



The Corporation of the City of Stratford
Social Services Committee
Open Session
AGENDA

Date: Monday, June 26, 2023

Time: 7:10 P.M.

Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

Committee Present: Councillor Henderson - Chair Presiding, Councillor Briscoe - Vice Chair, Mayor Ritsma, Councillor Beatty, Councillor Biehn, Councillor Burbach, Councillor Hunter, Councillor McCabe, Councillor Nijjar, Councillor Sebben, Councillor Wordofa

Staff Present: Joan Thomson - Chief Administrative Officer, Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Tatiana Dafoe - City Clerk, John Paradis - Fire Chief, Anne Kircos - Director of Human Resources, Taylor Crinklaw - Director of Infrastructure and Development Services, Tim Wolfe - Director of Community Services, Chris Bantock - Deputy Clerk, Karmen Krueger - Director of Corporate Services

To watch the Committee meeting live, please click the following link:

<https://video.isilive.ca/stratford/live.html>

A video recording of the meeting will also be available through a link on the City's website

<https://calendar.stratford.ca/meetings> following the meeting.

Pages

1. Call to Order

The Chair to call the Meeting to Order.

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

3. Sub-committee Minutes

6 - 17

Sub-committee minutes are attached for background regarding the discussion held at the June 13, 2023 Sub-committee meeting.

4. Delegations

None scheduled.

5. Report of the Director of Social Services

5.1 Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 returns (SOC23-018)

18 - 20

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

Motion by

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

5.2 Transitioning the Supportive Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) (COU23-019)

21 - 23

This item is also listed for consideration on the June 26, 2023 reconvene Council agenda.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services

be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

Motion by

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

6. Report of the Supervisor of Homelessness and Housing Stability

6.1 Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts (SOC23-016)

24 - 28

Staff Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

Motion by

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

7. Report of the Manager of Housing

7.1 2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for

29 - 36

Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys (SOC23-020)

This item is also listed for consideration on the June 26, 2023 reconvene Council agenda.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

Motion by

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

8. Report of the Manager of Ontario Works

8.1 2023 Ontario Works Service/Business Plan (SOC23-017)

37 - 69

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/ Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

Motion by

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/ Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

9. Sub-committee Recommendation

9.1 Request for Delegation by The Local Community Food Centre

70 - 73

Karen Wood, Community Advocate at The Local Community Food Centre (The Local), requested to address Sub-committee on behalf of The Local.

The request was for the City to provide free transit passes to all recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works.

Motion by

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the request from The Local to provide free transit passes to all recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program be referred to staff for review;

AND THAT staff bring back a report to the Social Services Sub-committee on programs currently being provided which offer free transit passes to recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, existing costs for these programs, information on additional costs for an opt-in free transit pass program for all recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, and how that program could be funded.

10. Adjournment

Meeting Start Time:

Meeting End Time:

Motion by

Committee Decision: THAT the Social Services Committee meeting adjourn.



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

Date: June 13, 2023
 Time: 4:30 P.M.
 Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

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

Regrets: Councillor Henderson - Chair

Staff Present: Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Alex Burgess - Manager of Ontario Works, Jeff Wilson - Manager of Housing, Jodi Akins - Council Clerk Secretary, John Ritz - Supervisor of Homelessness and Housing Stability, Tatiana Dafoe - Clerk

1. Call to Order

The Vice Chair called the Meeting to Order and stated that Councillor Henderson provided regrets for the meeting.

Land Acknowledgment

Moment of Silent Reflection

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 June 13, 2023, Social Services Sub-committee meeting.

3. Delegations

3.1 Request for Delegation by The Local Community Food Centre

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Decision: THAT the delegation of Karen Wood, on behalf of The Local, be heard.

Carried

Karen Wood, Community Advocate at The Local Community Food Centre (The Local), referring to a PowerPoint presentation, provided the following information:

- she is presenting on behalf of EPIC, the Local's advocacy working group;
- a Disability Justice Forum was held in February 2023 to discuss ending disability poverty in our community;
- one of the solutions discussed at the Forum is one that can be implemented by municipal government;
- The Local is asking the City to make free transit passes available to all recipients of the Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);
- to support the proposal, The Local conducted a survey with 75 community members;
- the responses demonstrate a clear desire for accessible transit options for community members;
- statistics from the survey were provided, with respondents believing that access to public transit would increase trips to obtain healthy foods, decrease sense of isolation, have a positive effect on mental wellbeing and foster a greater sense of belonging;
- it being suggested that by addressing the above social determinants of health, there was the potential to reduce the number of mental health calls received by police services, which would allow them to allocate resources elsewhere;

- that the voices driving this advocacy effort come from those with lived experience, with 36% of survey respondents being recipients of OW or ODSP and 32% self identifying as low income;
- it being argued that the cost to the City to provide transit passes would be minimal as buses often run empty during off-peak hours;
- by filling empty bus seats, they can ensure that transit remains efficient and accessible for all residents;
- the environmental aspect of the proposal being noted and including encouraging transit use as an alternative to personal vehicles, decreasing traffic congestion and carbon emissions;
- data from institutes such as the Tamarack Institute and 80 Cities being provided, and it being noted that accessible and affordable transportation is a key factor in reducing poverty and social isolation; and
- it was requested that their proposal be considered, taking into account the survey results and the arguments presented.

Karen Wood was thanked for her presentation, noting it was well-researched and well-presented.

It was questioned whether there are any programs already up and running that could be better utilized. The Director of Social Services provided information on programs and services currently available as follows:

- OW recipients can receive a transit pass if they are involved in activities that are employment related, such as job searches, basic education, or volunteer work;
- OW and ODSP recipients can receive a transit pass for medical needs;
- ODSP clients that are voluntarily participating in employment activities may qualify;
- Social Services staff work with partner agencies and give bus passes to help facilitate participation in community programs;
- low income families can access a bus pass at a reduced rate through the City; and

- with these initiatives, staff are hoping to reduce barriers to transportation as much as possible.

The Manager of Ontario Works stated that OW mandates are shifting away from being purely employment focused. OW clients may be eligible to receive a pass to enable them to participate in the community to access stability supports.

A question and answer period between Sub-committee and staff took place as follows:

- caseworkers can assess whether bus tickets or a pass should be given out based on the client's needs;
- to fulfill the request by The Local it would require the issuance of roughly 2,168 passes per month for Stratford recipients of OW or ODSP (this number would not cover those OW and ODSP recipients living outside of Stratford);
- it is hoped that the current processes for obtaining a transit pass are simple, but if there are barriers, staff could look at how processes could be streamlined;
- an example being provided of The Local where passes can be given out to community members and the names and pass numbers matched up by staff, instead of those community members having to go into the Social Services offices to receive a pass;
- it was noted that when OW clients access transit passes through their caseworkers, they are paid for by provincial funding;
- caseworkers can also provide passes or tickets to ride the PC Connect bus outside of Stratford;
- caseworkers work with the client to identify the best transportation solution for them, which may mean taking cabs or paying mileage to a neighbour with a personal vehicle;
- the financial impact of issuing approximately 2,100 annual transit passes with a value of \$60 monthly equates to \$1.5 million dollars annually;
- it was noted that costs would be less if it was an opt-in program, as not everyone may want one;

- if not available for a legislated reason through a case plan, transit passes could be provided under the Discretionary Benefits program, but that funding is capped;
- an example was provided of passes being provided using the Discretionary Benefits fund to those experiencing homelessness for housing searches; and
- staff would have to investigate if there was any provincial or federal funding programs that could be used on a large scale.

A question and answer period took place between Sub-committee and Derek Barnes, Manager of Community Outreach at The Local Community Food Centre, as follows:

- a relationship with Tamarack Institute could open doors for research pilot projects;
- The Local is not a member of the Institute directly, but they are part of regional advocacy groups who are;
- the United Way Social Research and Planning Council is a member of the Tamarack Institute and The Local has a relationship with them;
- Derek cautioned against equating the full value of the transit ticket price with equating to lost revenue;
- not everyone is going to want to obtain a free transit pass but denying the chance to others to use the system for free is not going to translate to receiving that \$60 as municipal revenue;
- The Local is seeing an increase in the number of people just trying to get by; and
- it is not realistic to expect that people can find that \$60 for the reduced rate transit pass.

It was questioned whether there are people who do not know what options are available and whether the City can address the matter by making that information more widely available. The Clerk suggested several options for consideration by Sub-committee:

- staff could develop an educational campaign promoting the various programs and how community members can access them;

- refer the request to staff for review to bring back a report on what is currently being provided, existing costs, information on additional costs for program expansion, and how they could be funded; and
- refer the request to the 2024 budget deliberations.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the request from The Local to provide free transit passes to all recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program be referred to staff for review;

AND THAT staff bring back a report to the Social Services Sub-committee on programs currently being provided which offer free transit passes to recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, existing costs for these programs, information on additional costs for an opt-in free transit pass program for all recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, and how that program could be funded.

Carried

4. Report of the Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor

4.1 Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts (SOC23-016)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor provided the following highlights from the staff report as follows:

- the City's Social Services Department received a letter of recognition on April 6, 2023 from the Director of Built for Zero Canada;
- a key milestone in ending homelessness is achieving 10% below baseline on the number of people experiencing homelessness;

- Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys met and held that milestone between December 2022 and February 2023; and
- Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys are the 7th community participating in the Built for Zero campaign to accomplish this milestone.

The Chair provided congratulations to staff, noting it is an incredible milestone. A question and answer period took place between Sub-committee and staff as follows:

- the end of homelessness for Stratford looks like reaching functional zero, which means solving of homelessness for the population and if anyone enters into homelessness, they are rapidly rehoused;
- it being noted staff are doing a lot of good work in the community, but there are still many experiencing homelessness and the encampments located downtown were provided as an example;
- the Director advised that the practice is to look at long term housing solutions by rapidly rehousing those experiencing homelessness, finding permanent solutions for them and ensuring supports are in place;
- most community members who are rehoused are placed in individual units, however, staff continue to pursue a supportive housing build;
- it was questioned what the process is for someone coming to Stratford from elsewhere with nowhere to stay;
- there being local policies in place regarding homelessness and case plans are put in place on an individual basis to address individual needs; and
- it was noted that often people have supports in place where they are originally from, and staff will look at whether they can be reintegrated back into the community where they have family or friends in place as a support system.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

Carried

5. Report of the Manager of Housing

5.1 2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys (SOC23-020)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Housing provided the following highlights of the staff report:

- this is the 9th year of the 10 year Housing and Homelessness plan;
- 55 households were moved from the centralized waitlist into permanent rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing in 2022;
- staff continue to work with all levels of government to leverage funding to maintain and repair housing stock; and
- continued construction is taking place at the affordable housing project at 200 Britannia Street and staff have been accepting applications for the past two (2) months.

A question and answer period between Sub-committee and staff took place as follows:

- 1 bedroom units continue to be the most popular;
- it was questioned whether staff could find out what the target would be for stock to increase to meet future demand;
- staff are seeing a demand for all types of units, including multi-bedroom units;
- 1 bedroom units make up most of the current housing stock, but there is a need for all types;
- the need for affordable and RGI housing outpaces the supply;
- a big change over the 9 years of the plan is the move to an evidenced based approach;

- the Social Services department has a data analyst in-house and staff will take an evidence based approach to figure out what the needs are in terms of housing type;
- there is a strong increased need for supportive housing based on current needs;
- there continues to be a significant demand for accessible units, in part due to an aging population; and
- as to whether increased need for beds to support those leaving domestic abuse will be needed, it was suggested that leadership at Optimism Place and the Emily Murphy Centre would be better equipped to respond.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

Carried

6. Report of the Director of Social Services

6.1 Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 returns (SOC23-018)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services advised that the City of Stratford coordinated the annual income tax clinic for low income residents, an initiative that has been ongoing since 1989. Famme and Co. Professional Corporation and McCutchen & Pearce Professional Corporation were thanked for their participation in providing this service.

For 2022, 132 participants had their returns completed. It was noted this year refugee claimants and those experiencing homelessness were served

through engagement with community supports to enable them maximum access to all resources available.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

The Vice-chair stated this is such an important program as it enables access to increased financial benefits and enfranchises members of the public as they are automatically registered to vote in elections.

The Vice-chair called the question on the motion.

Carried

6.2 Transitioning the Supportive Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) (COU23-019)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services provided the following highlights from the staff report:

- the SHOPP program launched in February 2018 as a collaborative Housing First intervention aimed at supporting individuals and

families experiencing homelessness in Perth County, St. Marys and Stratford;

- there is a scattered site and fixed site component to this program;
- the scattered site component is where staff are recommending service delivery changes;
- the program has had many successes but there have been some challenges as well;
- it is believed that the proposed new model will address many of the challenges being experienced; and
- staff are looking at using the months of July, August, and September to transition this program.

The Director of Social Services reviewed the staff recommendation.

It was questioned whether bringing this program in-house would enhance data collection and the Director confirmed it would.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

Carried

7. Report of the Manager of Ontario Works

7.1 2023 Ontario Works Service/Business Plan (SOC23-017)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/ Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Ontario Works provided the following highlights from the staff report:

- the 2023 service plan was attached to the Sub-committee agenda;
- the plan was written in accordance with the template provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services;
- this contract and budget have already been negotiated, which is early based on their usual timeline; and
- the service plan covers several topics including: the Ontario Works mandate and how the local office plans to meet those priorities, a review of the transition plan from the current employment focused model to a stability support model, a comprehensive caseload review, local labour market information, as well as an overall overview of how the program is managed locally.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/ Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

Carried

8. Next Sub-committee Meeting

The next Social Services Sub-committee meeting is July 11, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall.

9. 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: 5:20 P.M.



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 13, 2023
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Colleen Steckly, Administrative Assistant to the Director of Social Services
 Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report #: SOC23-018
Attachments: None

Title: Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 returns

Objective: To provide Council with a report on the annual community income tax clinic serving low-income residents of the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and County of Perth.

Background: The City of Stratford has coordinated an annual income tax clinic for low-income residents since 1989, with the support of local accounting firms. Services continued to be provided this year free of charge by two local accounting firms, Famme & Co. Professional Corporation, and McCutchen & Pearce Professional Corporation. Together they provided the opportunity for 132 participants to have returns completed.

Analysis: Prior to the pandemic, appointment slots were scheduled for in-person attendances with the accountants at various locations in Stratford on one day in mid-March. Throughout the pandemic, the City of Stratford Social Services Department was tasked with coordinating these services without interruption to residents by moving to a drop off/pick up approach rather than in-person with the accountants. This year, after consultation with the accounting firms involved, this method continued as we are able to serve more participants and more time is allowed to the agencies preparing the documentation free of charge. We communicated well in advance of the clinic, providing details to partner agencies, posting to various media platforms, displaying details on screens on the city transit buses, and included insert reminders with February benefits payment stubs to Ontario Works clients. Caseworkers, reception, and intake staff were informed of the details to share with clients.

This year, when contacted, one of the accounting agencies indicated they were no longer able to participate. We are grateful to BDO Canada LLP for their past participation. We had the same commitment of appointment times available as the previous year from Famme & Co. Professional Corporation and McCutchen & Pearce

Professional Corporation for completion of the 2022 tax returns. The program is offered on a first come first served basis with every effort made to accommodate as many participants as possible. There were 132 spaces available, with 126 spaces utilized by the deadline.

This year eligible annual incomes changed slightly to \$27,589 or less for individual and \$34,346 or less for couples. This brought the eligibility in line with the low-income cut off (LICO) scale and current guidelines for the Housing Stability Bank, the program formerly known as CHPI (Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative). This allows the service to be provided to individuals who may not otherwise be able to afford to file taxes through private corporations or accountants. Postage paid envelopes with proper mailing address for Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) were provided by firms if e-file was not an option. Only current year returns are completed during the clinic. As an alternative, referrals were made to another program offered through The Salvation Army under Purchase of Service Agreements with the City for anyone unable to meet our submission deadline, or if they had multiple years of returns or estate returns to be completed. The Salvation Army offers sites in St. Marys and Listowel which enables participants without the means to travel to Stratford to still participate in this very worthwhile opportunity.

Since its inception, this well-received program has been beneficial to residents of Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County. It provides an essential service that helps residents access further resources and ensure they are receiving all federal benefits available to them to maximize incomes. It has been helpful for individuals requiring income tax returns for applications such as Rent-Geared-to-Income Housing or the Canada Child Benefit and fosters greater financial stability when they receive federal benefits such as GST/HST credit.

This year we engaged with refugee claimants, and residents experiencing homelessness through community supports to make every effort to enable maximum access to all resources available. The flexibility and cooperation received from the accounting firm contacts and partners was key to keeping the process moving along.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

All professional accounting services are provided free of charge to participants. The cost to the Corporation was administrative time, which did not have an impact to this year's budget or to service delivery.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

There would be no future year impact.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Culture and Community

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities, and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

Prepared by:

Colleen Steckly, Administrative Assistant to
Director of Social Services

Recommended by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 13, 2023
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report#: SOC23-019
Attachments: None

Title: Transitioning the Supportive Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP)

Objective: To recommend a change to the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) scattered site delivery model, and to request approval to hire two Outreach Workers in-house to ensure that the City is serving the needs of our highest acuity individuals experiencing homelessness on the By-Name List.

Background: The SHOPP program was launched in February 2018 as a collaborative Housing First intervention aimed at supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Perth County, St Marys, and Stratford. There is a scattered site component to the program and a fixed site component. For this management report, and the review of the service delivery model, the scattered site component of the program is where the Social Services Department is recommending changes. The scattered site component supports housing for single adults, youth, or families with dependent aged children wherein participants receive intensive case management support, coupled with portable housing allowances to offset, or subsidize rent, to live in a unit of their choosing in the private market throughout Perth County.

The scattered site model has been a collaborative partnership between the City of Stratford Social Services Department, Optimism Place, Stratford/Perth Shelterlink, John Howard Society of London and District and CMHA Huron Perth Addiction and Mental Health Services. The program provides housing, coupled with intensive wraparound supports, to those most vulnerable in our community that are experiencing homelessness. The current memorandum of understandings with the four agencies are set to expire September 30, 2023. In the Winter/Spring 2022-2023 SHOPP leadership and direct service staff initiated a Five-Year Review of the Program.

Analysis: Within the last five years this program has had many successes, but there have also been some challenges in the current service delivery model for the City of Stratford as the Service System Manager. It is believed with the proposed model of

having two Outreach Workers internally and three external support agency workers, many of these challenges will be addressed. The Social Services Department will look at using the months of July, August, and September to transition the program.

By hiring two Outreach Workers in-house and streamlining operations within a revised service delivery model, more high acuity clients experiencing homelessness will be served. Social Services staff will investigate entering memorandums of understandings with two or three support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of our most complex clients to help support this program. The memorandums of understanding will require the support agencies to hire Housing Stability Workers (three in total) who will carry an intensive needs caseload and draw their intake from the local By-Name List.

The duties of the Housing Stability Workers and the City's Outreach Workers will include supporting clients with document readiness, housing searches, and once permanent housing is secured, housing stability support will be provided. The team of five (three external and two internal) will be supported by the current coordinator, and caseworker positions within the Social Services Department. Clients will not lose their support because the team will be able to absorb the caseload when a staff position is vacant. If a client needs discretionary benefits, there is a direct path to requesting the benefits as these are issued within the Social Services Department, and the caseworker who is supporting the program and issuing the benefits has access to various discretionary funds through multiple funding sources to ensure that all avenues are looked at for the client.

Approximately 50% of the clients with high acuity needs on the By-Name List are being housed through the Perth & Stratford Housing Corporation (PSHC) in community housing. Furthermore, as of January 2023, 43% of households on the By-Name List were in receipt of Ontario Works support. By having in-house Outreach Workers on this team, they will be able to liaise with Housing and Ontario Works staff (Public Housing Review Officers, Maintenance Workers, Ontario Works Caseworkers, Intake staff) providing intensive wraparound and timely supports. At the time of this report there are currently 39 individuals being served by five workers within the SHOPP program. This would increase the complement to 60 clients being served by five workers in an intensive manner, as each worker would carry a minimum of 12 per caseload and if the complement of workers temporarily dips below 5 due to illness or attrition the caseload will be maintained through resources in Social Services or partner agencies. Clients who are currently being served in the SHOPP scattered site delivery model will transition into the new model and will continue to be supported on their path to housing stability.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

The change in programming will not see any changes to the operational budget as the funding is currently 100% provincial. Should the provincial funding model change, the service would require reassessment at that time.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

It is anticipated that by bringing this program in-house and streamlining operations, there will be a savings in discretionary dollars as it will minimize duplication of services.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Culture and Community

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

Prepared by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services

Recommended by:

Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 13, 2023
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Kehlar Hillyer, Housing Stability Policy & Program Coordinator
 Grant Martin, Housing Stability Policy & Program Coordinator
 John Ritz, Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor
 Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report #: SOC23-016
Attachments: Letter from Marie Morrison, Director of Built for Zero Canada

Title: Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts

Objective: To inform Mayor and Council on the community's continued progress in reducing chronic homelessness in Stratford-Perth County-St. Marys as a participating community in the Built for Zero-Canada movement.

Background: As outlined in a previous report (**SOC19-001**), this community has been a part of a national movement to end chronic homelessness since 2017. Originally known as the 20,000 Homes Campaign, this movement met one of its goals – to house 20,000 of Canada's most vulnerable homeless people by July 1, 2020 – in March 2019. In June 2019, the movement relaunched as Built for Zero-Canada and refocused its efforts on supporting a core group of communities (currently 44) end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness through a structured, supportive, and data-driven approach.

The City of Stratford's By-Name-List is the tracking system used by Social Services to maintain a current and malleable database of those experiencing homelessness, at risk of experiencing homelessness, and recently housed. The By-Name-List was established in 2019 and is critical to provide reliable, real-time data that informs Built for Zero and other initiatives.

The City of Stratford Social Services Department also implemented the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan focused on the following objectives in 2013:

- Ending Homelessness
- Creating Attainable Housing Options
- Sustaining Community Housing
- Addressing a Diversity of Needs

The Community Safety and Well-Being Plan was initiated in 2022 and focuses on housing as Priority Area #2 of its goals. Unlike the Housing and Homelessness Plan, Community Safety & Well-Being targets a broader portfolio of housing needs but highlights the importance of safe and attainable housing under the Housing First Principle.

On April 6, 2023, the City of Stratford Social Services Department received a letter of recognition of efforts from Marie Morrison, Director of Built for Zero Canada. Stratford-Perth-St. Marys successfully reduced the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness by 10% below its baseline for three consecutive months.

Analysis: As a result of joint efforts by the City of Stratford Social Services Department government organizations, non-profits, and community groups within the service area, we have made significant progress towards the priority of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

In November 2021, Stratford-Perth-St. Marys established a baseline of 145 people experiencing chronic homelessness in the service area. Between the months of December 2022 and February 2023, this number was reduced by 10% below the baseline and the number reported in February 2023 was 115 people experiencing chronic homelessness. This is a reduction of 30 people, or 21%, between November 2019 and February 2023.

The inflow/outflow activity from December 2022 to February 2023 have the following key points:

Outflow (total outflow 50)

- 27 households experiencing chronic homelessness moved into new housing (higher than median)
- 23 moves to inactive (While that is not what we would see as 'positive' outflow, this still shows that more outflow was as a result of people getting housed as opposed to lost contact. In the past, that was not the case. It used to be more due to lost contact. Each month that passes we are getting better overall at decreasing lost contact.)

Inflow (total inflow 34)

- Newly identified: 16
- Aged in: 4 (homeless for 6 months or more)
- Return from inactive 16 (while this does impact our reduction, it is still a good thing because it means we have regained contact with those lost)
- Return from housing 0 (this means nobody lost their housing during this time which is considered a big driver for sustaining the reduction)

Net Change over 3 months = -16

We are the seventh community that is part of Built for Zero-Canada to accomplish this statistic and it provides encouragement for us as well as our partner organizations to continue our efforts while optimizing resources and opportunities within the service area.

Financial Implications:

Due to the fact this is an informational report only, there are no financial implications to be reported because of this report.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Local, regional, and national partnerships were instrumental in our community's progress related to ending homelessness; local community agencies dedicated staff resources to the processes required to implement key improvement projects, and the Built for Zero team and other BFZ participating communities provided guidance, support, and input throughout the terms.

This work also aligns with and strengthens the:

- updated *Housing & Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys* which identifies ending homelessness and addressing a diversity of needs as two of its four strategic objectives

Community Safety and Well-being Plan which identifies the priority of Adequate, Affordable and Attainable Housing

Other: This letter of recognition identifies the efforts made by the City of Stratford Social Services Department and its community partners to reduce chronic homelessness within the service area.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

Prepared by:

Kehlar Hillyer, Housing Stability Policy & Program Coordinator

Grant Martin, Housing Stability Policy & Program Coordinator

John Ritz, Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor

Recommended by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services

Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer



April 6, 2023

Re: Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign

Hello Team Stratford-Perth-St. Marys,

On behalf of the Built for Zero Canada team, I want to recognize and congratulate you on the progress you have made thus far on your journey to end chronic homelessness! A key milestone for communities in the Reduce Cohort is to achieve 10% below baseline on the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness. Stratford-Perth-St. Marys has reached this goal!

Communities set a baseline once they have achieved a quality By-Name List, indicating that they have reliable real-time data. After achieving a quality By-Name List in October 2019, your community reset your baseline in November of 2021 to 145 people experiencing chronic homelessness to reflect improvements to data collection. **To achieve the 10% below baseline milestone means that Stratford-Perth-St. Marys needed to reduce the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness by at least 10% of 145 for three consecutive months.**

Based on your most recent data submission, we are excited to recognize **Stratford-Perth-St. Marys reached and held a 10% reduction in chronic homelessness for three consecutive months between December 2022 and February 2023!** Most recently, you reported 115 people experiencing chronic homelessness in February 2023. This is a reduction of 30 people or 21% percent between November 2019 and February 2023!

This is amazing!!! Your hard work and dedication in moving towards your goal of functional zero for chronic homelessness is demonstrated by this impressive accomplishment. As the 7th community who has reached and sustained this milestone, Stratford-Perth-St. Marys is a leading community, proving to others that reductions in homelessness are possible.

The Built for Zero Canada team is very excited to continue to support your work toward functional zero!

Congratulations and thank you for all your amazing work!

Onward!

Marie Morrison

Marie Morrison, Director, Built for Zero Canada



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 13, 2023
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Kehlar Hillyer, Policy & Program Coordinator
 Jeff Wilson, Manager of Housing
Report #: SOC23-020
Attachments: Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

Title: 2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys

Objective: To present the 2022 Annual Report (Year 9) for the Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys.

Background: In accordance with the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, the City of Stratford (as Service Manager for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys) is required to produce an Annual Report on the community's accomplishments in implementing its Housing and Homelessness Plan. Attached is a report detailing the content of the 2022 Annual Report.

Analysis: Achievements in the ninth year of the Housing and Homeless Plan included:

- Moving 52 households that were experiencing homelessness into permanent housing;
- Moving 55 households on the Centralized Waiting List into permanent rent-geared-to-income housing;
- Providing 322 households with some form of rent support (e.g. housing allowance, rent supplement) to subsidize the cost of rental housing;
- Providing 419 households with homeless prevention supports;
- Leveraged over \$1.2 million for improvements at community housing properties and \$200,000 for transitional funding for housing providers approaching the end of operating agreements;
- Continued construction on Britannia 2 and began accepting applications for occupancy in early 2023;
- Hired Community Developers throughout the service area to provide case management based on specific, individual needs and implement projects based on demonstrated demand.

**Numbers are not mutually exclusive.*

Financial Impact: There is no new or additional financial impact for the City associated with this report.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage, and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Developing our Resources

Optimizing Stratford's physical assets and digital resources. Planning a sustainable future for Stratford's resources and environment.

Alignment with One Planet Principles

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

Prepared by:

Kehlar Hillyer, Policy & Program Coordinator
Jeff Wilson, Manager of Housing

Recommended by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Kim McElroy, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

Introduction

The 2022 Annual Report highlights the achievements made in Year 9 of the Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys. These achievements are a result of the commitment of service providers, community members, municipal partners, and City of Stratford staff. All of whom played an important role in furthering our community's vision that:

Everyone has the right to a home that is safe, suitable, and affordable and to supports that help them keep their home.

In conjunction with Housing First Principles, we know that safe and stable housing improves health and wellbeing outcomes. Local work stayed focused on ensuring that people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness received help with finding and maintaining permanent while the community is continuing to feel the impact of a housing crisis spurred by the global pandemic.

Snapshot of Housing & Homelessness

Demand for Rent-Geared-to-Income Housing

505 applicants applied for RGI housing through the centralized waiting list as of December 31, 2022.

Priority Status

Special Provincial Priority (SPP)	4%
Homelessness Status	31%
Chronological	65%

Demand by Unit Size

1 Bedroom	65%
2 Bedroom	17%
3 Bedroom	10%
4+ Bedroom	9%

Applicant Type

Singles and Couples	56%
Families	33%
Seniors	11%

Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

Where Applicants Applied From

Stratford	44%
St. Marys	5%
North Perth	7%
West Perth	2%
Perth East	0.6%
Perth South	1%
Outside Perth County	34%
No Response	6%

Households Experiencing Homelessness

129 households were experiencing homelessness in Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys according to the area's By-Name-List as of December 31, 2022. This is **41** fewer households than the previous year (Year 8 – 2021).

- **93%** were experiencing chronic homelessness
- **16%** identified as Indigenous

Gender Identity

Women	39%
Men	52%
Trans/Non-Conforming	5%
Chose Not to Answer	5%

**Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding*

93% of women self-identified as survivors of domestic violence. Data reflects 42 out of the 50 women who chose to answer this question.

Household Composition

Families	14%
Youth	22%
Single Adults	64%

Level of Acuity

High Acuity	71%
Moderate Acuity	28%
Low Acuity	2%

Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

Cost of Housing

Average Market Rent (AMR) – Yearly Comparison

Unit Size	2020	2021	2022	% Change 2020-2022
1 Bedroom	\$1,239	\$1,253	\$1,405	Increase 13%
2 Bedroom	\$1,421	\$1,487	\$1,782	Increase 25%
3 Bedroom	\$1,663	\$1,894	\$2,331	Increase 40%

Source: Local Rental Scan conducted annually for the Service Manager area

Average Housing Resale Price for Huron-Perth

\$605,294 in December 2022, a **9.4% decrease** from the resale price in December 2021.

Source: Huron Perth Residential Market Activity and MLS® Home Price Index Report December 2022.

2022 Accomplishments

Strategic Directive #1 – Ending Homelessness

Households Experiencing Homelessness Housed by Year

Source: City of Stratford Social Services Department, By-Name List

	2020	2021	2022
Private Market	35	51	22
Private Market with Rent Support	17	20	9
RGI in Community Housing	20	23	19
Unknown	11	6	2
Total moved into housing	83	100	52

Of the households housed in 2022:

- **88%** had experienced chronic homelessness (homeless for 6 or more months)
- **236** households accessed emergency accommodation
- **419** households received financial assistance through the Housing Stability Bank (previously known as CHPI) program for:
 - Last month's rent deposit – **14%**
 - Moving or storage costs – **11%**

Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

- Rent arrears – **22%**
- Utility arrears – **18%**
- Furniture – **21%**
- Other – **14%**

*Numbers are not mutually exclusive. Households may have accessed both emergency accommodation and financial assistance. Households may have required multiple forms of assistance.

Strategic Directive #2 – Creating Attainable Housing Options

Households in Receipt of Rent Supports by Year

Source: City of Stratford Social Services Department

49 households continued to participate in the Affordable Homeownership Loan Program

Construction continued in the development of the Britannia Street Affordable Housing Project. Applications are currently being accepted for available units.

76 new rent supports were introduced through various programs & funding streams.

Municipalities within the service area identified Attainable Housing as a priority in their strategic plans.

The Community Safety & Well-Being Plan continues to recognize the importance of housing to a general sense of well-being and includes attainable housing as one of the four priorities.

Strategic Directive #3 – Sustaining Community Housing

Households Housed from the Centralized Waiting List for RGI Assistance by Year

Source: City of Stratford Social Services Department

	2020	2021	2022
Special Provincial Priority	16	13	8
Urgent – Homelessness	27	19	29
Chronological	35	21	18
Total – Housed	78	53	55

Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

- As service manager, the City of Stratford completed operational reviews of all local non-profit and cooperative housing providers to improve supports for their sustainability.
- Leveraged over **\$1.2 million** for improvements at community housing properties and **\$200,000** for transitional funding for housing providers approaching the end of the operating agreements.
- Continuing to work collaboratively with community partners and agencies to create sustainability, permanency, and improvements.

Strategic Directive #4 – Addressing a Diversity of Needs

PC Connect – a partnership between the municipalities of Stratford, Perth County, North Perth, and St. Marys – continues to provide affordable and accessible intercommunity public transit service throughout Perth County, Stratford, St. Marys, Kitchener-Waterloo, and London.

- A total of **618** passes were issued to those experiencing transportation barriers which is a **172%** increase from 2021.

The City of Stratford Social Services partnered with the United Way to establish the Connections Centre in Stratford to increase accessibility to resources for those who are experiencing homelessness.

Coordinated Access continued to be used resulting in improved tracking systems, increased community partnerships, and providing better service to those we serve.

The Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team in coordination with the Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance and the Mobile Integrated Health Team was expanded.

Community Developers were hired throughout the service area to provide case management based on specific, individual needs and implement projects based on the demonstrated needs of the area.

Conclusion

It is understood that the effects of the pandemic are continuing to have an impact on housing and homelessness. While the real estate market is beginning to neutralize and interest rates are starting to decline, home ownership and rent are unattainable for many. The Social Services Department as well as the Community Safety & Well-Being Plan Partnership members are reviewing key performance indicators to ensure resources are allocated to the areas demonstrating the most need. The data from 2022 suggests a focus on youth facing homelessness, more community housing as opposed

Housing and Homelessness Plan 2022 Annual Report Content

to temporary shelters, and continuous collaboration with other levels of government, non-profits, and private developers to begin to address the on-going housing crisis.



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 13, 2023
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Alex Burgess, Manager of Ontario Works
Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report #: SOC23-017
Attachments: The City of Stratford Ontario Works 2023 Business Plan

Title: 2023 Ontario Works Service/Business Plan

Objective: To provide Mayor and Council with an update regarding the negotiated Ontario Works contract and service plan.

Background: As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the delivery of the Ontario Works Program, the City of Stratford is required to submit an Ontario Works Service Plan every two years to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). The due date for the 2023 Service Plan was March 31, 2023. Alongside the service plan is the negotiated budget, which is presented to MCCSS every year and then negotiated before a final transfer payment agreement is signed by the Director of Social Services.

The Ontario Works Service Plan provides an overview of programs and services that are available to individuals who are in receipt of Ontario Works with a focus on improving outcomes for people who rely on social assistance. The plan also details outcomes for the Ontario Works program and highlights the negotiated targets with MCCSS that the local CMSM will be measured on during the current contract year. The 2023 plan is the first service plan completed under the modernized Employment Services Transformation (EST) template and negotiated targets have been modified to meet the changing tides of the program.

Analysis: The 2023 Ontario Works Service plan was written in accordance with the template provided by MCCSS and was submitted on time to the Ministry. The plan focuses on several important categories, with the overarching topics being covered including:

- The Ontario Works Mandate and how the local office will meet Ministry priorities.

- A review of the transition plan from the current service delivery model to the modernized EST program delivery model.
- A comprehensive caseload review and review of local labour market information.
- A review of strategies that will be utilized to achieve performance outcomes, and
- An overview of overall program management.

The five categories covered throughout the service plan highlight the local labour market, the approach of the local office to addressing the needs of the community and social assistance recipients, highlights of service delivery methodologies and the negotiated outcomes that are measured as part of the contract negotiation process. The service plan's overarching philosophy is guided by the work done through the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan and keeps sight of the four priority areas through the work being done by the Ontario Works Division.

The budget and contract were successfully negotiated with the Ministry on April 19, 2023, with the final transfer payment agreement to be executed once it is made available.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

The funding received from MCCSS represents a substantial portion of the Division's budget, as detailed in the 2023 Budget submission. The fully negotiated contract means that funding for 2023 will continue to be flowed by MCCSS to the municipality. The total funding received from the Ministry for 2023 is \$1,336,400.00.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

Future year impacts are unknown at this time as this service plan and contract speak only to 2023 activities. Should the funding envelope change significantly, there could potentially be an impact to service delivery.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

Prepared by: Alex Burgess, Manager of Ontario Works
Recommended by: Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer



The City of Stratford Ontario Works 2023 Business Plan

**Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the Consolidated
Municipal Service Manager by:**

Alex Burgess, Manager of Ontario Works

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services

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Ontario Works Mandate

All Ontario Works delivery partners share the same mandate. This serves as a common starting point for the service planning process.

Mandate

To provide stability supports and financial assistance to people in financial need. The Ontario Works program:

- Recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through participation in the right supports, benefits and services.
- Serves people needing assistance by providing financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed.
- Is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario.

Ministry Priorities

Ontario Works delivery partners play a key role in delivering on many of the government's priorities and have the ability to leverage provincial investments in infrastructure, employment, education and social services to create new opportunities for clients. As part of the service plan, delivery partners will articulate the efforts they will undertake to address the following ministry priorities for the current business cycle:

1. Social Assistance (SA) Service Delivery

Accelerated Digital Delivery Solutions

Currently, 41% of our caseload is registered on MyBenefits. This has been a highly successful digital solution for the participants we support so we are continuing to increase registration for the program. As a predominantly rural setting, there can be challenges related to reliable internet, but we are continuing to work with participants, local municipalities, and internet service providers in our area to address these barriers. Caseworkers continue to utilize the messaging feature within MyBenefits and promote the safety and effectiveness of MyBenefits to the entirety of our caseload.

The local office has been directing clients to the enhanced and easy-to-use SA Digital Application (SADA) since it was made available in our region. We continue to promote and encourage the usage of this tool to allow for streamlined and automated service delivery when applying for Ontario Works locally, unless clients meet the requirements for a local office application.

Centralized and Automated Delivery

The local office continues to move forward as a member of Centralized and Automated Intake. We regularly provide feedback to IBAU regarding process changes and supports required to deliver services more effectively. Over the course of the past 5 months, we have processed 30% (114) of the applications received at the local office and processed a further 60 applications requiring immediate verifications. We are regularly refining and improving the local processes and ensuring they work smoothly and in tandem with IBAU.

The local office went live with Electronic Document Management (EDM) in November 2021. This has led to increased time savings for staff locating and producing documents as well as increased effectiveness of our file retention strategies and processes.

Risk-Based Eligibility Review

The local office continues to utilize all tools provided to us for risk-based eligibility determinations including third party sources, provincial, and federal tools. The addition of CRA information into SAMS has been especially helpful for our ERO and EVP staff members who can utilize this information during file reviews to ensure all income is being appropriately reported. The local office staff continue to utilize best practices provided by the Ministry with regard to risk-based eligibility determinations and risk-based eligibility reviews. We are participating in the ERO and EVP Community of Practice as well as staying in touch with other municipal offices through networks such as Business Processes and Technology working group (BPT) and the Southwest Employment and Life Stabilization Table (SWELT).

Access to Employment and Training

Presently, we receive regular reports from our EO partners in the community and participate in quarterly meetings with all employment, literacy, and basic skills/education partners across Perth County. The continued partnership and close collaboration to support participants remains a top priority for our local office, with a focus on getting participants back to work as soon as possible. We are co-located and work closely with the local economic development team at investStratford. Furthermore, we pride ourselves on strong relationships with our EO partners to ensure that OW participants receive the full range of support available to them. We are co-located with an EO provider in our North Perth satellite office which allows for more regional-specific services and an even closer working relationship which positively benefits participants. We also have presence in our local office by another of our EO partners on a weekly basis, offering informal and formal supports within our physical location.

As we move forward with Employment Services Transformation, we recognize our unique position as a member of the SSM Consortium as well as the OW Service Delivery Partner. We continue to have a strong role in developing a locally responsive and person-centered service system. This allows us to monitor and improve upon the successes and challenges facing our system locally, from both the EO and OW perspectives, ensuring a more robust response to any issues that may arise.

Collaborating with Municipal Partners

The City of Stratford continues to participate in municipal engagement sessions through OMSSA where members of leadership attend provincial tables and contribute feedback. The city is committed to co-designing, in conjunction with our municipal partners, a provincial social assistance program that meets the unique needs of each community across Ontario while staying accountable to taxpayers. As a unique community comprised of both large rural areas and an urban center, we are well positioned to offer feedback and input on the challenges faced in our community and similar geographic regions.

2. Improving Employment Outcomes

For the interim, while a SA performance management framework is being developed, EST delivery partners will use the performance metrics as the outcomes for service planning.

As outlined in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) memo, the Ministry is requesting an outcome target to be set for each performance metric, which will be due as part of the 2023 Budget Submission and contract negotiation. Further information will be forthcoming for the new EST municipalities in terms of setting targets for 2023.

The local office is committed to improving employment outcomes and setting fair and reasonable targets that the office can aspire toward. After another successful year of achieving employment outcomes, the shift to EST metrics will require the OW division to rethink strategy and service delivery as we transition through this transformative change. Through a strong relationship with the SSM and stronger relationships with our EO providers, we will offer integrated case management that supports participants to become more employment-ready and self-sufficient as they receive services.

We utilize best practices learned from tables we attend such as the Southwest Employment and Life Stabilization Table (SWELT) and the Business Processes and Technology working group (BPT), which sees representation from CMSM's across West 1 and West 2 region as well as Ministry staff. We regularly review

COGNOS reports to ensure accurate reporting of employment metrics and to follow-up with staff to confirm service delivery standards are being met. We inspire high level service delivery by OW staff at the local office by offering top quality training and coaching.

In all four employment metrics measured in 2022, we exceeded our targets as well as the provincial averages. In 2023 and beyond, we plan to continue that trend as we deliver a high level of quality services to residents of our catchment area.

3. Develop and Maintain Local Community Service Partnerships

Build on and strengthen local community partnerships and with Service System Manager (SSM) on the range of supports available to Ontario Works clients, including long-term recipients of SA and marginalized or disadvantaged groups across service sectors, including health, developmental services, housing and child-care.

The City of Stratford Social Services Department strives to be an active member of the community and has active partnerships with several organizations that support the health and welfare of individuals in receipt of Ontario Works.

The Director of Social Services co-chairs the local Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWB), as well as the executive steering committee that focuses on the work being completed across our geographic region. The CSWB plan is a tool to address key social priorities for safety and well-being ranging from mental health to poverty, to safe movement around the city, to employment, to social isolation and much more. It is a way to work together through multi-sectoral partnerships towards sustainable communities where everyone feels safe, has a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate, and where individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income and social and cultural expression. The CSWB plan guides all of the work that we do and is the overarching plan which informs the strategic direction our office is taking. The four key priorities – 1) systems planning and integration, 2) adequate, affordable and attainable housing, 3) affordable and accessible health, social and recreation services and 4) social inclusion – inform the direction that the Ontario Works Division is taking in 2023 and beyond and helps guide the creation of this document, serving as underlying priorities for all of the work that we do.

The OW Division currently has service contracts with the local chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association who provides mental health and addictions support to individuals across our catchment area. We also have contracts with Family Services Perth-Huron, a counselling agency who provides care along a

spectrum ranging from group and one-on-one therapy to mediation, housing stability support, and adult protective services. The OW caseworkers have close working relationships with representatives from Community Connections to support clients living with FASD and work closely with our partners at DSO Southwest Region to support those with developmental disabilities. We are co-located with our homelessness and housing stability team and our housing division. We have an integrated intake system to ensure all available services are provided to clients in a timely manner.

Additional Benefit Worker

The local OW Division currently has a singular caseworker for all recipients of ODSP and Non-Social Assistance Recipients who are looking for additional financial support such as housing stability benefits or urgent needs. This position also looks after the provision of Discretionary Benefits for ODSP clients. The additional benefits caseworker provides one-stop for SA recipients and Non-SARS to receive additional benefits and ensure that they have access to all relevant programs without having to tell their story multiple times. This position works in the office as well as in the community, regularly attending a local drop-in center and other municipalities within the region to offer services in-person. This position can develop wrap-around supports by guaranteeing all relevant financial programs are accessed to address barriers to food security, urgent basic needs, housing instability, and utility disconnections.

Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Social Services outreach staff, though they are no longer funded through the Ontario Works program, continue to work very closely with OW and ODSP clients as well as low-income individuals experiencing homelessness. In partnership with local agencies, outreach staff focus on in-community work to provide wrap-around supports focused on stabilizing a client's housing situation, look after immediate health needs, and move someone along the continuum to employability, if appropriate. Ontario Works caseworkers work very closely with these staff members and provide support to clients who access housing stability services, ensuring they are ready for any housing opportunities that arise, have an appropriate housing action plan connected with their outcome plan, and are supported in-community with all issues related to their housing and general well-being. Ontario Works caseworkers work more intensively with clients experiencing homelessness, in partnership with outreach staff, to establish action/outcome plans that reflect their housing action plans and their primary goal of achieving sustainable and safe housing. Once housed, participants can begin working toward employability and self-sufficiency. OW caseworkers provide regular monthly updates to our local By-Name List to ensure their clients are

eligible for housing-focused services and work closely with Housing Division staff to support stable tenancies and eviction prevention activities.

Relationship with SSM

As a member of the four county Consortium that was awarded the SSM contract for the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula, we have regular meetings with the SSM and participate in both the design of the SSM as well as system design for the more locally responsive and improved employment system. Through our participation at all levels of the SSM, we are involved in the planning, implementation, and regional advisory bodies that inform the work being done. We provide input into shared case management models which helps to ensure they will work for the local Social Assistance clients whom we support. Our unique position as a member of the SSM allows us to ensure that SA clients are at the forefront of the work being done.

The Stratford CMSM also partners with other local services to provide specialized supports to OW recipients including:

- Contracting the services of a psychologist to complete cognitive and mental health assessments. Participants who identify as having cognitive disabilities or believe that mental health is a barrier to their employment are scheduled for an assessment. The assessment identifies next steps for the caseworker and the client regarding their action plans and how best to achieve self-sufficiency. Examples of this include employment that involves routine tasks, counselling, and literacy supports.
- Co-locating the Childcare Subsidy Intake Worker for Social Services with the Ontario Works caseworkers to allow for direct transfers between programs. This establishes a seamless approach when a client needs to apply for a childcare subsidy or requires a therapeutic referral.
- Co-Locating with Housing Division staff including: Public Housing Review Officers, intensive outreach staff, outreach staff, and subsidy workers. We have a shared goal of working toward ensuring tenancies are protected, supported, and eviction prevention activities are thoroughly undertaken to promote stability for housed OW clients while preventing occurrences of homelessness.
- Partnership with Family Services Perth-Huron (FSPH) to deliver front-of-line counselling and psychotherapy to individuals in receipt of OW and ODSP who are actively participating in Social Services programming. FSPH also employs an ASPW who works closely with Ontario Works caseworkers who may be supporting an individual with a developmental disability.

- Regular training provided by agencies in the community who deliver specialized services such as Developmental Services Ontario, Literacy and Basic Skills providers, Newcomer, and settlement services and community health organizations.

4. Strengthen Program Accountability

MCCSS continues to refine program controls to support greater delivery and financial accountability. Delivery partners will need to consider how these controls impact their business processes and delivery approaches when constructing their service plans.

Key elements include:

Compliance with expectations related to completing the Eligibility Verification Process

The Stratford CMSM works diligently each EVP cycle to ensure that targets are met and all cases are completed in a timely manner. We continue to monitor the effectiveness of EVP locally and adjust the process to ensure outcomes are being met and the work being done meets a high standard of quality and accuracy.

Participation in current, and prospective, Oversight Intelligence activities aimed at preventing and reducing financial losses

The Stratford CMSM will continue to participate in all Oversight Intelligence activities and factor any advancements or modifications to service delivery into local business processes to ensure minimal financial losses incurred due to overpayments.

Documentation requirements for Ontario Works benefits that are managed outside of Social Assistance Management System (SAMS)

The City of Stratford currently issues all benefits from within SAMS and has no plans to alter this model of service delivery.

Section One: Transition Plan

Service Delivery

A summary of outcomes achieved in relation to establishing targets for 2023, and a description of service system outcomes and delivery successes, client outcomes, challenges and lessons learned.

Within the previous two-year service planning cycle of 2021 and 2022, the City of Stratford's Ontario Works Division was being measured on three targets; the percentage of files which close each month due to employment reasons, the overall

percentage of the caseload which exits assistance to employment each month and the percentage of the caseload that is actively employed each month.

Due to the tenacity and determination of the individuals and families in receipt of Ontario Works and the high level of effective and efficient customer service provided by the local staff, the Stratford CMSM Ontario Works Division was not only able to achieve all three targets, but exceed provincial averages in all four measured outcomes and exceeded the customer service standards set by the Province with regard to days from application contact to the application being granted assistance. The Stratford CMSM averaged 3.5 days to decision which is below the 4-day benchmark set by the Province. The other targets that were achieved are as follows:

Employment Outcome	Stratford CMSM Target	Stratford CMSM Achievement	Provincial Average
% of files exiting to employment	24.09%	26.40%	22.75%
% of overall caseload exiting to employment	1.47%	1.66%	1.10%
% of caseload with employment earnings	10.34%	13.55%	9.27%
Average monthly employment earnings per case	N/A	\$913	\$887

The following table shows the performance data for the last 8 years of service delivery. We can see that there has been a continued recovery of most metrics tracked. For example, the percentage of terminations to employment increased by 1.86% from 2021 to 26.80% in 2022. Additionally, the percentage of caseload exiting to employment recovered to 1.66% in 2022 which is higher than during the height of the pandemic in 2020. Average monthly earnings have exceeded pre-pandemic levels, reaching \$913 in 2022 compared to \$857 in 2019. Finally, the percentage of caseload with earnings is also up substantially since the pandemic, achieving 13.57% in 2022 compared to 11.07% in 2020.

Year	% of terminations to Employment	% of caseload exiting to employment	Avg. Monthly Earnings	Caseload % w/Earnings
2015	14.77%	1.14%	\$757	13.48%
2016	21.45%	1.90%	\$736	18.03%
2017	22.01%	1.83%	\$764	18.81%
2018	31.35%	2.51%	\$905	17.87%
2019	30.08%	2.03%	\$857	16.00%
2020	31.11%	1.62%	\$770	11.07%
2021	24.94%	1.49%	\$852	10.27%
2022	26.80%	1.66%	\$913	13.57%

As is evident in the data, there is a lingering effect of COVID-19 on industries in the area and the percentage of the caseload employed and with earnings. COVID-19 saw the percentage of our caseload with earnings fall dramatically from 16% in 2019 to only 11% in 2020. We have slowly rebounded from this but still see a lingering impact whereby we have fewer individuals on the caseload who are employed then we have had in the past.

As a unique geographic blend of urban and rural regions, transportation is a recurring barrier for clients. PC Connect has been operational since early 2020 though it does not offer regular enough travel to accommodate clients who are working shifts or abnormal hours. We continue to work with our partners across the County to improve transportation services for clients to remove the barrier that this presents. This continues to be a challenge for those on our caseload residing within the County and in St. Marys specifically, as they do not have access to regular, reliable transportation to get to and from employment if it is located outside of the small community in which they reside.

Enter specific strategies used for the transition to EST – below are some guiding questions:

1. Strategies used to complete Module 1 of the Common Assessment Tool and Action Plan for new clients and existing clients, including determining which clients remain in stability support activities rather than referred to Employment Ontario and reconfirming readiness for employment, including those with earnings – both employed and self-employed?

Locally, we take an individualized approach to completing module 1 of the CAT and for completing all action plans with our clients. We will leverage readiness assessment tools being created by the SSM as a strategy to ensure quality referrals, while also walking alongside clients and ensuring a strong relationship exists before embarking on Module 1 of the CAT. Action plans are created at

intake with all clients and check-ins are set on an average of every 3 months to ensure regular follow-up is completed and action plans are accurately updated. Using motivational interviewing techniques and a trauma-informed lens, staff will complete the CAT with clients once a relationship is established and the client does not identify any barriers that result in a complete deferral from activity. If no deferral is noted, the CAT is used in conjunction with local readiness tools, caseworker experience, and the client's self-declared readiness to make referrals to employment activities. Utilizing the stability supports guide and the integrated case management protocol provided by the SSM, we will make referrals based on readiness for employment activities rather than employment itself. Being ready to undertake a transition to employment activities is a big step and coupled with stability supports provided by the caseworker, regular case conferencing between EO and SA will ensure clients are well-supported with integrated case management that moves them toward success.

2. Provide a brief description of how referrals to Employment Ontario (EO) are determined?

Referrals to EO are currently determined through a combination of employment readiness assessments – utilizing the MCCSS assessment alongside a local employment readiness tool – caseworkers converse with clients to determine employment activity readiness and make referrals according to the results of the assessments. They review barriers to employment and participation in employment activities, set realistic goals that are attainable and measurable, and make referrals for those who are stable enough to meaningfully participate. We currently see approximately 12-15% of our caseload referred to EO at any given time and have regular case conferencing with our partners at EO to confirm clients are regularly attending and meeting their outcome plan requirements. As we transition into EST, we will be utilizing the SSM's Integrated Case Management protocol which will guide how referrals are made. Through a combination of the Common Assessment results, conversation with the client, and an SSM created tool we will be able to determine employment activity readiness and make referrals accordingly. Readiness will be defined as per the stability support guide provided by MCCSS and through the SSM's new readiness assessment tool. There will be a warm handoff between programs if a client is deemed employment activity-ready. If a referral has to be sent back, another case conference will ensue to ensure the client is not left behind or feeling unaccomplished. By utilizing the tools available alongside caseworker training and experience, EO referrals are expected to rise to closer to 20% over the course of 2023.

3. Explain the alternative case/change management used to serve ODSP Non-Disabled Adults, if any?

The local Ontario Works office and ODSP office meet to conduct regional joint meetings multiple times per year with a focus on ensuring there is a high level of communication and coordination between offices. All ODSP NDA's are referred to a singular OW caseworker who provides support and works closely with ODSP caseworkers to determine appropriate action plans for NDAs. Utilizing the same tools that are employed for OW clients, they review the stages of change and readiness for employment activities and case manage based on the results of these tools and assessments. There is a close working relationship with our ODSP partners and we plan to continue improving that relationship as we transition into EST. We will identify best practices & leverage experience of employment agencies who have experience supporting persons with disabilities or persons whose family members are directly impacted by disabilities. Through networks created by the SSM, we will continue to leverage our relationships in the broader sector to improve outcomes for NDAs and establish more effective case management techniques that improve outcomes of both OW and ODSP clients receiving support from our office.

4. A brief description on the strategies used for referrals to broader supports and services (i.e., to other programs - housing, childcare needs, etc.)

The City of Stratford takes an holistic approach to case planning for participants who are "job ready" and who are not "job ready" when applying for assistance. Building trusting, quality relationships with participants is vital to ensuring that outcome planning is completed adequately and meets the needs of each individual participant. By completing accurate, detailed outcome planning, we can address barriers that participants are facing and help move them along the employment spectrum. These quality relationships with participants link directly to our community partners and stakeholders by ensuring that our referrals to their programs are appropriate and supported by evidence. It is of the utmost importance for the Stratford CMSM to maintain and strengthen quality relationships with our community partners to best serve participants and leverage funding that exists across the community. To enhance strong linkages between Stratford CMSM and community partners, staff members participate in various local committees related to the effect of poverty on individuals. These include food security, housing and homelessness, mental health and addictions, and employment and training. Having a voice at these tables helps build strong partnerships, identify service gaps, and implement new programming and services that can enhance participants' lives.

Strong communication with partnering agencies is key to ensuring participants are following through with referrals. Proactive measures like booking the appointment with the referral agency during the outcome planning process, or doing monthly follow-ups to confirm participant participation, are important strategies to confirm the delivery partner is helping achieve employment outcomes for participants. In many cases, partner agencies maintain open lines of communication and situations that arise can be addressed quickly and effectively.

This is also being done inter-departmentally as the City of Stratford Social Services Department moves towards a human service integration model. We are co-located in our physical office location with our Housing, Homelessness, and Childcare team. As a result, each client who accesses services is offered an inter-departmental consent to ensure information sharing is permitted and available to better support clients accessing multiple services. Referrals are often made as warm hand-offs and OW caseworkers remain involved in case planning for clients receiving services from another division. For example, a client residing in emergency shelter will complete their primary Housing Action Plan with the outreach worker supporting them, but the OW caseworker will reinforce this plan in their OW action plan and will regularly participate in case conferencing to ensure wrap-around supports are in place. Regular case conferencing has become a staple of the work we do which involves the client in discussions about their situation with all relevant stakeholders at the table ensuring that services are aligned, gaps are addressed, and the client is supported in achieving positive life outcomes.

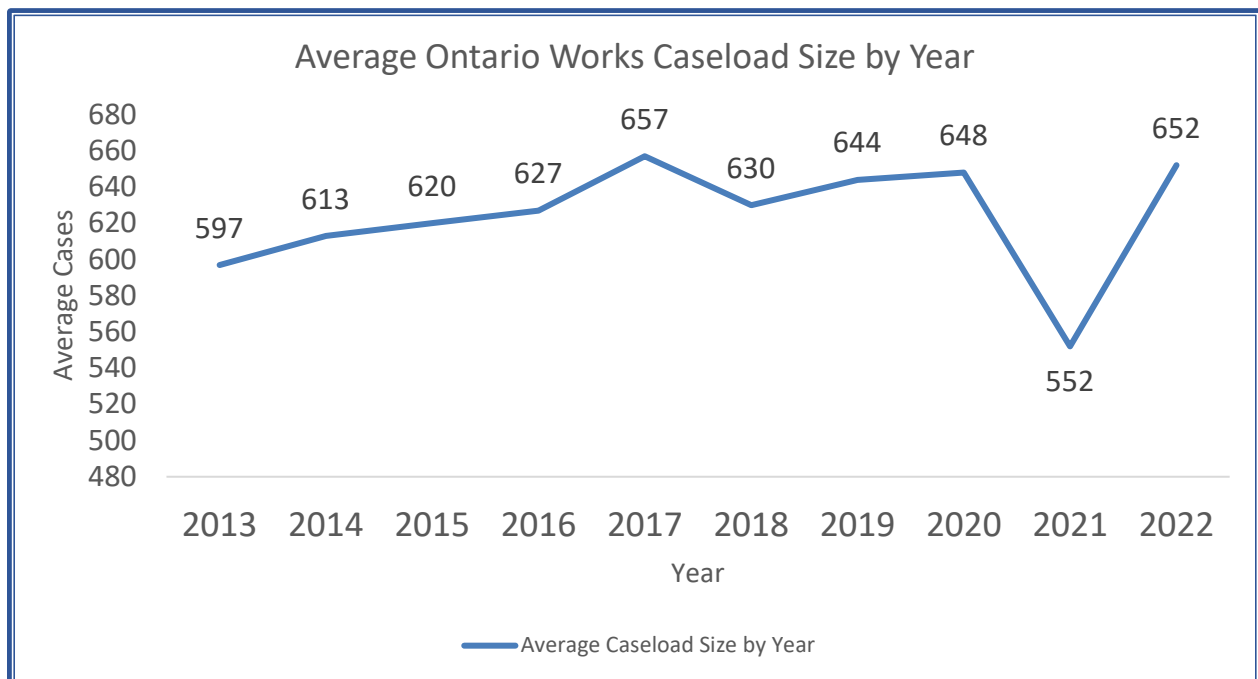
Furthermore, we regularly offer training and have agencies provide in-services to our staff regarding new programs in the community to ensure that caseworkers have the most up-to-date knowledge available to them.

Caseload

An overview of the current composition of the caseload and anticipated changes over the next two years (i.e., projected growth/decline, shifts in demographics, etc.).

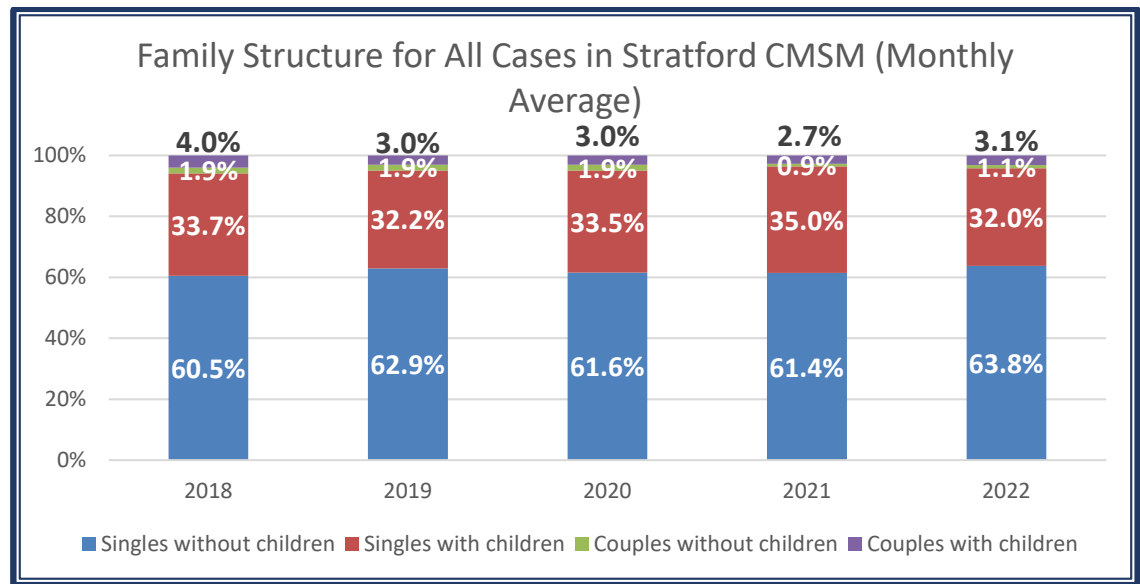
Note: Potential sources of caseload information include the Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance, Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports, Local Case Management System Reports, 2016 Statistics Canada/Census Data and other caseload information compiled locally by the delivery partner.

The chart below illustrates the Stratford CMSM's Ontario Works caseload. Overall, the caseload increased by an average of 18 benefit units from the year 2018 to 2020¹. In 2020, we began to see a decline in the latter half of the year from our year-high caseload of 702 in May due to the ongoing federal benefits. Clients who qualified, and some who did not, applied for the federal income benefits and lost contact with their OW caseworker resulting in file closures. New applications steadily declined as clients opted for the federal benefit programs. This led to a decrease in the average Ontario Works caseload to 552 in 2021. However, average caseloads have recovered, increasing to 652 in 2022, the highest average caseload since 2017. See average caseload data for the past 10 years in the chart below:



The chart below shows that the percentage of the caseload who are singles without children has grown over time to 63.8% in 2022. This poses significant challenges in finding affordable housing options for single-income participants. Conversely, the percentage of single parents with children has decreased to 32.0%, the percentage of couples without children has decreased to 1.1%, and the percentage of couples with children has also decreased to 3.1% in 2022.

¹ Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports, January 2023



The average months on assistance has reduced from 35 months in 2021 to 30 months as of 2022, though that does not reflect the complexity of the current caseload. There continues to be a majority of households lead by women, with 58% of the caseload having a female-gendered head of household. The predominant age range for the head of the family has remained in line with current years, with 32% of the overall caseload falling in the age range of 25-34 years old and a further 26% of the caseload representing the 35-44 years old range.

When reviewing the highest level of education completed, almost half, 45%, of the caseload has achieved a secondary school education. 17% percent have completed some form of post-secondary education, while just over a third, 39%, have not completed high school. Currently, over half of the caseload is participating in employment activity programming while the remainder are deferred from active participation for a variety of reasons, such as having non-school-aged children or having a medical reason that makes them unable to look for work or participate in employment activities.

Based on caseload forecast information provided by the Ministry in September 2022, the Stratford CMSM anticipates an increase from the current caseload, including temporary care assistance, of 732 to closer to 800 as of 2024. This increase, as we have seen in recent years, is largely attributed to singles who are of an employable age. Although our caseload represents many who are of an employable age, we are seeing added complexity in our clients, increased numbers of clients experiencing homelessness and more clients requiring intensive case management support. Based on our current homelessness By-Name List data (which is only able to capture source of income at program entry, so we anticipate this to be a slight underrepresentation), OW

² OW Caseload at a Glance, September 2022

recipients represent 43% of the households on the local by-name list. Of the households on the BNL, 63% are high acuity and 37% are mid-acuity, which helps demonstrate the complexity of clients that OW caseworkers are currently supporting.

Local Service Delivery Landscape and Community Partnerships

A description of how delivery partners have developed, maintained and plan to grow relationships with local community stakeholders that enhance access to services and support for clients and that may impact outcomes for participants. This includes (if details are unknown, the completion of this section can be held until the development of a service plan):

- **Current and future socioeconomic factors that may influence employment and employability**
- **Education and skills required to obtain available jobs**
- **Access to transportation, health, housing and other services**
- **Regional and local demographic trends (e.g., shifts in population size, age groups, and increases or decreases in immigration).**

Key Community Partnerships – to enhance stability supports services for clients include a list of stakeholders (e.g., SSM, community agencies, mental health providers, including other human social service providers).

The following data provides a high-level snapshot of the local demographic trends influencing employment across our geographic region. This report details the unemployment rate, labour force participation rates, business conditions in Perth County, and access to housing and local demographic trends. The City of Stratford maintains strong partnerships across the County with all the agencies listed on Page 20 and 21 and strives to improve upon services delivered using feedback and input from both our clients and service providers we work alongside.

It is of the utmost importance that the Stratford CMSM continues to collaborate and have strong partnerships at every level of the organization. Recognizing that, we are investing significant time networking locally, regionally, and provincially. Some of the steering groups and committees we participate in include:

- Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan Advisory Committee
- Partners in Resource for Employment in Perth
- Southwest Employment and Life Stabilization Table (SWELT)
- OMSSA Employment and Income Information Network
- OMSSA Housing and Homelessness Network

- OMSSA 47 Leads
- Southwest Region Business Processes and Technology Working Group
- Southwest Region Strategic Management Group
- Coordinated Access Leadership Group (Stratford, St Marys, and Perth County)
- North Perth Community Luncheon Committee
- Huron/Perth Situation Table

We continue to work closely, and are co-located, with Economic Development (investStratford) to look at our local labour market situation and affordable housing options. These partnerships allow us to stay abreast of current issues that impact our service delivery and enable us to implement best practices to improve participant services efficiently. By working with our community partners, we can improve employment outcomes for our participants. For example, case conferencing with Employment Ontario providers, referrals to counselling services, and the Community Legal Clinic have helped to mitigate complex situations.

The Homelessness Prevention Plan (HPP), Housing Stability Bank (HSB), and the Homemakers Program are administered by the Stratford CMSM. Risk of housing loss has become more prevalent which presents challenges for participants when finding and maintaining employment. Acting as administrators of the HSB program allows caseworkers to access financial resources to prevent eviction or re-house a client. Similarly, the Homemakers Program, which provides in-home, light cleaning services, helps participants maintain their residence so they can concentrate on improving their employment outcomes.

As we move forward with the human service integration model, we continue to look for partnerships that can help coordinate services to better serve our mutual participants.

Unemployment Rate

In 2022, the unemployment rate for Stratford-Bruce Peninsula was 3.7%³, an historic low and one of the lowest of all economic regions in Ontario. This is in stark contrast to 2020, when the unemployment rate was 7.3%. This is combined with job vacancy rates that are consistently higher than that of Ontario. Local economic development information suggests this points to a chronic shortage of workers in the Stratford-Bruce Economic Region.⁴

³ The Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Unemployment rate cannot be separated to reflect Stratford only.

⁴ Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Local Labour Market Plan, 2023

Business Conditions in Perth County

Economic Development recommends that a trend comparison of the number of businesses is not valuable at this time as the Postal Code Conversion File used has caused a change in the counts. As a result, some businesses have been assigned to an adjoining County because of the change, not because of a physical change in address. However, the majority of businesses continue to be owner operated (70.7%), followed by businesses with 1-4 employees (14.8%). Only 69 businesses in Perth County (public and private) have 100 or more employees.

The table below represents the top ten industries in Perth County from June 2022, and the total number of employers in each industry⁵:

Industry	Number of Employers
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	432
23 Construction	427
44-45 Retail Trade	371
81 Other services (except public administration)	262
62 Health care and social assistance	229
31-33 Manufacturing	200
54 Professional, scientific and technical services	188
7 Accommodation and food services	157
41 Wholesale trade	126
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	115

Access to Housing

An overall lack of housing stock has severely decreased both the affordability and availability of housing for individuals living on a lower and/or fixed income. Vacancy rates for the area indicate 1.8% for 1-bedroom units, 1.6% for 2-bedroom units and 4.0% for 3+ bedroom units. Overall, the vacancy rate for Stratford sits at 1.9%.⁶

Further concerns are brought forth regarding the affordability of rental units, as our local AMR scan has shown the following Average Market Rents for 2021⁷:

⁵ Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Local Labour Market Plan, 2023

⁶ CMHC Rental Market Survey; Ontario-Rental Market Statistics Summary by Metropolitan Areas, Census Agglomerations and Cities

⁷ 2021-2022 Request for Alternate Average Market Rents for Housing Allowance and Rent Supplement Programs, Business Case for the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and County of Perth

Unit Size	Approved Alternate AMRs based on 2021 Local Rental Scan
Bachelor	\$1,050
1 bedroom	\$1,253
2 bedroom	\$1,487
3 bedroom	\$1,894
4+ bedroom	\$1,894

This has a significant impact on access to housing for individuals living on a fixed income, such as those on Ontario Works. At this rate, a single recipient of Ontario Works is unable to afford an apartment without sharing that space or being in receipt of a portable housing benefit pushing more clients toward room rentals without security of tenancy.

Regional and Local Demographic Trends

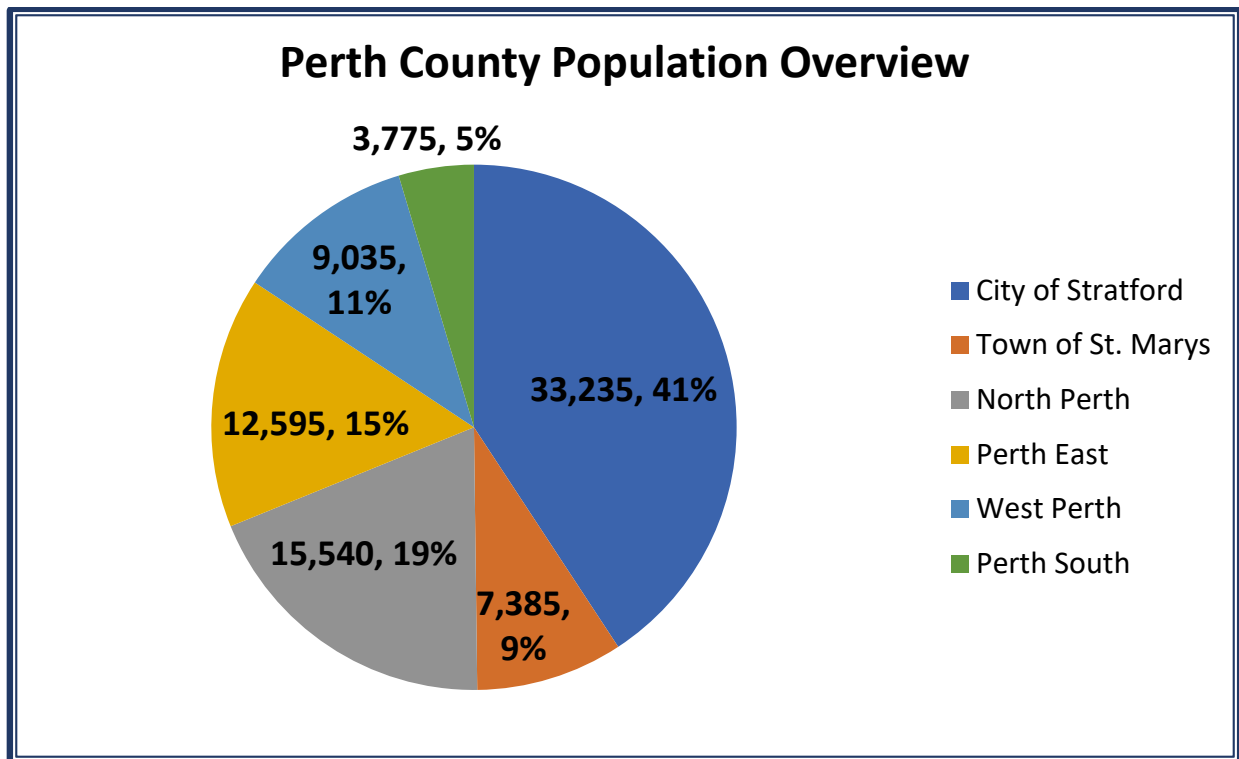
According to the Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Perth County attracted 17,169 new residents between 2015 and 2020. During the same period, Out-migrants totaled 13,447, resulting in a Net-migrant gain of 3,722 people. The 25-44 age cohort saw the greatest net increase of 1,201 people during that time, while the greatest net decrease came from the 18-24 age range, which saw a loss of 200 people over that time.⁸

Population Overview (Census 2021)

According to 2021 Statistics Canada Census data, Perth County's population was 81,565, which constitutes a 6% population increase since 2016. The largest population center in Perth County is the City of Stratford, which accounts for 41% of the total population.⁹

⁸ Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Local Labour Market Plan 2023

⁹ Statistics Canada, Census 2021 for Perth County Census Division



Labour Force Participation Rates (Census 2021)

Census data also showed that Perth County had a higher participation rate and employment rate than the Province of Ontario as a whole.¹⁰ The average unemployment rate for Perth County was 7.8% compared to 12.2% for Ontario according to the 2021 Census.

Rate	Perth County	Ontario
Participation Rate	66.3%	62.8%
Employment Rate	61.1%	55.1%
Unemployment Rate	7.8%	12.2%

Labour Force aged 15 years and over by occupation, National Occupational Classification Perth County (Census 2021)

Occupation	# Employed	% of Workforce
0 Legislative and senior management occupations	395	0.9
1 Business, finance and administration occupations	6,105	14.2%
2 Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	2,045	4.7%
3 Health Occupations	2,890	6.7%

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Census 2016 for Perth County Census Division

Occupation	# Employed	% of Workforce
4 Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	3,785	8.8%
5 Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	1,270	2.9%
6 Sales and service occupations	9,210	21.4%
7 Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	8,720	20.2%
8 Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	3,780	8.8%
9 Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	4,880	11.3%
Total	43,075	100%

Key Community Partners and Services

Basic Education

- Conestoga College (GED, ACE, Literacy)
- Avon Maitland District School Board (Grade 12, ESL)
- St. Marys Literacy (Level 1 & 2 basic Literacy)
- QUILL Learning Network

Employment Supports

- Conestoga College (Employment Ontario)
- Partners In Employment (Employment Ontario)
- Practice Firm (Employment Training)
- Contact North

Service System Manager (Employment)

- Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Service System Manager Consortium

Lead: Bruce County

Members: Huron County, Grey County, City of Stratford, Bruce County

Mental Health and Addiction Services

- Family Services Perth-Huron
- Local Psychologists (contracted)
- CMHA H-P Addictions and Mental Health Services
- Special Services Unit (ACT)

Life Skills

- Shelterlink/LOFY
- Salvation Army
- Family Services Perth-Huron
- The Local Community Food Centre

Self-Employment

- Stratford Perth Centre for Business

Community Placement

- Volunteers in Perth
- The Local Community Food Centre
- House of Blessing

Legal Services

- Huron Perth Community Legal Clinic
- Huron Perth Family Law Information Clinic

Housing

- City of Stratford Housing Division
- Ontario Works Intensive Case Management Housing Worker
- Social Services Outreach Worker
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Addictions Supportive Housing
- The Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP – Home For Good funded Housing First Program)

Child Care

- City of Stratford Early Years and Childcare Division
- Perth Care for Kids
- Anne Hathaway Childcare
- YMCA of Three Rivers Stratford Perth

Economic Development

- Invest Stratford
- St. Marys Economic Development
- North Perth Economic Development
- Perth County Economic Development

Health and Long-Term Care

- Mobile Crisis and Rapid Response Team
- HPHA Nurse Practitioner
- Perth County Community Paramedicine
- Family Health Clinic
- Huron Perth Public Health
- Homemakers Program

Section Two: Strategies and Outcomes

Performance

- The interim performance metrics are to be used by EST municipalities starting in 2023.
- For determining targets and tracking achievement, the Ministry has released a new interactive report which tracks Ontario Works Service Contract metrics for EST sites. The report provides interactive visualizations of relevant metrics to help establish targets for the 2023 service contract and to identify emerging trends over time.

The report currently features data for:

- Ontario Works clients and ODSP non-disabled adults with a completed Common Assessment Module 1
- Ontario Works clients and ODSP non-disabled adults with an active Action Plan and length of time to create an action plan
- Ontario Works clients and ODSP non-disabled adult referrals to Employment Ontario (EO) that were accepted (i.e., ready for employment) by Service System Managers
- Amount of time from Ontario Works intake, or referral to Ontario Works for ODSP non-disabled adults, to referral to employment services.

Target	Service Strategy
Percentage of Ontario Works adult caseload with a completed Common Assessment Module 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is set at 50% of the total caseload as not all clients will be open or willing to complete a CAT. • Takes into account SSM approach of having a readiness tool that is to be completed before completing the CAT. • This builds in time for relationship building so caseworkers are able to better utilize their skills and motivate clients to participate in employment activities. Allows for a buffer of 2-3 months between when AP and CAT are completed.
Percentage of Ontario Works adult caseload with an Action Plan created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is set at 80%. We plan to treat the AP like the current outcome plan and complete an AP with every adult member of Ontario Works files. • The 20% buffer allows for lags in timing (applies in December, AP created in

Target	Service Strategy
	<p>January) and deferred clients who will only have a "Started" outcome plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseworkers will complete AP's with all adult family members within 30 days of applying for assistance.
Proportion of Ontario Works clients (out of total Ontario Works caseload) that were accepted by the Service System Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is set at 8% to allow for a transition into the new model. As we will be working with more EO partners and may see a higher rate of returned referrals until the EST model is stable and eligibility requirements are clear to all participating agencies, this number is set to account for this. • This also allows for staggered referrals whereby we will be sending less clients initially due to our current transition plan.
Proportion of Non-Disabled Adults (out of total Non-Disabled Adults) that were accepted by Service System Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is set at 15% to represent the current number of NDA's working with EO. • We plan to build strong relationships and make appropriate referrals, but there may be returned referrals until the new EST model is stabilized.
Average days from intake into Ontario Works to referral to Employment Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is currently set at 120 days to allow time for new clients to explore self-directed job searching and caseworkers to build a relationship that makes completion of the CAT more seamless and supportive. • Using a strengths-based approach, caseworkers will make case-by-case determinations of who requires an immediate EO referral and who can complete self-directed job searching for the first 3-month action plan cycle.
Average days from referral to Ontario Works to referral to Employment Ontario for ODSP Non-Disabled Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is currently set at 120 days to allow time for new clients to explore self-directed job searching and caseworkers to build a relationship that makes completion of the CAT more seamless and supportive. • Using a strengths-based approach, caseworkers will make case-by-case determinations of who requires an immediate EO referral and who can

Target	Service Strategy
	complete self-directed job searching for the first 3 month action plan cycle.
Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) exiting to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This target is currently set at 1.4% which represents a slight decrease from 2022 actuals due to the shift to the EST model and the uncertainties that it brings.
Percentage of ODSP Non-Disabled Adults referred to Employment Ontario with new or increased earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This target is set at 10% as we have a low number of ODSP NDA's participating and need to set a realistic target of what we may be able to achieve in the 1st year under the new model.
Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exit the program for any reason and return within one year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This number is set at 80% due to the various reasons why a client may exit assistance, such as terminations for failure to provide information, terminations for failure to contact, terminations for not bringing in appropriate intake documentation, terminations for employment earnings, etc. These reasons often have individuals returning to assistance shortly after the file closes and will contribute to this number being higher than solely those who exit assistance for employment and return due to losing employment. The Stratford office will work diligently to ensure those who exit to employment, do so with all the necessary resources and supports in place to ensure long-term, sustainable employment, such as EHB/EEHB, referrals for additional benefits, housing supports in place, and regular follow-up from EO providers at key milestones.

Action Steps and Resources

- **Outline the key strategies that will be used to achieve 2023 targets. Describe how the proposed strategies will be monitored to determine progress towards the achievement of outcome targets.**

Overall Strategies:

- Monthly individual meetings with caseworkers to review transition plans and KPIs set in the transition plan.

- Weekly review of CRS 355 and 356 by management, followed by regular meetings with CW to address shortcomings in transition plan identified in the reports.
- Completing AP with all clients and completing the CAT as we get to know clients better. Stagger CAT to ensure checkpoints are spaced out and timelines can be successfully achieved.
- Integrated Case Management model in place, as per SSM, to ensure a high level of collaboration with EO. Furthermore, the local office has an EO partner physically on-site once per week to enhance quality of referrals in an effort to ensure they are accepted and clients are well-supported.
- We will work with ODSP to ensure all NDA's are referred promptly and with a clear idea of what to expect when engaged with OW supports. There will be ongoing, open communication between the OW NDA worker and ODSP CW's to ensure a high level of collaboration.
- Staff will utilize motivational interviewing techniques and other case management strategies to move referrals to EO within the 120-day target.
- We will leverage client self-determination and a strengths-based approach to ensure services put the client first, are individualized and meet the client where they are at.

Strategies being used with respect to exits to employment include:

- Ensuring caseworkers capture appropriate exit reasons in SAMS within the appropriate time frame.
- Ongoing case conference and follow-up with Employment Ontario providers on mutual participants and general employment outcomes.
- Promoting employment-related benefits and services to assist and inform participants about moving toward self-sufficiency (Earnings Exemptions, Extended Employment Health Benefit, Child Care Subsidy referrals) in both written and verbal formats.
- Maintaining contact with participants to ensure they inform us when employment is attained and are aware of the supports available.

Percentage of ODSP Non-Disabled Adults referred to Employment Ontario with new or increased earnings

- We will work closely with EO and with ODSP caseworkers to ensure compliance and movement toward increased earnings. We will work within the realm of what the clients are capable, leveraging a strengths-based approach, and build from there. The goal will be movement into employment before gradually building up to a full return to the workforce for all NDA's in receipt of assistance.

Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exit the program for any reason and return within one year

- We will work to ensure sustainable exits from assistance by empowering clients, providing all necessary resources and ensuring they are aware of where they can access what benefits (i.e. our additional benefit worker, EHB/EEHB).
- Through successful referrals to EO, we can also ensure regular follow-up is completed by the EO office after someone is employed. As the SSM, we expect that EO meets requirements of following up with clients and supporting them to maintain employment.
- By building sustainable, client-determined action plans that look at longevity, we will focus on reducing recidivism instead of the speed at which an individual can potentially exit assistance.

Section Three: Program Management

Overview of Learning Supports

- An overview of other strategic learning plans to train staff in the delivery of stability supports, to achieve program objectives and improve program outcomes (i.e., Supportive Approaches through Innovative Learning (SAIL)).

The Stratford CMSM continues its commitment to providing staff with relevant training opportunities that can enhance service delivery and avoid burnout by empowering staff to better serve participant needs. We are evaluating the renewed SAIL Program and are working through the logistics of what delivery of this program would look like in the local office.

Some professional development training opportunities provided to staff include:

- Core legislative training and local office policies for new hires
- In-Services from Community Providers (e.g. QUILL Learning Network, Family Services Perth-Huron, CMHA Huron-Perth, DSO SWR)
- Motivational Interviewing
- OMSSA Training – i.e. Making Difficult Conversations Easier, Legislation training, etc.
- Trauma Informed Care
- safeTALK
- Crisis Intervention and De-escalation
- First-aid
- Mental Health First-Aid

We also encourage staff to submit requests for specific training that will enhance their abilities and encourage positive personal growth. Once they have completed a training

session, they are asked to present the information they learned to their peers to share knowledge and best practices.

We continue to work closely with the Service System Manager and partner municipalities in our economic region with plans to deliver training that is locally specific and responsive to the needs in our region. This will also ensure service delivery across the region meets the highest level of service standards and is consistent for OW clients moving across the economic region.

Strategy to Deliver French Language Services

- A strategy to ensure active delivery of French Language Services within designated communities.

We do not see a large French speaking population in Perth County, but we do have one caseworker fluent in French and print off applications in French when required. We are actively engaged with the YMCA Settlement Services to assist any newcomers to the area, including those who may move from French-speaking regions.

Business Practices

- A description of how any changes, if required, will be made to business practices to meet standards for performance to comply with program policy (e.g., developing local policies to support program delivery).

We are constantly reviewing business practices locally and have instituted several policies that align us with the Provincial standards including Exception Based Income Reporting, Discretionary Benefits, Records Retention, and Verification Standards. We implement processes as they are needed to address ongoing issues and ensure we look at best practices from across the province when implementing processes. Participation in the Business Process and Technology working group (BPT) as well as the Southwest Employment Life Stabilization Table (SWELT) allows us to share best practices amongst CMSMs in West Region 1 and 2, and implement effective, proven strategies that are working in other communities.

Centralized Intake was onboarded on June 21, 2021, and our office went live with Electronic Document Management on November 8, 2021. Centralized Intake continues to be an iterative process that will reduce administrative workload once it is fully operational. Electronic Document Management has allowed for us to modernize our file management processes and move away from paper files thus improving efficiencies in our office related to the submission and retention of documents. By allowing the electronic submission of information, we are better able to support our rural residents who would otherwise have to travel or mail documents into our Stratford office.

The Health and Safety Manual for Social Services was updated for staff. The updated manual focuses on protecting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of staff when interacting with participants. We are also in the process of completing a review of all local policies and processes, updating, and modernizing them to reflect the changing landscape of Ontario Works service delivery.

Summary

Management and staff of the City of Stratford Ontario Works Division are committed to providing quality, holistic services to all Ontario Works participants.

The Ontario Works Division will continue to work with community partners to identify gaps and find solutions through the enhancement of existing services or the development of new programming. This work will be guided, at all times, by our local Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan community priorities, ensuring that we are aligned with our community goals and the associated objectives.

The Stratford CMSM will also continue to support and work diligently with the Province on any forthcoming projects or mandates. The City of Stratford Ontario Works Business Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Ministry Guidelines, Ontario Works Policy Directives, and Memorandums. The 2023 Business Plan is respectfully submitted to the South West Regional Office of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for approval.

Good morning members of the Social Services Subcommittee,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to address you today on behalf of EPIC, The Local Community Food Centre's advocacy working group. As you may know, we held a Disability Justice Forum on February 23rd at which representatives at all 3 levels of government including Stratford Mayor, Martin Ritsma, came together with disability advocates to talk about how we can come together to end disability poverty in our community! We are here to advocate for one of the solutions discussed that the municipal government can implement to help make that ambitious dream a reality. We are asking the City of Stratford to make free public transportation passes available to all recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW). We believe that this initiative aligns with the principles of social justice by which EPIC and The Local stand and has the potential to greatly improve the lives of individuals facing disabilities and income barriers in our community.

To support our proposal, we conducted a survey among 75 community members, and the results were quite enlightening. According to our findings, 68% of respondents stated that they would utilize public transit more frequently if it were more affordable. This demonstrates a clear desire and need for accessible transportation options among our residents.

Additionally, 80% of respondents expressed that they would use public transit more frequently to access grocery stores, farmer's markets, food banks, and community meals. It is crucial to emphasize the importance of affordable transportation when it comes to meeting basic needs, especially in terms of accessing sufficient, safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food, something we, at EPIC and The Local, consider a basic human right. By providing free public transportation passes, we can ensure that individuals facing income barriers have increased opportunities and dignified options to nourish themselves and their families, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Furthermore, our survey revealed that 63% of participants believe that improved access to public transit would decrease their sense of isolation. This directly impacts quality of life and mental health, as 67% reported that it would have a positive effect on their mental well-being, and 65% believed it would foster a greater sense of belonging. We should consider the impact on our local police

department as well. By addressing these social determinants of health, such as isolation and mental well-being, we have the potential to reduce the number of mental health calls received by our police, alleviating pressure on their resources and allowing them to focus on other areas of public safety.

It is important to note that the voices driving this advocacy effort come directly from those with lived experiences. Among our survey participants, 36% are recipients of ODSP or OW, and 32% self-identify as low-income. By listening to their needs and amplifying their voices, we are working towards creating a more inclusive and equitable community.

Now, let's address the economic aspect of this proposal. It is reasonable to question how such a program could be sustainable for the city. However, we argue that the cost to the city would be minimal, if not nonexistent. Buses often run with empty seats during off-peak hours, meaning that providing free transportation passes to individuals who currently face barriers would not result in additional costs for the city. By filling those empty seats, we can ensure that public transportation remains efficient and accessible for all residents.

Moreover, increasing access to public transportation has the potential to yield cost savings in other areas. As mentioned earlier, addressing social determinants of health, such as isolation and mental well-being, can lead to a reduction in mental health-related police calls and interventions. This not only benefits the individuals directly affected but also eases the strain on our police resources. Additionally, when individuals have increased access to community events, farmers' markets, and other activities facilitated by public transportation, they are more likely to lead healthier lifestyles. This, in turn, can lead to a healthier community and potentially reduce the burden on our healthcare system.

And we shouldn't overlook the environmental aspect of this proposal.

Encouraging the use of public transportation for residents of all income levels as an alternative to personal vehicles aligns with our commitment as a community to sustainability. By increasing the accessibility and affordability of public transit, we can reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicles on our roads, decreasing traffic congestion and carbon emissions. This not only benefits our environment but also contributes to the overall well-being of our community.

As Canadian urban designer and 8 80 Cities founder, Gil Penalosa, once said, “The sign of an advanced city is not when the poor have their own cars, but it is when the rich use public transportation.”

So to further support our proposal, we would like to draw upon evidence from reputable organizations such as the Tamarack Institute and 8 80 Cities. These organizations have conducted studies that provide compelling arguments from a social justice lens for making public transportation as freely available as possible to ALL residents, but in particular, those who are marginalized, those with disabilities and, those with income barriers.

According to the Tamarack Institute, accessible and affordable transportation is a key factor in reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. In their research, they found that individuals facing income barriers often experience limited access to transportation options, leading to reduced employment opportunities, restricted access to essential services, and increased isolation. By providing free public transportation passes to ODSP and OW recipients, we can break down these barriers, enabling individuals to access employment, education, healthcare, and social activities, thereby improving their overall well-being and potentially even breaking the cycle of poverty that traps far too many of our neighbours.

Similarly, 8 80 Cities, a nonprofit organization focused on creating vibrant and inclusive communities, has highlighted the importance of accessible transportation in promoting social equity. Their research shows that affordable and reliable public transportation options can increase social connectivity, enhance community engagement, and foster a sense of belonging among residents.

Moreover, studies conducted by these organizations and others have demonstrated the positive impact of accessible transportation on mental health and overall quality of life. The Tamarack Institute's research has shown that individuals with limited transportation options often experience higher levels of stress, social isolation, and mental health challenges. By providing free public transportation passes, we can enhance mental well-being, reduce feelings of isolation, and promote a greater sense of belonging among vulnerable populations in our community. This not only improves an individual's quality of life but also contributes to the overall social fabric of our city.

Coming back to the economic feasibility of this initiative, studies by organizations like 80 Cities have indicated that investments in public transportation can yield significant economic returns. Accessible and affordable transportation options can improve access to job opportunities, increase workforce participation, and stimulate local economies. By removing financial barriers through the provision of free public transportation passes, we can empower ODSP and OW recipients to access employment and education, contributing to their economic stability and reducing reliance on social assistance programs in the long run.

In conclusion, by making free public transportation passes available to all ODSP and OW recipients, we can address issues of social justice, improve access to food and essential services, enhance quality of life, reduce isolation, and promote mental and physical well-being for some of our most marginalized and vulnerable residents. This initiative has the potential to generate economic benefits by maximizing existing resources, reducing pressure on our police and healthcare systems, and fostering a healthier community. Furthermore, by encouraging the use of public transportation as an alternative to personal vehicles, we can contribute to environmental sustainability.

We have submitted the full results of our survey along with the many comments from community members who have strong views about the weekend On Demand service that you might like to have a look at and also an expression of interest for subsidized transportation from low-income seniors and families with children who use the busses to get to school.

We kindly request that you carefully consider our proposal and take into account the survey results and arguments presented today. Together, we can make Stratford a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable city for all residents.

Thank you for your time and attention.