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Report 2024-038

Report Title: 2024 Ontario Works Service Plan

Committee Name: Social Services

Committee Meeting Date: March 6, 2024

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Reviewed by: Lisa Horne
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Approved by: Jennifer Moore, CAO

Council Meeting Date: March 20, 2024

Strategic Plan Priorities: Innovate for Service Excellence
 Ignite Economic Opportunity
 Foster a Thriving Community
 Propel Sustainable Growth
 Champion a Vibrant Future

Information Report

“That the Social Services Committee receive Report 2024-038 ‘Ontario Works Service Plan’ for information; and

Further That the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information.”

Purpose

The following report will provide a summary update on the 2024 Ontario Works Service Plan for Municipal Service Contracting purposes. The Service Plan has been submitted to the Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services as of March 1, 2024.

Background

As an Ontario Works delivery partner, we are required to submit a Service Plan with the Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services. As an Employment Services Transformation prototype site, a one-year Business Plan was submitted in 2023, pending the onboarding of additional sites starting in April 2023. The 2024 Ontario Works Service Plan is a pilot of a new reporting template, with the expectation that a multi-year (up to 4-year plan) to be developed in 2025.

The purpose of the Ontario Works Service Plan is to outline what is to be achieved within the service contract period, including strategies towards meeting performance outcome targets, while taking into consideration internal resources, caseload demographics, community needs in relation to social assistance and high risks to achieving performance outcome targets.

The templates and guidelines for completion of this plan were released on August 29, 2023, with the completed plan due March 1, 2024, and final approval by May 31, 2024.

In addition to the formal plan, the Ministry required the completion of the following additional tools and templates (note, these templates have not been attached to this report due to challenges with making the documents accessible):

- Community Service Inventory
- Performance Outcome Risk Template
- Privacy Risk Assessment Template, and
- Privacy Maturity Self-Reporting Tool

As this is a pilot year for the new planning model, the next Service Plan will be required to include a strategy related to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Indigenous Engagement and staff learning and development.

Performance Outcomes

Starting in 2024, municipalities who have been onboarded to the Employment Services Transformation are now being measured by four performance outcomes:

- Percentage of Ontario Works adults and ODSP non-disabled adults with participation requirements with a valid Action Plan created.
- Percentage of Ontario Works adults and ODSP non-disabled adults with mandatory participation requirements that are referred to Employment Ontario.
- Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) that exited to employment.
- Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exit the program for any reason and return within one year.

The targets for these performance measures have been set by the Ministry. At this time, there has been no information shared on the impact of not achieving the targets established.

Achievement of the performance outcomes is the focus of the work completed by the staff within the Community and Social Services department, specifically, the Ontario Works Caseworkers. The team of caseworkers are responsible for providing person-centred supports to individuals in receipt of Ontario Works and non-disabled adult members of ODSP. This includes meeting with clients to review their situation, establish goals for the individual that supports independence,

self-sufficiency, and readiness for employment, and providing supports to individuals to overcome any barriers towards their goals.

In addition to the coaching support from the team of caseworkers, individuals who are participating may be eligible for additional funding under Ontario Works to support their needs. This could include providing additional funding to support cell phone minutes, internet to support academic upgrading, transportation supports for community participation, childcare costs to attend counselling appointments or financial support with purchasing appropriate clothing to participate in other stability supports.

Factors that Impact Achievement of Performance Outcomes

There are many factors that impact our ability to achieve the performance outcomes established by the Ministry. At the top of the list is the rate of assistance, which has remained unchanged since October 1, 2018. A single person in receipt of Ontario Works is eligible for a maximum of \$733 per month. The rates do not provide sufficient financial support for individuals to sustain accommodations, let alone be able to connect fully with their community.

In addition to the rates, lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable and consistent transportation, and lack of affordable cell phone and internet services, create significant barriers for individuals to be able to move forward with their goals and to connect with the labour market.

Furthermore, the Ministry has frozen the administrative funding provided to Municipalities to deliver this service since 2018. In 2021, our budget for Employment Services was reduced, with the transition to Employment Services Transformation, limiting the amount of additional financial resources to support goal attainment for clients. Finally, the amount of discretionary funding (\$10 per case per month, including ODSP cases) provided by the Ministry has remained unchanged for over a decade, despite costs for the services covered under this funding allotment, such as dental, vision, denture, and funeral services, increasing significantly. The effects of the frozen and reduced funding sources impact on the ability to fully support individuals in fully exiting the system.

Next Steps

The Service Plan has been submitted to the Ministry, along with the 2024 Budget. Approval is expected by May 31, 2024. It is expected that this process will resume in the fall of 2024 to build a multi-year service plan in 2025.

At a local level, we will continue to monitor performance outcomes and seek opportunities to build on collaborative models of case management that support a person-centred approach to delivery. This will include engagement with the broader community of supports to ensure individuals in need of support are provided with a streamlined referral that leads to improved outcomes for the individual. Additionally, we will be revisiting requirements to complete an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, and Indigenous Engagement Strategy, as it relates to the delivery of Social Assistance in Northumberland.

Consultations

N/A

Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations

We are governed by the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* and regulation for program delivery. In addition, we are guided by the Social Assistance Renewal, the Centralized and Automated Intake Partnership Agreement and the Person-Centred Supports Policy Implementation Guide for Employment Services Transformation Sites.

Discussion / Options

N/A

Financial Impact

Currently there is no financial impact to the 2024 Ontario Works budget because of this plan. The completion of this plan is a component of the annual contracting process with the province.

Member Municipality Impacts

N/A

Conclusion / Outcomes

This report has been submitted for informational purposes on the Ontario Works Service Plan for Municipal Service Contracting purposes.

Attachments

1. Ontario Works Service Plan 2024
2. Ontario Works Program Update Presentation