinated social housing access system is administered and funded by the City of Hamilton through a third party agreement. The current agreement is with Del Management Inc. The co-ordinated social housing access system is referred to as "Access to Housing (ATH)." ATH serves as a central point for applications and initial eligibility screening for RGI housing. ATH manages the centralized waiting list for RGI units. Social housing providers must offer vacant RGI housing units to eligible applicants selected from the centralized waiting list.

Applicants may select as few or as many housing buildings as they like and must meet the required eligibility criteria. Applications are ranked chronologically based on the application date except for individuals with a priority designation. Special priority, known as SPP, is a mandatory requirement under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* that assists victims of abuse who need RGI housing to leave the abusive situation. In addition to SPP, Hamilton also has other priority areas which include Urgent, Homeless, Newcomer and Youth. ATH staff assesses priority status eligibility.

Current Context:
In 2013, the average number of applicants on the centralized waiting list was 5,508. During the same year, there were 3,086 new applications received with 1,007 applicants being housed from the centralized waiting list. The social housing system in Hamilton is under pressure with a high demand for RGI subsidized units. The supply of social housing has not kept pace with the rising demand. As a result, the majority of applicants will wait up to two years or longer before moving into an RGI unit.

People who apply for social housing often have other barriers and while ATH has continued to meet the original mandate of administering the waiting list according to legislated requirements they are not adequately equipped to meet the varying needs of some households on the waiting list.

Proposed Changes to the Co-ordinated Access System for Social Housing:
As part of the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, the co-ordinated social housing access system will be improved by adopting an enhanced service approach. The new service will include:

- Ensuring individuals have accurate information to make informed decisions and choices regarding their housing options;

- Referrals to community resources;

- Revised and updated forms, letters and building inventory information;

- Upgraded technology with potential for submission of on-line applications;

- Increased supports to help people when they apply, during their time on the wait list and as they prepare to move into RGI subsidized housing; and,

- Supports to help people maintain housing.

A key change in moving from the current administrative model to the enhanced model is the introduction of case management. The intention is to incorporate two case managers who will be able to respond to evolving applicant needs. Case managers will

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help address applicant's needs beyond RGI subsided housing such as the need for employment, financial benefits and broader social supports.

Several performance measures will be developed to evaluate the enhanced co-ordinated access system. Key measures may include reduced length of time to fill a vacant RGI unit and decreased number of applicants on the centralized waiting list.

To support the shift towards an enhanced co-ordinated access system, Housing Services Division staff consulted with a working group comprised of social housing providers, tenant advocates and community agency representatives. A sample of work completed to date includes:

- Consultation about whether the City should continue to use a third-party service delivery for co-ordinated access system for social housing;

- Environmental scans of other municipal centralized waiting list models;

- Identification and revision of the policies and processes impacted by the HSA;

- Suggestions for customer service improvements for all users of the system;

- Plan and design phase of the social housing applicant profile project which will increase the understanding of the data and demographics of the centralized waiting list;

- Revising and updating all forms, letters and building inventory information; and,

- Guidance on the development of the enhanced co-ordinated access centralized waiting list model with a person-centred focus.

Having completed these actions, a Request for Information (RFI) was issued on May 1, 2013 and closed on May 29, 2013. The purpose of the RFI was to determine if there were any social service agencies, non-profit housing providers, or other appropriate organizations with the interest and ability to deliver the ATH co-ordinated access system. Staff reviewed the four RFI submissions and in doing so, confirmed interest and capacity to deliver co-ordinated access system which includes centralized waiting list services.

Next Steps:
An RFP has been issued to select a vendor to deliver the social housing wait list. The City is seeking proposals from qualified service providers to deliver the Co-ordinated Access System for social housing in Hamilton, known as Access to Housing (ATH). The name ATH is owned by the City and the successful proponent will operate the Co-ordinated Access System under the same name. Through the Request for Proposals, the

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City is looking for a Successful Proponent with the expertise and experience necessary to develop, implement and operate all components of ATH.

Housing Services Division staff worked diligently with Corporate Procurement and Legal Services staff to develop and issue an RFP to solicit proposals for funding. Compliant proposals will be reviewed and scored based on criteria set out in the RFP. The following is the RFP timeline:

- August 26, 2014 – Issue Request for Proposals

- September 23, 2014 – Close Request for Proposals

- October 2014 – Evaluate Proposals

- November 2014 – Award and execute agreement

- December 2014 – New Agreement for Co-ordinated Access System for Social Housing begins

Implementation of the changes to the Co-ordinated Access System for Social Housing will provide an opportunity to implement some of the strategies in the City's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan. Specifically, enhancing the centralize waiting list supports the Action Plan's outcomes which state "People have the individualized supports they need to help them obtain and maintain housing" and "People receive respectful, quality service within a "user-friendly" system and experience equity in housing." Building on the foundation of the existing centralized waiting list system, applicants will no longer be restricted to a single option for housing assistance but will have the opportunity to pursue multiple pathways to housing stability.

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