

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: January 10, 2023
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Alex Burgess, Manager of Ontario Works and Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report #: SOC23-006
Attachments: Consortium Member Council Information Report

Title: Service System Manager Bi-Monthly Update to Council

Objective: To provide an update from the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Service System Manager on the activities of the Consortium.

Background: Counties of Bruce (lead), Grey, Huron, and the City of Stratford were selected as the Employment Service System Manager (SSM) for the Stratford – Bruce Peninsula Economic Region by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skill Development (MLITSD) as part of Ontario’s Employment Services Transformation in the Spring of 2022. The SSM is to build and implement a locally responsive employment services system that effectively meets the needs of a diverse range of job seekers and employers in the catchment area.

The City of Stratford currently has representation on all committees identified in the governance structure and is an active participant in helping to reshape the employment services landscape as a member of the SSM. Locally, the Ontario Works Division continues to prepare for the transformation go-live date of April 1, 2023, whereby Ontario Works employment supports will be uploaded to the SSM. The budgetary impacts of the Ontario Works budget reduction have been detailed in the 2023 budget package.

Analysis: The attached report, the “Consortium Member Council Information Report” details the activities currently being undertaken and the work that has been done by the Consortium to date. This bi-monthly update provides a snapshot of the work currently being undertaken by the SSM to effect positive and long-lasting systemic changes to the employment services in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula economic region.

Locally, the Ontario Works office will cease to provide employment services as of April 1, 2023, and will move toward providing more stability supports and life stabilization services. These are not new services for the local office, as Ontario Works caseworkers

currently provide these supports in conjunction with financial assistance and employment assistance, but the systemic change to focus solely on stability supports is new for the division. Currently, the Province is training the administrative team so that this information can be passed along to the Ontario Works staff, and we are exploring further training opportunities meant to enhance staff experience and comfort within the new model.

It was identified in report **COU21-107** that there would be further budgetary impacts highlighted once they were made known. In September 2022, it was identified that the Provincial contribution to the Ontario Works budget for 2023 would be reduced by approximately 17%, or \$263,133. This amount is pro-rated due to the start date of April 1, 2023, for the new model. It has been communicated that in 2024 and beyond, the reduction will be 22%, or \$351,890. This reduction will be from 2022 actuals, not the already reduced 2023 amount, meaning that the Provincial contribution to the Ontario Works budget will sit at approximately \$1,247,610 as of 2024. The Division's plan to absorb these costs is detailed in the 2023 budget package.

Overall, this represents a significant shift for the Division amidst a year of changes and learnings. As we continue to move through economic recovery due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a low unemployment yet high participation rate, a growing caseload, employment services transformation and the ongoing social assistance recovery and renewal (see report **SOC21-001**), the Division will continue to update Council as to the impact these changes will have within the local context.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

This report provides information about a reduction in the 2023 operating budget for the Ontario Works Division. This reduction is thoroughly detailed in the 2023 budget package and is estimated at \$263,133 for 2023, and \$351,890 for 2024.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Widening our Economic Opportunities

Strengthening Stratford's economy by developing, attracting, and retaining a diversity of businesses and talent.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Service System Manager Bi-Monthly Update to Council" (SOC23-006), be received for information.

Prepared by:

Alex Burgess, Manager of Ontario Works

Recommended by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services

Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer