

County of Renfrew

'A Place to Call Home'

10 year Housing & Homelessness Plan

(Revised 2019)



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Introduction

In 2013, after considerable community consultation, the County of Renfrew adopted a ten year Housing and Homelessness plan. This plan, entitled “A Place to Call Home”, helped to establish a clear picture of housing needs in the community at the time as well as strategies and actions to address these needs. Since adoption of the plan, the County has been working with community stakeholders from across the housing spectrum to improve outcomes for those in the community who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or who are seeking affordable housing. The County has also issued annual reports, documenting progress and highlighting key activities.

Housing is a cornerstone for any community and having adequate shelter is critical to enabling residents to live, work and participate. Given the geographic expanse of Renfrew County and the uneven distribution of a diverse population within it, there are a range of housing needs that exist, whether in terms of seniors, working families, low income singles or youth. Those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are even more vulnerable. And while the housing market has responded to some of these needs, there are clear gaps that are not being adequately addressed. Housing affordability, suitability and adequacy are all on-going issues related to housing supply that can create challenges.

THE HOUSING CONTINUUM



Having a plan to address these community issues from a community perspective is important. Because the delivery of housing is a regional and interconnected system that involves many partners, finding solutions to specific issues across the housing continuum relies on action, coordination and collaboration to be effective. The structure of local government and the overarching responsibilities of the County as the designated Service Manager for housing and homelessness add further complexity. And while Renfrew County is blessed with a wide array of service agencies and organizations dedicated to providing housing and support services, the coordination of their efforts also presents real challenges.

“A Place to Call Home” helped to identify issues and guide a community response to housing challenges through planned actions. But over the past five years, the local housing market has continued to evolve as have programs, practices and policies in response to these changes. Despite progress in alleviating local needs, there remain unmet challenges and housing opportunities throughout the community. At the mid-point of the housing and homelessness plan’s lifecycle, it is beneficial to take stock and reconsider where there may be options for the local housing system to more effectively address the housing needs. By evaluating and re-positioning the plan, the community will be in a better position to respond to the anticipated needs of the next five years.

Five years on – A review of the original plan

Situating the housing and homelessness plan

Within the housing landscape, the County - as the designated Service Manager - has an important role; helping to facilitate housing and homelessness solutions in collaboration with stakeholders and community partners. Given the complex nature of the housing system, having a formal plan to help coordinate responses to pressing issues is vital to the community. The development of a ten year Housing and Homelessness plan is also obliged under the *Housing Services Act (2011)*. Policy guidance from the province serves to define the required content of such plans. The County and other Service Managers across the province are also required to undertake a review of these plans every five years under that same provincial legislation.

OUR VISION

“For all County of Renfrew residents to have a place to call home.”



Given adoption of the original plan in 2013, Renfrew County embarked on the mandated five year review in 2019. In addition to reviewing the progress of the current plan, the County also had to have regard for additional policy obligations imposed by the province in 2016 after the local plan was adopted. The review process was intended to ensure that the Housing and Homelessness Plan:

- continues to reflect the housing and homelessness needs/priorities of the service area;
- provides for responses to these needs and priorities in a meaningful way;
- is consistent with the Province’s housing legislation and policy framework; and,
- aligns with Renfrew County’s Corporate Strategic Plan

Consultations

Using a highly consultative process, the County engaged with a wide range of local stakeholders to gather feedback on changing trends, emerging issues and potential solutions. These consultations involved:

- **Focus group sessions** – two roundtable discussions were held with stakeholders who have a wide range of housing perspectives in order to explore progress on the original plan, emerging issues and opportunities looking forward
- **Key informant interviews** – telephone interviews were held with individuals in the community who have key perspectives on housing and homelessness issues

- **Town Hall session** – stakeholders were invited to attend a working session to review findings, discuss emerging issues and explore possible solutions to these issues
- **Community surveys** – two specific surveys were administered, one to the general public and one for those with lived experience (via select local service agencies)



These consultations were instrumental in better understanding what actions of the original plan have been more effective, what emerging issues are being seen and the priorities associated with these issues. The feedback was also helpful in identifying lingering challenges in the local housing system and prospective opportunities for meeting these challenges. This served to help shape how revisions to the housing and homelessness plan could better position it to meet local needs. Emerging issues from stakeholders indicated:

- Coordination of the homelessness system across a large, diverse service area is a continuing concern as is local awareness of services and where to get them
- There is a desire for a case management approach to get vulnerable households more permanently housed, recognizing that substantial resources are needed to support this
- Programs which support housing stabilization have been effective (e.g. CHPI, RS and Ontario Renovates) but support services for addictions and mental health remain in high demand
- Demand for community housing and supportive housing options remains high due in part to the lack of new supply coming on line
- Expanding the supply of affordable housing in the County is essential, especially for rental options, as affordability issues impact on resident and employers alike
- Approaches to expanding supply need to leverage existing community housing assets, better utilize available planning tools and get the private sector more involved

Progress to date

Throughout the consultation process, there was acknowledgement of the progress that had been made under the original plan. A range of programs, services and funding was delivered by the County to:

- Provide emergency assistance to vulnerable persons
- Help households find and maintain their housing through rental assistance
- Assist with home repairs for households in need
- Renovate/repair community housing units
- Build new affordable housing
- Provide access to affordable home ownership

This assistance resulted in the following key outcomes for residents in the community:

Housing and Homelessness Indicators	Households/individuals served by year				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Housed from the centralized waiting list	161	142	142	114	559
Received CHPI Rental Allowance	64	64	125	125	378
Received Housing Allowance assistance (shared/direct)	26	31	37	49	109
Received Emergency Minor Home Repair Assistance	n/a	26	28	13	67
Received Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit	n/a	23	47	47	117
Housed in newly built affordable housing units	19	0	0	14	33
Received Homelessness Prevention Program assistance	949	621	804	567	2,941
Received Ontario Renovates assistance	0	17	50	111	178
Received Home Ownership Program assistance	n/a	n/a	14	11	25

The County also facilitated other activities to advance plan goals and objectives including:

- Creation of a Housing and Homeless community group
- Supporting a contingency fund for victims of domestic violence
- Establishing a poverty reduction strategy group
- Creating 'A Place to Call Home' web site
- Developing a Teacher's Resource kit for housing
- Hosting housing events to educate and inform

Trends influencing housing needs

As a further part of the review, a supply and demand analysis was undertaken to better understand how local trending has changed since the original plan was adopted and how this might influence housing issues and actions going forward. By examining the latest Census and housing statistics, an evolving picture of local needs was developed. This analysis indicated:

Shifting/evolving trends in population and housing demands as evidenced by:

- Modest overall growth across the County but notable variances by area – higher growth in the southern and northern municipalities of the County and negative growth in the central and western parts of the county
- Shifting age dynamics as the outflow of youth and general aging of the population signal a continued trend towards an older population base
- Trending towards smaller, more diverse households, with a notable increase in non-family and single person households resulting in demand for smaller sized units
- A resulting need for housing options that reflect these shifting trends

Sustained issues of affordability for households as evidenced by:

- Gradual increases in median household incomes, although income levels are still lower in comparison with other jurisdictions
- Climbing house values/prices and rents due to demand in the housing market
- A sustained incidence of low and moderate income households as signaled by those in core need and with defined affordability issues, especially for renters (+/- one third renters paying >30% of income towards housing)

- Increasing social assistance caseloads (OW+ODSP) which have only recently started to moderate
- Growing waiting lists for community housing at the same time as unit turnover rates are declining, resulting in longer overall waiting times for access to units
- Modest but persistent homelessness as documented in the 2018 homeless count, the majority of which was attributed to household conflict or substance abuse

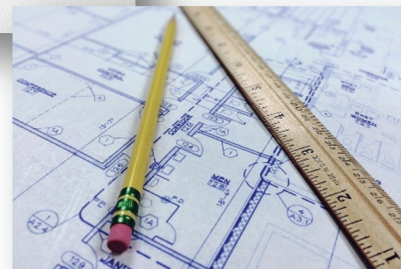
Limited diversity/suitability in the current supply as evidenced by:

- A high rate of home ownership and single detached housing within the current stock which serves a broad segment of the population
- A modest supply of purpose-built rental housing that is augmented by a notable share of 'informal' rental stock that is less secure in terms of tenure
- A general aging of the housing stock, leaving some units less suitable for accommodation
- Continued demand for rental housing despite modest new additions to this stock, resulting in falling vacancy rates and rents that are rising faster than inflation
- Continued emphasis in the production of lower density, ownership forms despite the demonstrated need for more rental and multi-residential forms of accommodation

Emerging issues

As a result of this assessment, there were a number of emerging issues that were identified at a general level:

- There is a sustained need for homelessness services, especially in regards to prevention - current programs are helping to address these needs but not in all areas
- Demand for affordable housing continues to grow and some current stock is not in very good shape but production of new supply is minimal
- Current funding programs are limited in their capacity to add stock – leveraging of existing resources, tools and partnerships is required to expand supply
- While many community resources exist, coordination among partners in the system could help to improve outcomes/ effectiveness



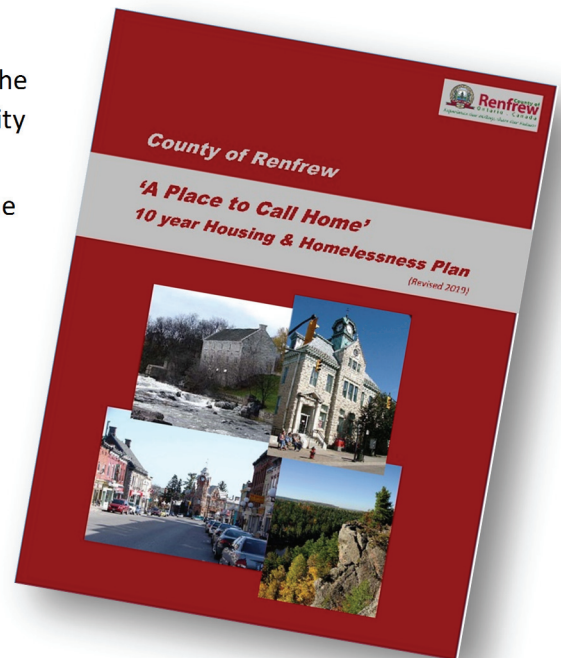
The Revised Plan

Responding to a changed environment

The original housing and homelessness plan was developed with the context of existing conditions and policies of the day. Since adoption of the plan in 2013, there have been shifting and evolving trends in the community which have influenced housing and homelessness needs. There have also been trends within the local housing market and how well it responds to identified needs. At the same time, changes have also occurred in the policy framework and the programs used to help address these needs. The emergence of the National Housing Strategy in 2018 and the continued legislative refinements seen in Ontario have had impacts in terms of community housing, planning and related municipal tools/ authorities.

While progress has been made through actions in the original housing and homelessness plan, the changed environment requires a reconsideration of the objectives and planned actions to ensure it remains current, meaningful and on-target. The review also provides the opportunity to acknowledge work completed, shifting priorities and emerging opportunities. With this in mind, certain of the original ideas and actions remain relevant but require reshaping and refining to make them more effective. Likewise, new actions have also been identified where progress has been impeded or where emerging issues warrant. As a result, the revised plan is essentially an updated version that reflects the finding of the five year review and which helps to reinforce the need to:

- *Ensure a community response to community issues* – Ownership of the plan rests with the community and while the County has a leadership role in developing the plan, solutions arising from it are a shared responsibility among all community partners
- *Have a strategic and coordinated approach* – Given the diversity of community partners, the expansive geography of the service area and range of needs in the community, it is critical to have a clear and coordinated plan to help promote system-based outcomes
- *Promote the effective use of resources and leveraging wherever possible* – Partners in the community represent a wide range of service interests, locales and capacities within the system. Harnessing this capacity and leveraging resources to achieve best outcomes for the housing system is especially important in light of the finite resources available



Setting the plan framework

The original housing and homelessness plan established a vision and associated principles to help guide the goals, objectives and actions of the plan. These vision and principles remain relevant and applicable to the revised plan and are as follows:

OUR VISION - For all County of Renfrew residents to have a place to call home.

OUR PRINCIPLES - We value a housing system that is:

- **PERSON CENTRED:** the residents of the County of Renfrew and their unique experiences are central to planning and decision making
- **THOUGHTFUL AND HOLISTIC:** the system is mindful of economic, environmental and social factors
- **INCLUSIVE:** an accessible system of supports for individuals and families from all communities
- **RESPONSIVE:** responds and is flexible to changes in community demands
- **WELL COORDINATED:** a collaboration of committed partners with a shared responsibility to better meet the housing and support needs of residents and families.

The original plan also established broad goals which were intended to reflect needs along the entire housing continuum, reinforcing the interconnected nature of the housing market. These goals remain valid today and underscore the continuing need for a holistic approach to addressing housing issues locally.

OUR GOALS

1. Housing persons who do not have a home
2. Preventing homelessness and maintaining housing stability
3. Ensuring an adequate supply and choice of housing
4. Improving coordination and capacity within the system

Taking action

To support these four goals, a series of 12 objectives and 33 actions have been established. These build on the work of the former plan, reflecting refined actions and augmenting them with new activities where warranted. These actions have been established with regard for the changed local environment since 2013 and with the intent of better addressing housing and homelessness issues in the community.

GOAL 1: HOUSING PERSONS WHO DO NOT HAVE A HOME

Those who are homeless or are unsheltered represent the most vulnerable individuals in the community. While these individuals may be less visible in Renfrew County, the homelessness enumeration done in 2018 did quantify needs among this group. While there are not any designated emergency shelters within the County, this plan promotes a Housing First philosophy which encourages priority access to housing as a first step in concert with necessary supports.

The objectives under this goal seek to promote the Housing First approach while improving access to the supports and services needed by the most vulnerable in the community.

Objective 1: Take a Housing First approach to addressing homelessness

Within the array of programs and tools that the County is able to offer, housing allowances and CHPI program funding provide two options to help individuals gain access to housing. By using these tools on a priority basis for homeless individuals, housing and supports can be secured in accordance with Housing First principles.

Actions to support this objective include:

1. Allocate housing allowance funding for persons who are homeless and are provisionally sheltered
2. Prioritize the use of Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) funding to assist unsheltered and at-risk individuals/families gain access to housing

Objective 2: Improve access to housing and support needs by focusing on persons who are most vulnerable

Getting those in need housed requires connecting them with appropriate and available services. Gaining access to resources and navigating the system of supports and services can be daunting, especially for vulnerable individuals. This challenge is compounded where the system of supports and services is incomplete or fragmented. Providing supports to navigate the system and encouraging greater coordination of the system are key ways to make it work better for the clients it is intended to serve.

Actions to support this objective include:

3. Augment intake resources that support a case management approach, helping those who are homeless to gain access to housing and connect with necessary supports
4. Through the Community Roundtable, undertake a homelessness services review to determine how system resources can be more effectively used and coordinated to meet the needs of the homeless population

GOAL 2: PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND MAINTAINING HOUSING STABILITY

Households who are housed but are in precarious housing situations represent another vulnerable segment of the community. While not homeless, these households are at risk of becoming homeless, which could trigger the need for additional supports and services to rehouse them. Where efforts are taken to stabilize these households – financially or otherwise – homelessness can be prevented. Securing suitable resources and making strategic investments in stabilizing supports and services can therefore help to prevent homelessness and curtail the number of system responses required.

The objectives under this goal seek to promote prevention of homelessness through the use of financial assistance, enabling greater access to services using ‘hubs’, securing senior government resources and increasing awareness through community partnerships.

Objective 3: Reinforce homelessness prevention through emergency financial assistance programs

There are a variety of programs and tools geared to preventing homelessness that are offered via the County. These involve financial assistance to help keep households housed, access critical support services or maintain the housing in which they live. Securing the resources to provide and deliver this

suite of services is critical. Streamlining and transparency in the allocation of this assistance also helps to strengthen support for partnerships in the community.

Actions to support this objective include:

5. Continue to deliver the Ontario Renovates program to help stabilize households in need, prioritizing repairs that improve accessibility & energy efficiency
6. Consolidate CHPI and HPP funding delivery to streamline administration, maximize impact and improve service outcomes
7. Engage the Community Roundtable in setting CHPI funding priorities and evaluating the effectiveness of funding impact on an annual basis
8. Target the use of new program funding dollars under housing allowances and housing stability programs to help prevent loss of housing for households at-risk
9. Continue to pursue and utilize new sources of funding that promote homelessness prevention and housing stability

Objective 4: Improve access to support services and programs through service ‘hubs’

The expansive geography of the County and the uneven distribution of the population create clear service delivery challenges, especially when services and supports are concentrated in more populated areas. County spaces have been used to promote service ‘hubs’ in order to help improve access. Expanding this approach to include housing or service agency locations, especially in more remote areas, would help to expand and improve access to services while reducing transportation needs.

Actions to support this objective include:

10. Expand the use of County of Renfrew and RCHC buildings as ‘hubs’ for the delivery of an array of community-based services
11. Continue to coordinate with agencies that provide housing or services in rural communities to establish virtual ‘hubs’ that leverage and expand existing services

Objective 5: Engage senior levels of government to help address identified local housing needs

While the obligation to create and maintain a housing and homelessness plan is the responsibility of the County, the resources necessary to fund and support homelessness initiatives lies with senior government. Having the necessary resources to delivery services is critical to addressing local needs. Being able to flow these dollars promptly is also important and can be hampered where program eligibility, rules or obligations are onerous.

Actions to support this objective include:

12. In concert with sector partners, continue to advocate for a fair share of funding and programs that adequately respond to identified community housing and homelessness needs
13. Pursue remedies to existing funding and program irritants in order to improve access, effectiveness and community impact

Objective 6: Increase housing awareness and promote housing stability through partnerships and education

The local housing system is comprised of the many agencies and organizations that provide housing or affiliated services. Expanding awareness of services and supports among these community partners is an important way to help improve the system's ability to respond. Working collaboratively as an informed system helps to ensure that those in need are referred to the most appropriate supports, regardless of where they go to seek help.

Actions to support this objective include:

14. Develop and execute an MOU with the Legal Clinic regarding the provision of landlord and tenant advisory services, resource information and eviction prevention
15. With the Community Roundtable and local utility companies, develop a protocol on eviction prevention due to late/delinquent accounts
16. Develop resource materials in a range of formats that outline available service and supports for persons in crisis and/or with complex needs
17. In collaboration with the Community Roundtable, develop a protocol for referring individuals/households to appropriate services using the 'no wrong door' principle

GOAL 3: ENSURING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY AND CHOICE OF HOUSING

While the housing needs of vulnerable households are a clear priority, there are other segments of the housing continuum that merit consideration. The availability and affordability of suitable housing is a key concern for many households in Renfrew County whether in terms of rental or ownership accommodation. And while production has tended to follow historical low density patterns, having more choice and affordability are of concern to the entire community. Creatively using available assets, partnerships and policy tools are an effective way to address these needs.

The objectives under this goal seek to increase the supply of affordable housing, expand the awareness of available tools/resources and cultivate interest in local housing investment.

Objective 7: Retain and increase the affordable housing supply through effective strategies and planning policies

While the overall condition of the existing local housing stock is reasonably adequate, it does continue to age and in the case of rental stock, is largely considered informal (i.e. not purpose-built). Housing production has also been geared primarily to lower density ownership forms despite the fact that there is a clear need for a wider range of multi-residential forms, especially in terms of affordable rental housing. Given this context, it is important to maximize the use of available municipal tools to help preserve and expand housing stock. Leveraging existing housing assets is also a key strategy for preserving and expanding housing stock, especially in terms of options geared to those with low or moderate incomes.

Actions to support this objective include:

18. Promote the preservation and development of affordable, accessible, and supportive housing in partnership with local municipalities through the use of available planning and finance tools

19. Encourage local municipalities to maintain/update housing policies and establish tools that encourage development of a range of affordable housing choices
20. Develop a strategic asset management plan for Renfrew County Housing Corporation in order to mitigate the impact of expiring agreements, better leverage existing resources, improve climate resilience and ensure sustainability of affordable housing supply

Objective 8: Encourage development and investment in affordable housing through greater awareness of existing resources, models and tools

Local housing production trends continue to support low density ownership forms of housing that are less affordable. Expanding education/resources on new opportunities, approaches and techniques would help to broaden awareness about alternative approaches among community stakeholders. Linking partners with available resources is also a key strategy for broadening the capacity of community partners.

Actions to support this objective include:

21. Seek out and share best practices related to public/private partnership models, creative financing tools, energy efficiency and accessibility
22. Enhance and maintain a resource inventory of potential funding sources for the development of affordable, supportive and accessible housing and share access to this information with community partners

Objective 9: Support affordable home ownership opportunities through continued investment

Modest but effective investments in affordable ownership housing have created options for households who are financially able to move on from rental housing. Continuing to provide opportunities for households like these helps to expand housing supply and move people along the housing continuum.

Actions to support this objective include:

23. Continue to promote affordable homeownership through the use of senior government funding opportunities geared to down payment assistance
24. Seek out and leverage opportunities for additional investment in affordable ownership housing through community partnerships

GOAL 4: IMPROVING COORDINATION AND CAPACITY WITHIN THE SYSTEM

The local housing system is comprised of many agencies, organizations and partners who, along with the County, provide housing or associated support services which residents may rely upon. While these community entities may approach housing from different perspectives, they each play a role in the overall system. Coordinating and collaborating efforts among those in the system helps to provide a more coherent service system that can better respond to community needs. Building capacity and expanding partnerships also helps to ensure community needs are being addressed in a meaningful way.

The objectives under this goal seek to enhance coordination of the local housing system, improve awareness of housing services and programs available in the County, and increase the longer term capacity of the system through monitoring and assessment.

Objective 10: Enhance the effectiveness of partners within the housing system through greater coordination

Under the direction of the original plan, some progress was made in launching a community table of partners to help respond in a more coordinated way to local housing and homelessness issues. Despite this initial progress, there is a need to reconstitute this group to ensure a more comprehensive, action-oriented and community-based approach to addressing community needs. Having a more coordinated system can help to ensure that partners in the system have a mutual understanding of needs and how these can be more effectively met working collaboratively.

Actions to support this objective include:

25. With the assistance of the County's Programs Coordinator, resurrect the Community Roundtable ('Housing & Homelessness Community Group') and update/clarify the Terms of Reference for the group
26. Under the guidance of the County and with the full participation of the Community Roundtable, update service and partnership mapping in an effort to better define the housing and homelessness service system and coordination thereof across the County service area
27. In collaboration with the indigenous community, continue to explore and enhance housing opportunities for off-reserve indigenous peoples

Objective 11: Improve awareness of housing services and programs in the County of Renfrew

Since adoption of the original plan, the housing pages of the County web site have been used to share key housing information with community stakeholders. Expanding the information and use of this tool would help to provide a consistent source of reliable information for the community. Expanding awareness and connectivity could also help to engage non-traditional partners like those in the private sector. By collecting and sharing relevant information, the capacity of the system would be enhanced.

Actions to support this objective include:

28. Expand and regularly update the housing section of the County's website to maintain a primary community resource for information on available housing and homelessness services/supports, tools, resources and other important housing-related information
29. Increase private sector engagement in housing issues and expand awareness on housing services & programs that support housing preservation and increased supply
30. Facilitate regular housing events that bring together potential partners and provide the opportunity to share relevant information/experiences regarding current themes
31. Working with community partners, coordinate data collection and reporting on relevant housing indicators

Objective 12: Enhance capacity within the system through continued monitoring and assessment

The County has effectively used tracked indicators and annual reports to help share news about the progress of the existing plan in meeting community needs. Refining this monitoring report will help community partners to track progress and measure effectiveness over time. Integrating goals and objectives of the plan into other strategic documents helps to ensure a more integrated and comprehensive response to pressing housing needs (e.g. planning, economic development, etc.).

Actions to support this objective include:

32. Continue to distribute a Housing Report Card that annually evaluates community progress in achievement of Housing and Homelessness Plan goals
33. Integrate and align the goals and objectives of the Housing and Homelessness Plan with strategic County plans/initiatives, especially with regards to planning and economic development

Measuring success

As an integral part of implementing the housing and homelessness plan, there is a need to monitor progress and measure success in meaningful terms. The County uses an established annual report card to support this and will continue to do so under a revised format. This format will also have regard for indicators developed by the Community Roundtable and the data they collect.

The report card enables consideration of plan actions, progress and impact annually, identifying issues or areas where supplementary action may be warranted. As the current plan moves forward, it is anticipated that actions in the plan will help speak to identified knowledge gaps which include:

- Setting meaningful housing targets with regard for County and local planning policies
- Understanding the capacity of community housing and service provider organizations
- Defining the potential for community housing assets to meet future needs
- Identifying specific gaps in local planning and development policies that impact on housing
- Determining key factors that would help spur private sector engagement in affordable housing development

This annual approach to reporting helps to better support awareness, both within the housing system and the broader community. The legislated obligation to undertake a five year review also offers an opportunity for a more formal re-evaluation of the plan and consideration of more substantial changes to the direction of the housing plan post of 2024.