



# Staff Report to Council - for Information

**Title:** Homelessness and Encampment Response Protocol

**From:** Tina Metcalfe, Director Human Services

**Date:** March 19, 2026

**Report Number:** HS-2026-002

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## Report Purpose:

This report is for information.

## Report Summary:

Staff have worked collaboratively with local municipalities, emergency services and external partners to develop a Homelessness and Encampment Response Protocol (the “Protocol”).

The Protocol outlines a coordinated, collaborative approach to responding to homelessness and encampments within the community, with an emphasis on safety, dignity, consistency, and access to appropriate supports and housing pathways.

This report is provided to Council for information to provide awareness of the approach being taken and the principles guiding this work.

## Background/Analysis:

Like many communities, Bruce County has experienced an increase in visible homelessness and unsheltered living. Encampments present complex challenges that intersect housing, health, safety, by-law enforcement, and community well-being.

In response, staff have worked collaboratively with internal departments, local municipalities, emergency services, and external partners to develop a clear, consistent, and compassionate framework for responding to homelessness and encampments.

The Protocol is intended to support coordinated decision-making, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure responses are grounded in best practices, human rights considerations, and local context.

## Elements of the Protocol

### 1. Goals

The overarching goals of the Protocol are to:

- Ensure a coordinated, compassionate, and safety focus approach
- Prioritize voluntary engagement and housing solutions
- Maintain strong inter-agency collaboration and communication throughout the process

## 2. Notification

The Protocol outlines how potential encampments are identified and how information is shared internally and with relevant partners. Clear notification processes support timely, coordinated responses while ensuring information is managed appropriately and respectfully.

## 3. Engagement

Engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness is a central component of the Protocol. Outreach and engagement efforts focus on building trust, understanding individual needs, and connecting people with available supports. Engagement is approached as an ongoing process rather than a single interaction.

## 4. Collaboration

A collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach is fundamental to the Protocol. This includes coordination between:

- Municipal departments (including by-law enforcement and other operational areas),
- Homelessness and housing service providers,
- Outreach and support services
- Emergency Services, and
- Other relevant community partners.

## 5. Services and Supports

The Protocol emphasizes connection to appropriate services and supports, including outreach, housing support, shelter options, health and social services, and other community-based resources. The intent is to reduce barriers to access and support pathways toward stability and housing.

## 6. Transition and Resolution

Where transitions are required, the Protocol prioritizes advance notice, continued engagement, and support for individuals to move to safer or more appropriate alternatives where available. Transitions are approached with care and coordination.

## 7. Debrief and Continuous Improvement

Following an encampment response, debriefs may be conducted with involved partners to review what worked well, identify challenges, and capture lessons learned. This supports continuous improvement and helps ensure the Protocol remains responsive to evolving community needs.

### **Next steps:**

The Protocol will be piloted through Q2-2026 to monitor its effectiveness in practice, with a goal to formalize the protocol in Q3-2026. County staff will provide training to support consistent application across partners and to create an opportunity for service providers to seek clarification and share feedback.

Following the pilot period, participating partners will review lessons learned and identify any required refinements informed by operational experience, emerging best practices, and evolving community needs.

Once formalized, the Protocol will be brought forward for endorsement by municipal partners, emergency services, and community organizations.

**Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:**

There are no financial, staffing, legal or IT considerations associated with this report.

**Interdepartmental Consultation:**

Community Paramedics, Office of the CAO and external partners were consulted during the development of the Protocol.

**Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:**

Community and Partnerships - Build a strong and inclusive community

Community and Partnerships - Enhance and grow partnerships

**Link to Departmental Plan Goals and Objectives, if any:**

The coordinated management of deeply affordable housing and housing stability supports, emergency shelter, and homelessness solutions is in alignment with strategic pillars and objectives outlined in the [Housing & Homelessness Plan Strategic Pillars & Objectives Report](#) (September 2024) and [Housing and Homelessness Update Report](#) (May 2025).

**Report Author:** Tania Dickson, Housing Services Manager

**Departmental Approval:**

Tina Metcalfe, Director

**Approved for Submission:**

Claire Dodds, Commissioner of Community Development

**Attachments:** N/A