



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works **OW-23-06**
Date: Wednesday, November 08, 2023
Subject: **Social Assistance Renewal Plan and Employment Services Transformation Update**

Background:

In a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, the province is transforming Ontario's employment services. As part of Employment Services Transformation (EST), a new service delivery model will integrate social assistance employment services, as well as other government funded employment services, into Employment Ontario.

On February 9, 2023, and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development announced the selection of Employment Services, Service System Managers for Phase 2 catchment areas. Phase 2 includes five additional catchment areas across the province. Wellington is included as part of Phase 2 in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie catchment area. The Ontario Works division continues to work with provincial ministries as well as Serco Canada to prepare for the full implementation of Integrated Employment Services delivery effective January 1, 2024

EST as well as the provincial Social Assistance Renewal Plan, emphasizes the role of Ontario Works offices in delivering person-centred supports to clients, including additional needs assessments, service planning, warm referrals to employment and support services, and ongoing delivery of discretionary benefits. In addition, local Ontario Works offices retain responsibility for financial administration and programme eligibility functions.

The direct delivery of employment services and supports to Ontario Works clients will no longer be the responsibility of local Ontario Works offices under this new model. Caseworkers will now focus their referrals of employment-ready clients to Employment Ontario providers exclusively. In addition, most mandatory employment benefits that are issued to support clients will no longer be available through the Ontario Works programme and individuals will need to request this type of assistance through the Employment Ontario system. Caseworkers will continue to have the ability to issue more limited participation benefits to clients to support them in activities related to life stabilization and wellbeing.

Update:

The Ontario Works office will continue to work with provincial officials, Serco, local Employment Ontario providers and clients to support the EST transition. These activities include client communications via their caseworker, local meetings with stakeholders to discuss implementation

plans and issues, monitoring of key activities and targets (e.g. completion of assessments and referrals), and monitoring the delivery of impacted client supports and benefits.

Staff have completed a Client Transition Plan that has been shared with provincial officials as well as local Serco management. The Transition Plan covers a 15-month period from October 2023 until December 2024, and includes the number of Common Assessments and referrals to Employment Ontario that will be completed each month. The plan considers several factors, including:

- OW clients already connected to Employment Ontario.
- Current referral-ready OW clients that need to be connected to Employment Ontario.
- Estimates of new clients accessing OW during this period.
- The ability of staff within both systems to sustain high-quality service delivery to individuals being assessed and referred throughout the transition.

In addition, the current OW Employment Team is working to prepare clients that they are actively supporting for changes happening on January 1st. This includes connecting client pro-actively to Employment Ontario providers, working with caseworkers to ensure a hand-off of support, and working to complete various activities prior to the end of the year.

Ontario Works caseworkers will continue to provide individuals with non-employment participation benefits, including discretionary health-related benefits, supports to access counselling and life-skills workshops, and some limited technology supports. Service delivery processes are being developed to support seamless and efficient delivery of these benefits to clients.

As part of EST, a standardized Common Assessment Tool as well as Mental Health and Addictions Screen are being introduced for use with all adult individuals in receipt of Ontario Works assistance. In addition to demographic information, these assessments ask questions in relation to the skills, support needs (housing, child care, food security), physical and mental health, and substance use of individuals. Training and business process supports for all caseworkers on the use of these assessment tools is being completed this fall.

Financial Implications:

The implementation of EST and associated provincial Social Assistance Renewal activities, has resulted in a reduction of nearly \$1.1 million in provincial administrative funding to support Ontario Works programme delivery. This reduction and offsetting expenditure reductions have been included in the County's Preliminary 2024 County Budget and 10-Year Plan.

Recommendation:

That the report, Employment Services Transformation Update be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,



Stuart Beumer
Director of Ontario Works