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Coming up at 1 pm, it's this month's Social Services Committee meeting at Wellington County. This is what's on the agenda:



MEETING PREVIEW: County Social Services Meeting for June 14, 2023

This month at Wellington County's Social Services Committee, there's going to be a lot of information. It's going to have financial information, planning information, information ...

<https://guelphpolitico.ca/2023/06/09/meeting-preview-county-social-services-meeting-fo...>

Chair Anderson has called the meeting to order.

No Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

First up, Financial Statements and Variance Projections as of May 31, 2023. In summary:

Service	Projected Savings / (Overage)	County	City	Comments
Ontario Works	\$490,000	\$120,000	\$370,000	Staffing vacancies and gapping; small savings in office supplies, discretionary benefit costs have attributed to these savings.
Children's Early Years	-	-	-	All funding is planned to be allocated to best serve the community
Social Housing	(\$2,400,000)	(\$280,000)	(\$2,120,000)	Pressure in Homelessness Prevention (\$1.7 million) and higher costs to maintain and operate social housing units.
Affordable Housing	-	-	-	Tracking close to budget. Variances are typically offset by reserve transfers.
Total Social Services	(\$1,910,000)	(\$160,000)	(\$1,750,000)	

While there have been savings in Ontario Works and childcare, it's the housing service file that weighs heavily. Pressure in the homelessness prevention program, especially \$1.5 million in providing emergency shelter is the biggest one.

Nearly \$400k to help the people made homeless by the fire on upper Wyndham has also cost, and the other driver is maintenance and repairs, which is a result of people having for longer term stays in the units.

Mayor Guthrie asks about projected \$2.1 million overrun to the City of Guelph, has there ever been anything like this? Shauna Calder, Manager of Finance, says not in her experience

Guthrie: Any mitigation?

Calder: She says they will look at where they can mitigate costs, but they'll have a better picture in the fall. There are assumptions that these trends might continue. County side could be covered by reserves, could be same for City.

Guthrie asks if there's been a trend building. Calder says now, there have been positive variances, but the pandemic has increased costs across the board.

Guthrie asks about how long the fire victims have been taken care of by the county. Luisa Artuso, Social Services Administrator, notes that it's been since March. They have managed to help some people find new accommodations, but others are still getting help.

Artuso notes that the people were paying \$1,200-\$1,800 for rent, and finding something in the same price range is obviously difficult. Also, the cost of local hotels is higher than in recent years.

Warden Linton asks about the pressure on rental arrears. Dir. Housing Poste says that they're paying out a lot in this line, which is also the same line that covers emergency shelters. He notes that it's better to help people avoid eviction than to let it happen & add to problem.

Artuso adds that the budget for rental arrears has been tapped and it's only mid-June.

Cllr Bulmer asks about the post-move out costs. Poste says that some ppl are moving out and they've been there for a while so it's regular wear & tear, but if they do have to bring someone to the Landlord Tenant Board that's a months/years process, which can have impact on rental

Cllr Davidson asks if this over and above the costs they accounted for. Calder said they factored in some extra costs for maintenance, but this is over and above. They're looking at \$900k over budget on the repairs and maintenance.

That's more damage, higher cost of labour, higher cost of materials and higher cost of abatement. They all contribute.

Cllr Duncan asks what to do in the case of people who purposefully caused damage. Poste says it can follow people through a province-wide arrears database, but in a lot of cases that doesn't happen until a new tenancy has started. It would affect them on later transfers.

Motion to accept the report for information approved unanimously.

Next, a delegation from Ward 1 Cllr Caton. She wants to talk about Bill C-22 and wants the Social Services committee to send a letter to urge its passing with the senate changes. It's actually being debated as we speak.

Here's the bill. Caton notes that the senate amendments close the loophole that allows private insurance to clawback benefits based on the increase.



She notes that accessibility to housing, and devices used to create a healthier space for people with environmental sensitivity (ie air purifiers) are not covered by conventional insurance.

Bulmer, who's the chair of the County's Accessibility Advisor Committee, seconds Caton's comments noting that they pay members of their AAC and that honorarium was clawed back and they lost people who couldn't afford to take part.

Bulmer adds that the Assisted Devices Program is a barrier and found it dehumanising from his own personal experience.

Anderson asks about the difference between doing this now and September. Caton says that she heard from Guelph MP Longfield that he believed the House would extend the session until this was passed. So there's a hope that is immediate.

Guthrie offers to table a motion: That the Social Services committee endorse a letter from the Warden to support the passing and implementation of Bill C-22, and that it be forwarded to the Mayor of Guelph for consideration. Plus cc to local MPs.

Davidson seconds and Caton asks for an amendment to explicitly add the senate amendments, which guard against clawbacks. Guthrie says that's a friendly amendment.

Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works, notes that this was passed through all party support before going to the senate for substantive amendments and is now back in the house. It has a one year implementation period and is very high level about its application to benefits.

Beumer notes that there's still a year before we full understand how the benefits will apply even after it's passed.

The motion passes unanimously.

Next, Overview of Ontario Works Department. Beumer is presenting this one.

For the last couple of meetings, each department covered by social services has been providing some orientation about their operation and this week it's Ontario Works turn.

Now the County does not fund Ontario Works, but they are the service provider. There are offices in downtown Guelph and in Fergus, plus they provide an agent to meet people in Mount Forest on Thursdays.

Informative chart:

Understanding Poverty and Low-Income Thresholds	
Approximate Income Thresholds 4-person Family in Guelph Census Metropolitan Area (2021 Census)	
Average Income	\$140,200
Median Income	\$125,000
Living Wage (2 adults full time)	\$69,500
Minimum Wage (2 adults full time)	\$59,520
Low Income Measure	> \$62,500
Official Poverty Line (Market Basket Measure)	> \$49,290
Low Income Cut-Off	> \$35,274
Ontario Works	\$15,000

Beumer notes that people taking Ontario Works are below all the established poverty lines. It's suppose to be there as a stop gap as people find new employment or until they segue to a different assistance program.

By the month, and my the applicant:

- Basic needs and shelter portion
- Amounts vary based on family size and individual circumstances

Family Type	Total Monthly Benefit (Max.)
Single Person	\$733
Couple with 2 Dependents	\$1250
Single Parent with 2 Dependents	\$1057
Couple with 4 Dependents	\$1338

People on OW may also be offered additional benefits: Ontario Drug Benefit Card

Emergency Dental Care

Basic vision care

Other health-related costs

Extended health benefits

Special Diet Allowance

Employment Benefits

Housing Stability Programme

Beumer notes that community partnerships are also important to OW's work since people in the program also access other supports like food insecurity programs.

The OW office does more than manage people's support payments, they also offer help looking for work, connecting ppl w/ employer thru incentives or even look at new education opportunities. They also look at transport options like Ride Well, or the lending of hotspots, laptops.

On Settlement Services, which helps new immigrants to the County, but it's paid for by the Federal Ministry of Immigration. It's based in Fergus, but they do work through other agencies here in Guelph. 227 new immigrants helped last year.

Settlement Services – Wellington County Focused

- Settlement workers provide services across the County and at the Fergus Social Services office
- Assist newcomers to Canada to access community services and adjust to life in their new communities
- Services available to Permanent Residents, Convention Refugees and Live-in Caregivers
- Team assisted 227 new clients and hosted 69 group sessions in 2022

The future:

Future Directions

- Employment Services Transformation
 - SSM to take over administration of employment supports by January 2024
- Social Assistance Modernization
 - Centralized intake, risk-based eligibility determination, automatic granting, paperless strategy, enhanced online tools
- Anticipated Caseload Growth
 - Forecasted to grow by 8.3% to a monthly average of 2,064 cases by early 2024
- Financial Pressures for Clients
 - Significant gap between social assistance rates and poverty line and rapidly increasing market rents making it increasingly difficult for OW recipients to find and maintain housing and meet basic needs



Guthrie asks if there's opportunity for staff to work outside the office. Beumer says that staff do have that flexibility to do outreach, meeting people at Royal City Mission or at a coffee shop. It's routine.

Davidson asks about how they can help people directly as representatives while out in the community. Beumer notes they should bring these people to the attention of social services, perhaps this person is on assistance and needs more support, or they can walk thru application.

Artuso adds that they're working on adding a 1-800 number so that people can be connected to the help centre who can then direct the caller to the help that they need. Also, another office is being added in the northern part of the county.

Bulmer asks about putting a dollar figure on the benefits, which would bring the total income up to about \$18,000 for a family of 4. Beaumer says that's not far off & there are tight restrictions benefits. Bulmer says he wants to fight the appearance ppl on OW are living large.

Davidson asks if housing support is on top of OW. Beaumer says most clients are in the private market; only 11 per cent is in social housing. Ppl in rent-geared-to-income are set to fixed scales that haven't changed in years. Many rent supplements going to ppl on OW.

Anderson says that he's noted that church groups and service clubs are helping new immigrants, but they're not always being registered in the County's immigration program. Wants to get that awareness out.

Vote to receive the presentation for information passes unanimously.

Next: Tender Award – Window and Door Replacement at 232 Delhi Street.

The lowest bidder had to be excluded because the door they offered didn't meet the specs, so it's going to Mapleton Exteriors Ltd., Drayton. Motion passes unanimously.

COMPANY NAME	TOTAL AMOUNT
B.E. Construction Ltd., Etobicoke	*\$315,050.00
Mapleton Exteriors Ltd., Drayton	\$330,610.21
JASS Construction, Mississauga	\$332,000.00
ONIT Construction Inc., Brampton	\$405,000.00
Alpeza General Contracting Inc., Mississauga	\$520,250.00
Brook Restoration Ltd., Toronto	\$690,000.00

Next, 2023 Ontario Works Service Plan Addendum and Agreement. Beaumer presents this one, it's about the agreement with Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, who fund OW, and outlines the budgeting and goals for the program as administered locally.

Recommendation to receive the report as info passes unanimously.

Next, 2019-2023 Ontario Works Caseload Profile. Beaumer again. He says this is an annual exercise to give people a profile of whose getting assistance and what trends they're seeing.

Key trends:

- the case loads are increasing and approaching pre-pandemic level
- seeing more reliance, even as a smaller than average portion of the pop are using it.
- fewer younger people using program plus year-over-year decline in # of people under 25.

The report also covers the use of emergency benefits, which are also used to help stabilise someone's housing situation, but they can only issue it once every six months using OW guidelines.

Vote to receive report for info passes unanimously.

Next, Modernization and Agreement Renewal of Dental Benefits Administration. This report is about the modernisation of the service, especially the removal of the dental card with every monthly statement.

The card lists all people in that house who have access to emergency benefits, moving to an electronic benefit portal. This why they need to amend the agreement. There's also a request to fund some one-time costs to set it up.

This will also give people the option to go paperless with their benefits.

Recommendation:

That the report, Modernization and Agreement Renewal of Dental Benefits Administration be received for information; and

That the Warden and County Clerk be authorized to enter into an agreement with Accertaclaim Servcorp Inc. for the administration of Ontario Works adult emergency dental services subject to review by the County Solicitor.

Davidson asks if the costs are offset. Beumer says that if even 10% sign up to go paperless the cost of administration will be covered by the savings from mailing out the paper statements.

The motion is carried.

Next, 2022 Housing and Homelessness Plan Annual Report. Poste says this represents the third of five yearly updates to the County's homelessness plan. They have to submit the report by June 30 to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

This is the report here: <https://pub-wellington.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=7737>

Bulmer asks about how the increasing gap is affecting the plan, there's a bulge coming and this assumes a steady progression. Poste says this is a five-year cycle and are now working on the next cycle. Notes that rent supplements hit hardest b/c of market forces.

Cllr O'Neill asks how close Grace Gardens is to completion. Poste say they have a date in mind but there's been no formal announcement yet. It's in the short-term. Poste adds he was inside Shelldale recently, and they're now doing drywall another other things.

Recommendation to receive passes unanimously.

Next, Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) Funding Update. The report provides high level details about the projects received, but the Ongov has not yet confirmed funding so staff are asking for delegated authority to continue their review in the summer.

Recommendation:

That the report #HS-23-07 2022 COCHI Funding Update be received for information; and

That delegated authority be provided to the CAO and the Social Services Administrator, subject to the approval of the County Solicitor for approving commitments made by the County of Wellington under the 2023 Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative programme; and

That, based on the commitments made under delegated authority, that Housing staff complete all necessary Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing reporting for the projects and draft and execute all necessary agreements related to the funding.

Motion approve unanimously.

Next, 2023 Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care System Update. Mandy Koroniak, Director of Children's Early Years Division, presents. This report provides the confirmation of funding for new spaces thru to 2026.

*childcare spaces.

Staff will be holding info session for current licensed childcare holders and are also open to holding them for municipalities.

O'Neill asks about getting to the new community-based spaces in 2024, can we get there? Koroniak said that there will be some difficulty getting to some of these numbers given the reaction so far, but they keep looking at ways to meet the targets.

Artuso notes that it's going to be hard to get to 1,700 if there is no workforce to support that, specifically early childhood educator. The ONgov has sent \$19 per hour as the base wage, and she says that the ministry has to do better if they want to attract ECEs.

Anderson asks about the base pay Artuso would suggest. She says \$30/hour. She also notes that ECEs have to go through a whole monitoring system and join the college, which is \$150/year and have to make reports to stay in good standing.

Anderson suggests that regional governments should delegate to the Province, otherwise nothing will change.

Motion to receive for information approved.

Nothing under closed session.

Guthrie asks to make comment about the homelessness plan, which he was not in the room for when it was discussed. He says he wanted to highlight that the MMAH noted that Wellington has a plan to actively reduce homelessness, and wants to recognise staff's efforts.

This meeting is over!



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