



The Corporation of the City of Stratford Social Services Sub-committee MINUTES

Date: April 15, 2025
Time: 4:30 P.M.
Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

Sub-committee Present: Councillor Henderson - Chair Presiding, Councillor Briscoe - Vice Chair, Councillor Nijjar, Councillor Wordofa

Regrets: Councillor Biehn

Staff Present: Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Alex Burgess - Manager of Ontario Works, Robin Brown – Supervisor of Social Services - Ontario Works, Tatiana Dafoe - City Clerk, Miranda Franken - Council Clerk Secretary

Regrets: Councillor Biehn

Also present: Aaron Stauch - Employment Service System Manager Director, Bruce County, Kate Aarssen – Executive Director, Family Services Perth Huron

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the Meeting to Order.

Councillor Biehn provided regrets for this meeting.

Land Acknowledgment

Moment of Silent Reflection

Respectful Conduct Statement

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature of Pecuniary Interest

No disclosures of pecuniary interest were made by a Member at the April 15, 2025, Social Services Sub-committee meeting.

3. Delegations

None scheduled.

4. Report of the Manager of Ontario Works

4.1 Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Employment Service System Manager (SSM) Consortium Member Update (SOC25-004)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "SSM Consortium Member Update" (SOC25-004), and dated April 15, 2025, be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: Aaron Stauch, Employment Service System Manager Director, Bruce County, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, provided background and updates on the Employment Service System Manager. Highlights included the following:

- in 2002 the Ministry of Labour, Training, Immigration and Skills Development having awarded a consortium of Bruce County, Grey County, Huron County and the City of Stratford the contract to run the Employment System Manager function for the Stratford Bruce Peninsula area;
- the change transforming Employment Ontario to better integrate with Ontario Works (OW) and Social Assistance in the catchment area with Bruce County being the consortium lead;
- Stratford being the Consolidated Service System Manager serving Perth County;

- the transition having begun in the 2000's with the Federal Government starting the transfer of employment programming, funded by Employment Insurance, to the province and creation of the Ontario Employment program;
- the 2010's seeing three Auditor General reports on Ontario Employment, OW and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), identifying the programs not being effective to the intended policy outcomes;
- Employment Ontario intended to serve the hardest to serve individuals looking for work, OW intended to serve as a program of last resort for individuals needing income assistance and ODSP intended as a disability pension with the programs not delivering on policy intent;
- the reports finding the services fragmented, not well integrated, with poor referral pathways and provider competition over targets to achieve ministry performance expectations;
- this change having been initiated under the Liberal government and rolled out under the Conservative government;
- the intention being to tailor locally responsive employment service systems to the needs of each community, for client centered services, and case management integration between social assistance and Employment Ontario focusing on long term employment outcomes for program participants;
- this being the first municipal consortium to become a Service System Manager;
- the Counties seeing opportunity for human service integration between each municipality's OW departments, economic development and Employment Ontario, being the supply and demand of employment, and being well positioned for a community focused approach;
- the strategic pillars being:

- employer activation strategy, engaging employers to hire from the Employment Ontario network and to serve these employers;
- moving to digital by default service for the least vulnerable clients to increase human interaction time available for most vulnerable clients;
- working to address individual's cognitive motivational barriers;
- implementing evidence based practices from around the world looking at what we know actually changes an individual's trajectory towards sustainable employment post social assistance;
- performance accountability framework to ensure money spent on Employment Ontario is delivering for program participants;
- the fiscal year being April 1 to March 31;
- an overview of performance metrics being provided;
- staff having onboarded indigenous service providers and anticipating indigenous targets will improve;
- working with the ministry for better engagement from ODSP;
- seeing an annual cycle with high number of outcomes achieved in the first quarter as case load clean up happens; and
- continuing to focus on employment outcomes as the evidence based interventions are being integrated across the network.

Discussion on the report occurred between Sub-committee, the Employment Service System Manager Director, and staff. Highlights of the discussion included:

- the provincial metrics requiring maturation regarding Stream C clients and a disconnect between provincial measures and outcomes with clients being close to certificate completion when offered employment and without completion of the certificate the employment not being measured;

- with trade tariff threats, the province focusing on strong skills upgrading, training and retooling for new roles and looking at a more wholistic measure of success for client's long term career trajectory;
- transportation being a barrier with clients in Toronto receiving bus passes but the consortium requiring creative solutions in rural areas;
- advocacy conversations being had with the Ministry regarding life stability supports necessary for client success including transportation, mental health, housing and childcare;
- gender demographics indicating approximately 55% of clients being women and 45% being men;
- a member noted the importance of employers working with these programs;
- employer activation being key with labour market data, the Stratford Perth area indicating decline in job postings in the shifting market with a hope that the provincial response to tariffs would encourage employers; and
- it being early in the pilot of the digital program before the platform being full scale, with the platform using AI to match employer job descriptions and employee resumes.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "SSM Consortium Member Update" (SOC25-004), and dated April 15, 2025, be received for information.

Carried

Staff noted Stratford is fortunate to be partnered with the Counties of Bruce, Grey, and Huron, that the program is seeing success and staff are interested to see how the program develops.

4.2 Family Services Perth-Huron Counselling and Support Agreement Update (SOC25-005)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Family Services Perth-Huron Annual Utilization Rate Summary Report" (SOC25-005), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Ontario Works provided an overview of the report highlighting the following:

- continuing a long-term partnership with Family Services Perth-Huron with the most recent agreement being in place since 2023;
- updates in the agreement to reflect language aligning with new services, roles, and programs;
- Family Services having worked with staff to modernize the agreement to reflect necessary work and increase focus on all aspects of life stability;
- Family Services strengths being in personal and group interventions, counselling and relationships built with clients;
- Family Services being a valued and reliable partner with 168 participants referred in 2024 and 151 served, with this being a high referral follow through with positive client feedback;
- averages of 2024 caseload reflecting 22% of case load referred to Family Services with 20% served;
- 30% of the current caseload having identified mental health as a needed support and barrier to employment with Family Services serving this need;
- Family Services offering large amounts of programming including homelessness and precarious relationships support looking at trauma, intergenerational trauma and violence in the household with 25% of case load indicating "pursue housing" as part of action plan;
- Family Services supporting the applicant as well as the applicant's family, spouse and dependents;

- staff seeing 85% of referred clients indicating improved community and social connection, 63% improved employability and capacity to look for work, and 85% improved health and wellness with caseworkers feeling confident referring to family services; and
- staff noting some of the metrics overlap.

Discussion occurred between Sub-committee and staff. Highlights of the discussion included:

- a member noted provincial funding is supporting this agreement and asked if there is a role for Council in funding this;
- staff noted 2025 funding being granted by the Province in 2024 with Council providing investment for the 2024 funding that could be set aside;
- OW managing at this time but the volume and complexity of the case load increasing;
- staff to have more information to inform 2026 budget requests should it be required that funds be set aside or for funds to be allocated to municipal contribution to municipal supports portfolio specific to an agency like Family Services;
- funding being prioritized on agencies with the most impact and value for money, with Family Services being the most important referral service;
- the 2026 funding formula for the OW program to come;
- there being a high likelihood over the next few years that staff will be requesting additional funding to support agencies in the community and support funding losses;
- mental health being a Ministry of Health mandate with staff choosing advocacy points and sourcing funding;
- provincial funding being crucial and municipal staff allocating money to support services;

- Family Services program open to all Social Services clients even if they are not under OW; and
- staff evaluating Family Services needs at larger community level, OW funding not of concern but the community need growing.

Members commented that the indicators show dedication with staff advocacy being commendable. It was noted that mental health supports are important at this time.

Motion by Councillor Briscoe

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Family Services Perth-Huron Annual Utilization Rate Summary Report" (SOC25-005), be received for information.

Carried

5. Department Update

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services provided an overview of the metrics reflected in the OW report. A member commented it is sad to see a continued increase in caseload with the tariffs.

6. Next Sub-committee Meeting

The next Social Services Sub-committee meeting is May 13, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall.

7. Adjournment

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Decision: THAT the Social Services Sub-committee meeting adjourn.

Carried

Meeting Start Time: 4:30 P.M.

Meeting End Time: 5:05 P.M.