



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chairs and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	November 9, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Ontario Works SAMS Update (CES15020(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

Not Applicable

Information:

The provincially mandated Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) was launched on November 11, 2014 to manage case files including payments for individuals and families in receipt of Ontario Works (OW), Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. Extensive challenges have been experienced province-wide in the transition to the new SAMS technology.

On June 22, 2015, Report CES15020 was provided to Council regarding the implementation of SAMS outlining Hamilton's experiences.

On October 21, 2015, the Ministry of Community and Social Services released an update on the Social Assistance Management System. Their Integrated Transition Plan is attached as Appendix A to Report CES15020(a). This plan addresses concerns with the launch of the provincially mandated Social Assistance Management System and includes the 19 recommendations from the independent report conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers earlier this year. This plan lays out both the issues and the actions planned to improve the system moving forward.

This plan is intended to be a blue print for the ongoing operations of SAMS and addresses the outstanding issues and challenges with the system as well as what is still required to move forward with the SAMS transition. This plan focuses on issues raised by staff, delivery partners and unions through working groups and focuses on the five priority work streams consisting of:

- Engagement and Planning
- People
- Process
- Technology
- Transition to Operations

Coming up to the one year anniversary of the release of SAMS, there are still challenges with this system and the Ontario Works Divisions continue to be in a state of recovery.

In addition, the Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario (CUPE) along with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) have coordinated two Code Red for SAMS days with the second occurring on November 12, 2015. Staff are encouraged to wear red in support of the frustrations and problems experienced as a result of the implementation of SAMS. Locally, Ontario Works administration has fully supported these events.

Hamilton Status and Outstanding Issues:

Since implementation, there have been significant impacts to staff, clients, community partners and internal operations. Through all the continuing difficulties with SAMS, staff have been a model of commitment, determination and perseverance. They remain focused on ensuring clients experience the least amount of disruption possible, while ensuring their financial assistance and needs are met. Staff are slowly gaining confidence in the system; however some continue to experience frustration.

The City of Hamilton's Ontario Works caseload is approximately 13,000. There are still operational needs that have not been met in the system which impact the overall caseload size that has been increasing since SAMS implementation in November 2014. Examples of outstanding challenges include:

- Timely training to keep up with system updates and consistent messaging on system workarounds;
- Continued redeployment of staff from other responsibilities;
- Increase in application times;
- Issues with conversion of data;
- Fewer regular meetings with clients to create referrals and discuss employment opportunities due to decreased appointment opportunities as staff have been redeployed during the recovery period;
- Inability to confidently reconcile subsidy claims; and
- Invalidated system reports.

Business Transformation Team:

In Hamilton, a Business Transformation Team (BTT) was established to support and lead the continuing SAMS recovery. The team, comprised of six existing full-time equivalent staff, has been established to support and lead the continuing SAMS implementation. The

team is expected to be in place throughout 2016. The BTT will be responsible for the implementation of the longer term recovery plan to help restore the delivery of Ontario Works services, and to implement change management and communication strategies.

As well, in June 2015, additional staff were dedicated to the case management function on a temporary basis to complete applications and manage caseloads. A total of 44 staff were redeployed to case management reducing caseload ratios, which in turn has allowed staff more time to learn the system and become more confident through their practice and knowledge of SAMS.

Provincial Engagement and Partnerships:

Senior management, Ontario Works staff and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) are lobbying the province to recognize the full depth of the issues SAMS has created. Hamilton continues to provide input to the Ministry of Community and Social Services to ensure our work aligns with Ministry priorities. Additionally, Hamilton offers significant feedback to the Ministry as to the reporting needs of our municipality to ensure that validated reports are generated through SAMS for financial and budgeting purposes.

The City of Hamilton continues to work with the province and be engaged on their provincial working groups by participating in the following:

- Technical Working Group
- Front Line Staff Working Group
- SAMS Training Reference Group
- Director Administrative Reference Group
- OMSSA Business Recovery Working Group

Next Steps:

While a significant amount of time, effort and resources have been dedicated to lessening the impacts of SAMS on staff; there is still much work to be completed. Based on the scope of what is entailed in recovery, it is anticipated that the recovery work will carry through until the end of 2016.

Locally, staff along with the Business Transformation Team, will continue to review the Ministry of Community and Social Services Integrated Transition Plan and provide a detailed report in December 2015 on the impacts to staff, clients and operations.

Financial Implications:

Between 2013 and January 2015, the City of Hamilton has received a total of \$549,600 in mitigation funding from the Province. This 100% funding assisted with training expenses, engagement activities, staffing costs for the implementation and overtime costs during the initial months after the software transition. Additional information on financial implications and impacts of SAMS implementation on the City of Hamilton will be presented at

Committee and Council in December 2015. Within the financial implications, items such as staffing costs, equipment resources, overtime, etc. will be detailed.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES15020(a): Ontario Works SAMS Update