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| | REPORT No.: 2018-42 |
| MEETING DATE: JUNE 28, 2018 | DATE PREPARED: MAY 30, 2018 |
| SUBJECT: PORTABLE HOUSING BENEFIT – SPECIAL PRIORITY POLICY | |

RECOMMENDATION

THAT with respect to Report No. 2018-42 (Housing Services Division), we, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, authorize the Chair to execute a Transfer Payment Agreement with the Ministry of Housing and with the Ministry of Finance for the delivery of the Portable Housing Benefit – Special Priority Policy program;

AND THAT any necessary By-law be presented to the Board for consideration.

REPORT SUMMARY

To provide The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB or the Board) with information regarding the Portable Housing Benefit – Special Priority Policy (PHB-SPP) program, a new program offering a portable benefit to individuals and households who qualify for the special priority policy category described in the *Housing Services Act 2011*.

BACKGROUND

In early April 2016, the Ministry of Housing (MHO) announced a new pilot project to address the urgent housing needs for survivors of domestic violence. The MHO committed \$7.4 million over 2 years for this initiative. An Expression of Interest was released seeking proposals for participation in the pilot. The objectives of the pilot were:

- To increase support for those experiencing domestic violence to obtain and retain housing;
- To decrease wait times for housing assistance for Special Priority Policy (SPP) households and other households on the chronological wait list for social housing;
- To expand housing choice for SPP households;
- To evaluate the household's experience and range of benefit options with respect to the delivery of a portable housing benefit; and
- To align with Ontario's action plan to end sexual violence and harassment.

TBDSSAB submitted an Expression of Interest and on July 11, 2016, TBDSSAB received correspondence from MHO stating that the submitted proposal to provide portable housing benefits to survivors of domestic violence was approved. Funding was made available for the remainder of the 2016-17 budget year, and the 2017-18 budget year. This was presented to the Board for approval at the September 28, 2016 Board Meeting (Report No. 2016-50).

TBDSSAB implemented this pilot in conjunction with Faye Peterson House, Beendigen Inc., Geraldton Family Resource Centre and Marjorie House (Marathon), crisis service shelters providing services to women and their families. These organizations provided the direct connection for those requiring urgent housing need with the portable housing benefit administered by TBDSSAB. They established and maintained a service component, to provide assistance and support once a household in need had engaged in the pilot.

Throughout the pilot program, the crisis service shelter providers indicated that each was supportive of this new initiative and worked in partnership with TBDSSAB in implementing the portable housing benefit with their clients. As of June 1, 2018, there were 25 individuals and households supported through the SPP pilot.

COMMENTS

In early 2018, the Ministry of Housing (MHO) advised all Service Managers delivering the pilot program that the pilot would cease in 2018 and that the initiative would become a provincial program beginning on July 1, 2018.

Under this program, eligible applicants who would prefer to live in private rental housing rather than wait for social housing are able to apply for monthly portable housing benefit (PHB) payments. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) will pay the benefit to participants each month, recalculate the benefit as required, and verify continued eligibility annually. Service Managers would accept and review the applications and submit the applications to the MHO. Eligible applicants may also receive funds directly from Service Managers for first and last month's rent. Service Managers will receive an administration payment for each application approved for their service area and will be reimbursed for funding provided to eligible applicants for first and last month's rent.

As the monthly housing benefit is fully portable within Ontario, participants will continue receiving a benefit if they move to a rental unit in another Service Manager area. As a result, recipients will have more flexibility to choose where they live to be closer to family, social support networks, schools and employment opportunities.

Under the pilot program, Service Managers had the flexibility to design their own local PHB programs for eligible applicants. These flexibilities included determining PHB amounts as well as the option to offer additional funds for first and last month's rent. TBDSSAB offered the monthly PHB based on the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Average Market Rent (AMR), less 30% of the applicant's adjusted

family net income (AFNI). Where an applicant received Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits, the monthly PHB was calculated at AMR less the maximum shelter allowance provided under these programs.

Under the provincial program, the amount of the monthly PHB is based on the difference between 80 percent of the CMHC AMR, and 30 percent of annual household AFNI. For social assistance recipients, consistent with the PHB Framework, the same PHB calculation formula applies to determine the maximum benefit amount for a household. The social assistance shelter allowance will be provided in the normal fashion, however, the PHB will fill the gap between the social assistance shelter allowance and actual shelter costs, up to the maximum PHB amount.

Because of the difference between the pilot program funding calculations and the provincial funding calculation, there may be some current program participants who will receive less funding due to the program change. Where this occurs, the recipient will have the ability to decide whether to transfer to the provincial program or be eligible to access local RGI housing or possibly receive a local PHB where available.

When an applicant applies to the new program, household net income and AFNI will be determined by MOF if the relevant tax information is available for each household member whose income is to be included in the calculation. Service Managers will have access to this tax information through an agreement with MOF. Otherwise, the Service Manager will review the income statements provided by the applicant and determine the AFNI.

Annually each spring, households in receipt of monthly program benefits must complete an annual renewal form to confirm their ongoing eligibility and to update MOF of any changes to the household composition, address, and other relevant information. Participants can continue to receive a monthly benefit when they move to a rental unit in another Service Manager area. When a participant moves to a different Service Manager area, the amount of the monthly benefit may change, based on the new Average Market Rent (AMR) for the corresponding size of unit in the new community.

MOF will conduct annual Automated Income Verification using Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) income tax information. For the 2019 to 2020 benefit period (July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020), 2018 income tax information would be used for Automated Income Verification. As a result, households receiving a PHB-SPP benefit must submit CRA income tax return(s) each year by April 30. Failure to submit the required income tax return(s) may result in a delay in benefit payments.

Under the provincial program, Service Managers will not receive annual funding allocations. All Service Managers are eligible to receive funding from MHO on a quarterly basis:

- Towards administration costs related to supporting the program; and
- To be reimbursed for first and last month's rent assistance provided to applicants who are approved for the program, as appropriate.

Service Managers will receive a one-time administration payment of \$250 for each application from their service area that is approved for the program. It is anticipated that this amount will cover the administration costs to process a typical application, but the actual work involved will be monitored over time to determine if this amount is sufficient.

In order to receive funding, Service Managers are required to sign a Transfer Payment Agreement with MHO and MOF that sets out the roles and responsibilities of the parties and the accountability framework for the program, including the terms for funding and reporting requirements. Funding is conditional upon MHO receiving the required quarterly reports from Service Managers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The program allows the Service Manager to receive \$250 per approved benefit application, as well as a reimbursement of first and last month’s rent paid retroactively on a quarterly basis.



This program is 100% provincially funded and does not impact the levy to Municipalities and Territories Without Municipal Organization.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this report provides the Board with information relative to the Portable Housing Benefit – Special Priority Policy program and Administration’s recommendation to participate in the program as provided by MHO. It is further concluded that the Board authorizes the Chair to execute all required agreements related to the program.

REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED

None.

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| <i>SUBMITTED / SIGNATURE:</i> |  William (Bill) Bradica, Chief Administrative Officer The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board |