



Community and Health Services
Office of the Commissioner

Memorandum

TO: Members of Council

FROM: Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: January 22, 2015

RE: **Initial Impact of the Social Assistance Management System Implementation**

The Social Assistance Management System was launched by the provincial government on November 12, 2014 across Ontario; a memorandum sent to Councillors prior to implementation is attached for reference (*Social Assistance Management System Implementation Update and One-Time Provincial Relief Funding, September 4, 2014*). The purpose of this memorandum is to inform Council of the initial impact of implementation on Ontario generally and York Region in particular.

The Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) is a new case management tool for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is responsible for managing the system and municipal use is mandatory. York Region's approximate caseload, as of October 2014, was 5,590 that includes 10,000 individuals (including all household members such as spouses and children).

Since implementation there have been complex system issues that have affected service delivery

Challenges that are common with any complex systems roll-out were expected. While the Region had contingency plans in place to mitigate initial service slowdowns, impact on client services and potential technical problems, the number and complexity of system issues being encountered and the duration of these issues are significant and were unforeseen by the Province.

Issues are ongoing, very complex and beyond the scope of normal business contingency planning. As of January 16, 2015 there were 17,297 issues logged across the Province and 48 percent resolved.

Staff have been able to mitigate impacts on Ontario Works clients so far

York Region has a solid contingency plan, which includes extensive internal staff training, manual processes, redeployment, full utilization of all trained casual staff, and ongoing client communication. For example, to mitigate increased call volume and maintain customer service some staff were redeployed to answer client calls and resolve enquiries. To mitigate cheque errors, staff have been manually verifying client payments and cheques for accuracy prior to release. Also, Corporate IT, Corporate Finance, and Community and Health Services have collaborated to develop workarounds. Despite this, clients and potential clients are experiencing service wait times that are two to six times longer.

York Region's resources and capacity to work without a stable system is diminishing but is not unique to York Region. The focus of limited resources has been on ensuring client service and preventing resident hardship. The dedication of staff has been key to managing resident relations and maintaining basic service and has been possible despite the substantial stress and impact to staff themselves.

The extent of the impact of the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System is being assessed

The expectation is that it will take most of 2015 to stabilize the Social Assistance Management System and some period of time after that to normalize. The focus remains on finding ways to keep serving clients while the Province is stabilizing the system. Strategies are being set in place to contain as many system-generated errors as possible. However, considerable additional administrative support will be needed to enter and clean-up corrupted data in the system, retrain staff and ensure financial integrity once the system is fully stabilized. The Province has provided some leniency in regard to timelines to meet administrative and reporting requirements but these relaxed requirements will be very short-term.

The impact on human resources, accuracy of information, ability to meet provincial reporting requirements, ability to perform financial audits; and the financial costs to the Region due to implementation of SAMS are currently being assessed with the involvement of Corporate branches across the Region. There are short- and long-term human resource, financial, technological and legal implications. The Province has provided York Region with \$222,000 to mitigate costs, and has indicated that no other funding will be made available. Discussions with other municipalities commonly reflect an intention to advocate for more funding to manage short- and longer-term impacts.

Regional staff are working closely with the Province and municipal partners to coordinate activities to fix errors within the new system. There have been regular teleconferences with the Province to troubleshoot problems, identifying work-around solutions and doing everything feasible to mitigate impact on clients. The Ontario

Municipal Social Services Association has recently created a Municipal/Provincial Technical Team to further support fixes.

A report to Council will be provided when a fuller assessment has been completed, as well as a better sense of the extent of the impact on program integrity and the Province's plans to address broader issues is known.

Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Attachment (1)

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Community and Health Services Department
Office of the Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Committee of the Whole

FROM: Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: September 4, 2014

RE: Social Assistance Management System Implementation Update and One-Time Provincial Relief Funding

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform Committee that the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System will proceed during the period of November 6 to 11, 2014, and to update Committee on the possible impact of this province-wide initiative.

The Province has announced the new implementation timeframe for the Social Assistance Management System

The new database that will replace the current social assistance system is a case management tool for Ontario Works clients that was originally targeted for implementation in November 2013. Due to the need for further planning and revisions to the technology, the launch was postponed and will now occur in November 2014.

One-time provincial funding for the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System will offset some implementation and planning costs

The Province originally maintained that no funding would be provided to municipalities for the implementation of the new technology. However, due to the additional financial impact of the delays, the Province is allocating \$5 million in one-time funding to municipal service managers.

York Region's total allocation is \$111,200. This will offset some computer lease costs and temporary resources.

Plans are in place to mitigate the impact of service slow downs

Between Thursday, November 6, 2014 to Tuesday, November 11, 2014, neither the current or the new technology will be available while the Province migrates the information from the current database to the new one. There may be service slowdowns initially and unforeseen

technology problems due to the transition between databases. Contingency plans are being put in place to mitigate the impact of technological disruptions on client service. Clients will not be financially impacted by the changeover.

Regional staff will continue to work closely with the Province to coordinate activities to prepare for implementation, including communications, training, technology, operations and business practice changes. As well, Regional staff will also work with the Province after implementation to identify and resolve issues that arise.

Inquiries should be directed to Maria Smith, Manager, Social Assistance and Lead SSSMP Project at maria.smith@york.ca or 905-895-5166 Extension 72206.

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Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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