



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chairs and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	February 23, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Ontario Works Organizational Review (CES15011) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

None

Information:

The General Manager of Community and Emergency Services will be undertaking a Hamilton Ontario Works organizational and process review during 2015. A final report outlining the results of the review will be presented to Committee in Q4 2015. The need to develop a financially sustainable model of service delivery and to respond to social assistance reforms implemented by the Provincial government are key factors influencing the timing and scope of this review.

In terms of provincial direction, the government announced a number of changes to social assistance in their 2013 budget as first steps in a plan to reform Ontario's social assistance programs. These reforms are centred on removing barriers and increasing opportunities for everyone to participate in the workforce. It is their belief that for social assistance to be effective, the system must be simple, and effective in helping people move into employment as well as in providing income support. This requires fundamental change, both within social assistance and outside the system.

In 2014, the Provincial government also began the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). The roll-out of this new software has created major issues for staff and clients utilizing Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Once the issues with the new software are resolved it is expected that business practices will change as a result of the new approach to intake and client services through SAMS.

Locally, from a program delivery perspective, the City of Hamilton developed an OW Contingency Plan in 2009 in response to the recession which had begun to impact the OW caseload. When the recession began in late 2008 the caseload was less than 10,000 cases. The caseload steadily increased and went as high as 14,166 in July 2011. In order to manage the caseload growth, City Council approved an OW Contingency Plan which provided for the hiring of a total of 30 additional staff. The municipal share of the funding for these positions was taken from the OW Stabilization Reserve.

The OW Caseload has consistently decreased over the last three years and was at an average of 12,456 in 2014. This is still nearly 2,500 cases above pre-recession levels. The contingency staff positions have remained in place. The OW Stabilization Reserve is not sustainable and therefore there is a need to review Hamilton's social assistance delivery model.

The review will be informed by data which is currently being collected on participant demographics and service contract key performance indicators. The purpose of the review is to conduct a structure and process review that will result in the development and implementation of a sustainable organization structure and relevant resources that will provide cost effective quality services while being responsive to the needs of our diverse Ontario Works, Ontario Disability and low income clients and families. The resulting structure, services and processes will:

- Effectively and efficiently deliver holistic, person centered services and supports.
- Identify opportunities to maximize value for clients and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery. This may include the use of Lean management approaches to engage staff in business process changes
- Align similar services (both internally and externally) so that Hamilton Ontario Works is positioned to meet present and future goals and objectives, foster collaboration and minimize duplication of work.
- Deliver services and supports that maximizes the City of Hamilton's return on investment.
- Provide an efficient participant service path with appropriate levels of service; services and supports would be proportional to the level of need.
- Efficiently and effectively allocate limited resources to maximize organizational performance.

Consulting services will be procured to assist with this review. The review will be overseen by senior management of the Community and Emergency Services Department.

Background

Hamilton Ontario Works provides services on behalf of the provincial government under the Ontario Works Act, Regulations and Directives. Health and non-health benefits may also be issued under Council direction.

Hamilton Ontario Works is delivered through four Divisions: Employment and Income Support, Benefit Eligibility, Housing Services and Children's and Home Management Services.

Employment and Income Support is responsible for delivering:

- Employment Services
- Financial Case Management
- Emergency Assistance

Benefit Eligibility is responsible for:

- Ensuring program integrity, fairness, integrity and consistency in delivery
- Ensuring audit requirement are met (eligibility verification, family supports, overpayments)
- Delivering specific health and non-health benefits

Housing Services is responsible for:

- Intensive case management for a specific target group specifically those persons in emergency shelters, residential care facilities and homeless persons

Children's and Home Management Services is responsible for:

- Delivery of the learning, earning and parenting (LEAP) program

Financial Implications

The cost of the review will be funded through the operational budget.