

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year, the City of Greater Sudbury has taken over direct responsibility for the administration of Greater Sudbury Housing (GSH). The intent of this change is to bring increased accountability, consistency and transparency to housing operations and, at the same time, achieving underlying goals of supporting the development of neighbourhoods in GSH communities, ensuring that tenants have clear avenues to be heard and ensuring that there are clear and consistent policies on tenants' rights and obligations.

This report provides a number of updates on this ongoing transition including the findings from the Greater Sudbury Housing Survey and Town Hall Meetings ('Coffee Chats') held this past February by the Northern Leadership Program Peer Group.

The report also provides an update on the community partnerships that staff have been working on as part of a population health strategy to bring additional programming to tenants within our housing facilities.

This report also seeks Council approval of the Tenant Complaint Process which was developed following recommendations from the Town Hall meetings and surveys. The Tenant Complaint Process outlines a safe and respectful course of action to deal with complaints in a timely manner.

BACKGROUND

In September 2018, the transition of the Greater Sudbury Housing Corporation (GSHC) to a quasi-independent operating model was approved. This model transferred the administrative component of the corporation to the municipality while leaving the assets within the GSHC. Greater Sudbury Housing Operations (GSHO) is the newest division in the Community Development Department.

DETAILS

1. Tenant Engagement

Tenant engagement is a key process in providing opportunities to create trust between landlord and tenants. The City recognized the importance of this and initiated a project through the Northern Leadership Program, to have a peer leadership group assist in establishing new relationships with Sudbury Housing properties.

During the month of February, a Peer Leadership Group from the Northern Leadership Program, staff from Greater Sudbury Development Corporation (GSDC) and Greater Sudbury Police Services (GSPS) conducted town hall style meetings (Coffee Chats) with tenants and tenant lead groups in order to engage residents concerning matters that were important to them and to improve the quality of life and place and move markers on the City's Housing Population Health Priority. As part of the strategy for this tenant engagement, a survey was developed and distributed during the Coffee Chats, with additional hard copies made available at properties. A link to an online version of the survey was also available on the Housing and City's websites for approximately six (6) weeks.

The objectives of this tenant engagement were:

- To improve services, programs and other initiatives that will enhance the quality of life and place for tenants;
- To determine the needs of tenants in order for them to maintain a successful landlord and tenant relationship;
- To listen to feedback provided by tenants to improve communication between tenants and landlord; and
- Develop an open and transparent Tenant Complaint Process for tenants living within Greater Sudbury Housing Corporation properties.

The key areas of concern identified by Tenants were:

- safety and security
- health and well being
- property maintenance and beautification
- communication and tenant engagement

Appendix A is a summary report prepared by the Northern Leadership Program outlining the survey results, resident concerns and requests for possible changes to service levels and programs.

2. Community Partnership Opportunities

In the context of the City's commitment to population health priorities and interest in building and strengthening neighbourhoods in GSH complexes, a number of community partnership opportunities have been explored. Highlights of the new partnerships which will be piloted or implemented in the summer and fall of 2019 include:

- The Community Garden at 1920 Paris Street received a donation from Coopers Equipment Rental in the form of volunteer labour and equipment to till the existing garden area and spread new topsoil in preparation for the planting season. Housing operations staff assisted with the tilling of the garden area at 720 Bruce Street and installation of a new garden shed.
- Our Children Our Future (OCOF) will be partnering with Housing Operations to offer a free after-school program in the Multi-use Centre at 1960 Paris beginning this Fall.
- Laurentian University Cool Kids Program which is an anti-bullying and sports activity program that has been developed for use by local schools will be operating a free pilot project one night per week in the Multi-Use Centre at 1960 Paris throughout the summer.
- Potential partnership with Cambrian College Physical Fitness Management Program to offer exercise programs in the common rooms of various properties allowing Cambrian Students to complete the mandatory volunteer hour element of their program.

- Pilot project with Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and Canadian Mental Health Association for a transitional community support worker based at 720 Bruce Street and whose focus is to support tenants and assist with maintaining positive tenancies.
- Partnership with the NE LHIN, March of Dimes and Coulson Court Non Profit Housing on a Neighbourhood Model of support services for Capreol residents.
- Partnership with Better Beginnings Better Futures (BBBF) to offer Collective Kitchens program at Louis Street and 720 Bruce Ave. A community barbecue was held at Louis Street at the beginning of July including children's activities.
- Participate in monthly Community Safety meetings led by the GSPS, Social Planning Council and Noah Community Hub. These regular monthly meetings with tenants and tenant led groups at various housing properties have resulted in increased communication regarding housing and safety matters.

These are only a few of the opportunities that staff are working on to bring activities and wellness programs to housing residents free of charge and demonstrate our commitment to population health priorities. Staff will continue to evaluate and respond to future partnership opportunities that arise.

3. Tenant Complaint Process

As a reflection of the City of Greater Sudbury's vision, mission and core values, Greater Sudbury Housing Operations is committed to assisting tenants in a manner that reflects the City's customer service strategy and meets tenant expectations to deal with complaints in a respectful, safe and confidential manner. This process provides tenants with a clear path to make their concerns known.

Greater Sudbury Housing Operations will ensure that complaints and concerns are investigated and responded to effectively and appropriately. A complaint made will not result in retaliation towards the tenant or barriers to assistance, programs and services provided while living within any of the properties owned by the Greater Sudbury Housing Corporation. All employees and volunteers are responsible to adhere to this process and are committed to address all complaints in an effective and timely manner.

A copy of the Tenant Complaint Process is attached as Appendix B for review and approval. The purpose of the Tenant Complaint Process is to:

- Outline the response guidelines for all verbal and written complaints or concerns received by Greater Sudbury Housing Operations while ensuring the process reflects the City's new customer service response standards, and
- Provide a transparent process for reporting and handling of complaints from tenants, staff and volunteers.

If the tenant complaint is related to a decision as a result of the application of legislation contained in the Housing Services Act, 2011, (i.e. eligibility, unit size or the rent calculation) this tenant complaint process does not apply. It would be subject to a separate internal review process under the rules and timelines outlined in legislation.

4. Tenant Rights and Obligations

Part of creating a safe and welcoming neighbourhood is ensuring that all tenants are able to experience the quiet enjoyment of their homes. As such, all tenants have an obligation to abide by the terms and conditions outlined in their tenancy agreement. This includes adhering to applicable housing legislation, rules, regulations and City by-laws.

As landlord, GSH has an obligation to ensure that those do not abide by these standards, are dealt with in a clear, fair and consistent manner. Over the next few months, Housing Operations will develop a draft policy, for Council's consideration and approval during the last quarter of 2019. This policy development will include an opportunity for tenants to comment as well as a survey of best practices in other Ontario housing corporations.

In the interim, staff will utilize the process outlined below:

If the Housing Corporation receives a complaint that a tenant has failed to comply with the terms and conditions of their lease agreement, housing policies or City by-laws, the following steps are undertaken to review the situation and determine the appropriate course of action:

Step 1 - Validation of the Complaint: The process to validate a complaint may include; obtaining corroborating statements from other witnesses, review of photographic or video surveillance footage, obtaining reports from police, security or by-law personnel or gathering other relevant information.

Step 2 - Issue a warning letter; a warning letter is issued if this is a first offence and the nature of the breach has determined that it is easily correctable by the tenant.

Step 3 - Issue the applicable Landlord and Tenant Board Notice; The most common notice filed based on tenant complaints is called an N5 Notice to End your Tenancy for Interfering with Others, Damage or Overcrowding. This notice allows the tenant 7 days to stop the activity and correct the breach or 21 days to elect to move out. If the tenant complies and there are no further issues the process ends. The notice is on file and in effect for 6 months.

Step 4 – If there is a similar or repeat occurrence of the breach of the Tenancy Agreement that was identified in the first N5, then the Landlord issues the tenant a 2nd N5 Notice and files an L2 Application to End the Tenancy with the Landlord and Tenant Board.

At the Landlord and Tenant Board there is an opportunity to mediate the situation. If a mediated agreement is reached the result is a minimum of 12 months with no reoccurrences. If mediation is not successful or agreed upon by both parties then the matter proceeds to a hearing.

At the Landlord and Tenant Board hearing the evidence is provided to an adjudicator in the form of documentation, or testimony by staff, witnesses or officers. Subsequent to Landlord and Tenant Board hearing, the adjudicator delivers a decision in writing on the termination of the tenancy. The length of time it takes to receive the order may vary depending on the adjudicator's opinion of the severity of the situation.

The Landlord and Tenant Board does not require a letter to be sent prior to serving the first notice however, this practice displays to the Landlord and Tenant Board that Housing has provided an additional opportunity to correct the issues and therefore the practice of sending warning letters, helps fulfill the Housing Corporation's duty to accommodate and work with vulnerable tenants.

There are a number of different Landlord and Tenant Board forms and applications available to both Landlords and Tenants. More information on Landlord and Tenant Board forms can be found at <http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/ltb/forms>.

CONCLUSION

Housing Operations staff has been focused on initiatives to improve the quality of life and place for tenants, which has resulted in positive changes and improvements over the past nine months. Staff will continue with these efforts to foster positive relationships with tenants and increase the number of partnership initiatives and opportunities.

The next steps in this process include:

1. Communication of the approved Tenant Complaint Process to all tenants of Greater Sudbury Housing Corporation;
2. Further engagement with residents, through surveys, coffee chats and community safety meetings with tenants, tenant lead groups and other Community Partners; and
3. Working with Community Partners to bring forth findings from coffee chats, surveys and other programs and initiatives to the Population Health, Safety & Well-Being Panel to assist with outcomes.
4. Development of a policy with respect to Housing procedures to be followed in serving Landlord and Tenant Board notices, including consultation with tenants at our monthly safety meetings. This policy will be prepared for Council consideration during the fourth quarter of 2019.

