Non-Emergent Encampment Support Process (Formally Interim Strategy)

General Description

Individuals who encounter an encampment or an individual sleeping unsheltered can contact 311 and, if appropriate, they will be diverted to the outreach service provider ("OSP") identified by the City as the first point of contact. The OSP will send outreach workers to attend the locations identified in the calls to assess and connect individuals with appropriate supports and services. Emergency calls are directed to 911 so that appropriate first responders can attend.

Typical support provided by OSPs includes, but may not be limited to:

- transportation;
- transfer to emergency shelters;
- distribution of warm clothing;
- provision of blankets, water, coffee, food and harm reduction supplies; and
- wellbeing checks.

OSPs will not ask residents to leave an encampment on public property/crown land or within a transit shelter. Their role is to provide immediate support for individuals in the moment. Unless an immediate life-safety risk is identified, the City will also not vacate an encampment or transit shelter.

For instance, where significant life safety issues exist within encampments and the encampment needs to be evacuated, the City will engage with the area OSP, and other community partners as appropriate, and collaboratively notify residents that they must relocate. Typically, the WFPS will provide timelines for clearing an area, and the OSP will engage with residents to identify alternate sheltering options as well as transportation or storage needs. This approach was developed with consideration of the National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada, and the need to adopt a new approach to encampments in Winnipeg.

Included below is a map of the existing process. It is important to understand, however, that this process is not intended to resolve the issue of encampments and individuals living in transit shelters in Winnipeg. The process is intended to be an interim strategy until a long-term plan, that includes access to affordable and supportive housing, is developed. Although the recent increase in issues related to transit shelters is related to the closure of all public and private spaces due to the pandemic, it cannot be stressed enough; **the issue of encampments will persist until a housing strategy can be developed and implemented**.

Internal and External Planning

As outlined in the chart below, the overall process is guided by two overarching planning groups. This includes an internal City of Winnipeg Encampment Strategy Planning Group, and externally the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers Strategy Group.

Internal Planning

Internally the City of Winnipeg maintains an Encampment Strategy Planning Group ("ESPG"). Chaired by the Deputy CAO, the ESPG has representation from:

- Community Services,
- Indigenous Relations,
- WFPS,
- WPS,
- Public Works,
- Any other Departments as required from time to time (e.g. Transit, Legal Services, Corporate Communications).

Generally, the ESPG provides the overall internal strategy and planning related to the City's response to encampments within Winnipeg. The roles of each Department within the group include:

Office of the CAO

- Overall lead of the ESPG.

Community Services

- Provides a support role and connection point between the city and community-based organizations.
- Provides a support role to the office of the Deputy CAO prepares planning documents, administrative reports, and briefings related to encampments.

Indigenous Relations

- The Manager of Indigenous Relations participates to assist the ESPG in ensuring that its entire approach is crafted and implemented in a culturally sensitive manner, and properly considers the needs of Indigenous residents at all times.

WFPS

- The WFPS has assigned one Fire Prevention Officer that works with OSP outreach teams to educate encampment residents on fire hazards and life safety information to mitigate risks. In addition the Assistant Chief - Fire Prevention and Public Education holds the encampment portfolio, is an active member of End Homelessness Winnipeg and handles complex encampment issues including the decision to resort to enforcement and vacate encampments.
- The WFPS is often the first to identify encampment issues around the City due to fire and medical calls. They share this information with internal departments and the OSPs, without disclosing a residents' personal health information.
- When enforcement action is required due to the existence of significant fire and life safety issues, WFPS will work with Legal Services in the drafting of any required Orders.
- WFPS will only resort to enforcement action as a last resort when they have been unable to manage critical fire and life safety issues through education and requests to modify behavior.

WFPS will only vacate an encampment for issues regarding fire and life safety. This may include (but not be limited to) issues related to the placement of shelters, the materials used in shelter construction, the location and volume of combustible materials, compressed gases such as propane, fires, and behaviors that contribute to the occurrence of accidental fires.

WPS

- The WPS has assigned Executive members to the ESPG. The WPS will typically play a supporting role when any of the above activities are carried out to ensure safety for all involved.

Public Works

- Public Works staff investigates areas of concern as reported through 311 or by community stakeholders regarding potential encampments.
- Where an encampment has been vacated, Public Works will clean up and remove debris.
- Where an encampment continues to be occupied, but the accumulation of garbage, unwanted debris and abandoned material reaches excessive accumulations, Public Works will perform mindful cleanups within the encampments, despite their continued occupation.

External Planning

Externally, the City is also a key member of the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers. This strategy table makes up the other planning component that informs the process outlined below regarding encampments. This process is only one focus area of the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers, they also provide broad community-based oversight and planning related to unsheltered homelessness in Winnipeg. It is important to understand the history of this group and the City's participation.

In May of 2019, The City of Winnipeg issued a request for proposal (RFP) for the PROVISION OF COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL OF BIOHAZARDOUS WASTE AND OTHER DEBRIS from temporary homeless shelters on public property. The release of the RFP resulted in negative feedback from community members. As a result, in early June of 2019, End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) invited a group of community stakeholders to come together with the intended purpose of supporting individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. In consultation with EHW and other community agencies, in late June, the City cancelled the RFP and committed to work collaboratively with community agencies to develop a coordinated approach in addressing encampments and unsheltered homelessness.

Since that time, this group has developed into what is now the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers, Strategy Group. City participation in this group includes representatives from the CAO's Office, Corporate Communications, Public Works, the Winnipeg Police Service, the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, and Community Services. Two of the key

outcomes of this group include the release of the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers, and the development of an Interim Strategy designed to support individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Winnipeg until a long-term housing solution can be developed and implemented.

Process Implementation

Outreach on private property

Encampments on private property are a police matter. Any private property owner with concerns regarding an encampment on their property should reach out to WPS.

Outreach on public property

1. Where there is ongoing or imminent criminal activity or a person who may be in medical distress, the WPS or WFPS will be dispatched as appropriate;
2. Otherwise, the Outreach Service Provider ("OSP") for the area is immediately contacted with available details about the encampment;
3. OSP staff attend the site with the objective of providing any needed supports to the residents, and attempting to offer and connect them with available supports;
    a. If the resident wishes to be transported to a shelter, transportation is arranged;
    b. Some residents will simply choose to go elsewhere on their own;
    c. If an alternate destination is desired by the resident, OSP will provide that resource;
    d. If the resident is prepared to enter a transitional housing placement (which requires a daily cash payment upon entry), OSP will transport the individual and the City will make arrangements with the provider to cover the initial funding necessary for a period of up to 1 month, or until Provincial Income Assistance can begin to cover the daily cost;
4. Some residents will express the intention to remain at the encampment, and not wish to leave for any other accommodation or resource. Even in these circumstances, the OSP will continue to maintain communication and connection with the resident(s) on an ongoing basis.
5. Where an encampment site becomes vacant, crews with the Public Works Department visit the site as upon its vacancy to remove any garbage, debris and other abandoned material to remediate the site to its former state.

Outreach due to fire and life safety concerns

There are numerous elements of encampments that are frequently of concern from a fire safety/life safety perspective, including but not limited to:

a. Combustible nature of materials used;
b. Open fires;
c. Proximity of structures/shelters to each other and to other combustible structures;

d. Improvised heating sources being used including candles, fires, and propane heat in close proximity/within the entrance of the shelter, leading to concerns regarding shelter fires and the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning; and
e. Accumulations of material and debris that could impede the egress of residents from their shelter/structure in the event of an emergency.

1. If any of the above are noted at any point in time, representatives of the City's Fire Prevention Branch will conduct an inspection of the site in question. Additionally, those representatives will explain the risks to residents, and where needed, provide direction regarding risk reduction.
2. Where informal direction is not heeded, and a pattern of persistent behavior that is a risk to life continue the Assistant Chief under the authority of the WFPS Fire Paramedic Chief will issue an Order necessary, typically including an Order to Vacate.
3. Where vacancy has been ordered, the WFPS has an established protocol that includes collaboration with encampment resident service agencies, Public Works and the WPS. The OSP will continue to work with the residents, explaining the necessity of vacating the site, and working collaboratively to identify necessary supports.
4. As above, if any of the residents are prepared to enter a transitional housing placement (which requires a daily cash payment upon entry), the OSP will transport the individual and the City will make arrangements with the provider to cover the initial funding necessary, until Provincial Income Assistance can begin to cover the daily cost.
5. Upon reaching the ordered date for compliance, the Fire Paramedic Service, with any required support from WPS for safety concerns and Public Works for immediate clean up efforts, will proceed to ensure compliance with the Order.
6. Where an encampment site becomes vacant, crews with the Public Works Department immediately visit the site to remove any garbage, debris and other abandoned material to remediate the site to its former state.

<u>Occupancy of Transit Shelters</u>

1. As above, if there is or imminent criminal activity or a person who may be in medical distress, the WPS or WFPS will be dispatched as appropriate;
2. Otherwise, the first response is provided by Winnipeg Transit, with a Transit Inspector and/or Transit Supervisor attending to assess the situation.
3. If the initiating complaint/observation was mistaken and the occupants of the shelter are awaiting bus service, nothing is done.
4. If it is determined that one or more occupants are present for the sole purpose of:
    a. Occupying for an undue period of time with no intention of boarding a bus;
    b. Causing mischief;
    c. Using substances; or
    d. For any other purpose that would contravene the Transit By-law;

    then the attending Inspector/Supervisor will request that those occupants exit the shelter.
5. Should those occupants not agree to leave, the Inspector/Supervisor will cause the area OSP to be contacted to attend the shelter.

6. The OSP will attempt to engage with the occupants, explaining the necessity of leaving the shelter, and working collaboratively to identify necessary supports.
7. As above, if any of the residents are prepared to enter a transitional housing placement (which requires a daily cash payment upon entry), the OSP will transport the individual and the City will make arrangements with the provider to cover the initial funding necessary, until Provincial Income Assistance can begin to cover the daily cost.

Other considerations

At all times, the City's actions are guided by *A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada*, issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing: https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf

Principle 1: Recognize residents of homeless encampments as rights holders

Principle 2: Meaningful engagement and effective participation of homeless encampment residents

Principle 3: Prohibit forced evictions of homeless encampments

Principle 4: Explore all viable alternatives to eviction

Principle 5: Ensure that relocation is human rights compliant

Principle 6: Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights

Principle 7: Ensure human rights-based goals and outcomes, and the preservation of dignity for homeless encampment residents

Principle 8: Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples in all engagements with homeless encampments

Where applicable, the City applies these principles to anyone occupying public space for an extended period of time (including transit shelters).

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