



Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: March 26, 2024

Submitted by: Cindy Howard, General Manager, Finance and Community Services

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Subject: Social Services Update – March 2024

BACKGROUND:

Social Services includes Ontario Works, Children's Services and Early Years and Homelessness Prevention. The City of London is the CMSM for Middlesex London, however through contracted service agreements the County of Middlesex is responsible for service delivery in the County for Ontario Works, Child Care and Early Years and Homelessness Prevention. Ontario Works (OW) is a mandatory program that provides legislated income and employment supports to eligible participants. Individuals receiving financial assistance through Ontario Works participate in a wide range of stability supports and employment assistance activities which focuses on helping people prepare for and find work in order to become financially independent.

Social Services staff works collaboratively to ensure seamless services are provided to individuals and families throughout Middlesex County. The Ontario Works Department is committed to ensuring that households in need have access to stability, financial, community and employment supports they need. Child Care and Early Years includes the planning and funding of licensed child care programs; administering financial assistance for eligible families through fee subsidy; allocating additional resources to families; programs that provide care to children with special needs and oversight of EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) aims to prevent and end homelessness by improving access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing and homelessness services for people experiencing homelessness and for people at risk of homelessness.

ANALYSIS:

General:

Over the past few years, there has been a number of Provincial program and service changes that have affected the Social Services department. Throughout the changes, administration has ensured that we continued to provide quality services to the residents of Middlesex County. As we continue to implement the changes mandated by the province, the Social Services department will continue to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

Ontario Works:

The Ontario Works department provides stability, financial, community and employment supports to households who are eligible for Ontario Works (OW), Emergency Assistance, Temporary Care and or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

The province's renewed operating model for social assistance (Recovery and Renewal Vision, Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation) continues to be rolled out. Changes include Centralized Intake, Electronic Document Management, and Employment Services Transformation.

In November 2022, Phase 6 of the Centralized Intake (CI) process was implemented in Middlesex County. The intent of the new process was for the Intake Benefit Administration Unit (IBAU) to complete the intake process, reducing the administrative burden on the OW Case Assistant and Case Worker. Throughout this process there have been many challenges for both clients and OW staff. Prior to the start of the Centralized Intake process, clients' applications were being processed within four (4) business days. Once the Centralized Intake process started, the processing time has been as long as two weeks. The OW department continued to work with the IBAU to reduce the wait time. The impact of this means that the Social Service department is still experiencing the administrative workload.

The Social Services Department has fully moved to Electronic Document Management (EDM). As a result, any new applications and/or information that are received through the IBAU or our clients will be digitized. This reduces the number of files that must be maintained by the County. Any remaining files will be destroyed as per the record retentions standards, no new files will be created.

In October 2023, Phase 3 of the Employment Services Transformation (EST) process was implemented in Middlesex County. The intent of this new process is to streamline employment supports for OW and ODSP in partnership with Employment Ontario (EO) providers in the London Economic Region. The City of London's London Regional Employment Services (LRES) was awarded the Service System Manager role for the

LER which includes the City of London, city of St. Thomas, Elgin County, Oxford County and Middlesex County.

The OW Caseworkers are now required to complete a Common Assessment and Mental Health and Addiction Screener. These two documents provide caseworkers with in-depth knowledge on how best to refer their clients to community supports within the County. The current service model in Social Services provides wraparound supports to clients, which put the County in alignment with the province changes.

Profile and Caseload:

In the 2023, Middlesex County has had an average of 379 households on social assistance. Of these, an average of 333 are Ontario Works clients, 17 are Temporary Care Assistance clients, and the remainder (29) are ODSP-in-OW clients. This is an increase from an average of 344 social assistance clients in 2022, and 337 in 2021. The most common reason provided for applying for social assistance, in each of the last three years, has been an inability to obtain employment.

The majority of social assistance clients are single. In 2023, an average of 235 (62%) clients were single individuals, 120 (32%) were sole support parents, 6 (1%) were couples without dependents, and 18 (5%) were couples with dependents. An average of 271 children were supported each month.

On average over 2023, when compared with 2022, the average client household

- 4.1% fewer members per cases
- 8.1% fewer months on social assistance

In 2023 there was an increase of 4.2% of individuals who found employment than in 2022, and a 13% increase in the number of full-time employment found.

Total Number of Employment Obtained = 119

- Number of Full Time Employment = 69 (58%)
- Number of Part Time Employment = 50 (42%)

On average, in 2023, 18% of clients have been employed at any given time, with an average amount of monthly earnings of \$462. The ability for clients to find work is partially dependent on the overall labour market. According to Statistics Canada, the unemployment rate of the County of Middlesex has increased since 2016, from 6% in 2016 to 8% in 2021. This remains below the Ontario average of 12%.

Each year the Ministry of Children, Community and Socials services set targets that each office must meet, in 2023 Middlesex County has meet or exceeding our provincial targets. This is due to the hard work and dedication of the Social Services team.

Discretionary Benefits:

The County of Middlesex, through Discretionary Benefits, provides financial assistance for funerals and burials for County residents in financial need. Every attempt is made to recover these funds from the deceased’s estate. As such, the ultimate cost to the County per funeral in any given year varies.

In 2023 changes have been made to the Social Services webpage. There is now a page outlining burial assistance, how the process works from the applicant perspective, and providing the phone number and extension of Discretionary Benefits, linking applicants directly to a Case Assistant. (www.middlesex.ca/socialservices/discretionarybenefits)

In 2024 a review of internal processes related to burial assistance will take place, allowing Social Services to identify potential opportunities and efficiencies and to formalize the process.

Below is an overview of the funerals over the past three years:

Year	Number of Funerals	Total Cost	Total cost after recoveries
2023	21	\$70,050	\$63,981
2022	14	\$58,744	\$42,742
2021	12	\$42,612	\$19,764

Discretionary Benefit funding also supports Ontario Works or ODSP members who express financial need with covering costs related to essential health-related expenses, such as dental care, medical care, vision care, and the purchase of layettes (for newborns). In 2023, 64% of payments have been related to dental care, 24% have been related to medical care, and the remaining 12% have been related to vision care and baby layettes.

Children’s Services:

The Children’s Services department has experienced changes in processes and funding allotted to Middlesex County. The increase in the Canada-Wide Early and Child Care funding, General Operating Grants and other one-time fundings has increased the administrative workload.

The total number of licensed child care spaces in Middlesex County as of December 31st, 2023 was 2,394. Below is a breakdown:

- Infant = 109
- Toddler = 297
- Preschool = 624
- School Aged = 1,364.

This is an increase of 9.5% of spaces compared to 2022.

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care:

Since the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement, there have been many modifications to policies and processes both internally and for the licensed child care centres who are supported.

In the County, 16 licensed child care organizations have been approved to provide the CWELCC program. In December 2022 the first reduction of fees were issued to families, the second reduction occurred in January 2023. At this time no other reductions of fees for families have been announced.

The Directed Growth Plan - Access and Inclusion Framework, as shared in March 2023, continues to be a driving force to open new school and community based licensed child care spaces. In January 2023, the Ministry of Education assigned 2,080 spaces to London and Middlesex. In May 2023, that number for the CMSM was increased to 2,889 spaces and a portion of the licensed spaces have been assigned to Middlesex County specifically. These spaces are targeted to be opened by 2026.

The County, in partnership with the City of London, has provided two separate opportunities (Spring 2023 and Fall 2023) for organizations to request increase or create new licensed child care spaces in the Middlesex and London area. The challenge to maintain the set ratio of For-Profit vs Non-Profit in the London-Middlesex area has impacted the approvals the County has been able to provide applicants. The province set the London-Middlesex ratio as of December 31st, 2022.

Since March 2022, the start of CWELCC, 293 new licensed child care spaces have been created in Middlesex County. This is broken down by, 114 community based spaces and 179 school based spaces.

General Operating Grant:

London and Middlesex use a point system to determine allocations amounts to eligible licensed child care centres. General Operating Grant (GOG) funding helps to offset operating costs of a centre and provides a stable funding source to operators. Infants, Toddlers, Preschool and School Age children are assigned a set number of points. This point system determines the amount of GOG funding each centre receives. In 2022 and 2023 there were increases to the GOG funding points for centres. In total there was an increase of 34% in funding issued out from 2022 to 2023 in the amount of \$863,843.

Fee Subsidy:

As of March 2024, there are 125 unique children, 88 families who are accessing fee subsidy supports. This is a 26% reduction in families accessing supports from July 2023, the reduction is due to the reduction in the cost of fees through the CWELCC program.

This trend has been across the province. There is a small waitlist of 12 families (20 children) for fee subsidy. This waitlist is not due to lack of funding to support the family, but due to lack of spaces available for families to access.

Service Plan:

The Child Care and Early Years Services plan is due to be updated in 2024. Kelly Smith, Oakley Frechette, Nadine Devin, and Joe Winser have been working in collaboration with the City of London to ensure the updated service plan reflects the needs of Middlesex County. The service plan has been completed and will be provided to council for approval at a future meeting.

Homelessness and Housing Supports:

Over the past few years the number of homelessness or at risk of homelessness individuals have continued to grow. This increase has resulted in an increased demand for service. Provincial Homelessness Prevention Funding for Middlesex County is funded through the City of London as the Service Manager. For the period 2023-2024 the total amount provided was \$873,903. All funding will be allocated by March 31, 2024.

Homelessness Prevention Program:

Middlesex County Social Services provides services aligned with the four service categories within the Homelessness Prevention Program guidelines:

- Emergency Shelter Solutions
- Community Outreach and Support Services
- Housing Assistance
- Supporting Housing

The programs, services and activities will cover the Motel Accommodations program, Middlesex Paramedic Outreach Program, food security programs, emergency hotel/motel stays and the continuation of the Whatever it Takes Fund (example: rental and utility arrears, last months rent and other supports to obtain or maintain shelter).

Social Services works closely with our community partners and individuals with lived experience to ensure the funding will be utilized to meet the needs of the County.

For the HPP funding period of April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 (as of this date):

- Over 170 individuals and families have been supported through the Whatever it takes fund. This has helped support individuals to be housed or maintain their current housing.
- 55 individuals (including children) were served through the Middlesex Accommodations Program. CMHA TVAMHS continues to hold the contract to provide wraparound services.

- Partnership with Youth Opportunities Unlimited created to support youth transitional housing.
- Funding provided to food banks and meal programs. Food security continues to be a growing need in the County.
- Temporary hotel/motel stays provided during the coldest nights.
- 98 patient engagements have occurred through the Middlesex Paramedic Outreach program. This program operates in partnership with the Middlesex London Paramedic Services at the Middlesex Accommodations program and at the Women's Rural Resources Centre (WRRRC) on Tuesdays.

A proposed investment plan has been submitted to the City of London for review and approval for the 2024-2025 funding. The Middlesex investment plan will be added to the City of London investment plan that is required by the Province of Ontario. This proposal includes funding requests for the Middlesex Accommodations program, youth transitional beds, Community Navigator position, food security (food banks, meal programs), Middlesex Paramedic Outreach Program, Whatever it takes fund, and funding to explore out of the cold/heat options that would greatly benefit individuals who are currently living unsheltered.

Middlesex Homeless Action Committee:

The Middlesex Homeless Action Committee (MHAC) meets on a regular basis to discuss the needs of homeless and or precariously housed individuals throughout Middlesex County. The committee consists of 13 different agencies working together to provide seamless services to individuals and families.

Within MHAC there are three adhoc working committees:

- Website design
 - Review of the Middlesex County website to ensure it provides up to date and information related to supports available throughout the County.
 - www.middlesex.ca/socialservices/housingandhomelessness
- Education
 - Creating information sessions to be provided to both individuals facing homelessness and the community at large
- Food Security
 - Discussions around what supports are currently available and where there are gaps and opportunities in services

This committee has been imperative in the gathering of information and collaboration between community agencies to determine and action on the needs of the community.

Social Housing Waitlist:

In 2023, the waitlist for subsidized housing has averaged 3.97 years in length. This is an estimate that takes into account the number of new applications, application

cancellations, and households placed each month. The waitlist length is shorter than in 2022, when it was estimated to be 4.02 years, but longer than it was in 2021 (3.8 years). In 2023, in any given month 0.35% of the waitlist was housed. In 2023 the number of new applications for housing increased by 14%. Currently there are 260 households on the waitlist, this is down by 2.6% from 2023.

Newcomers and Immigration:

Between 2011 and 2021 Middlesex County has experienced an increase in immigration. In the County 669 individuals living in Middlesex, or almost 0.9% of the total population, reported having immigrated since 2011. Listed below are the immigration statistics from the 2021 Statistics Canada data for each municipality.

Municipality	Number of new immigrants since 2011
Thames Centre	70
Strathroy-Caradoc	239
Southwest Middlesex	35
North Middlesex	50
Middlesex Centre	208
Lucan-Biddulph	45
Adelaide-Metcalf	21

A significant avenue through which newcomers in Middlesex-London are supported is through the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP). LMLIP is funded through the federal and provincial governments, as well as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. A representative of Middlesex County Social Services actively participates on their governance, welcoming communities, and central council committees.

LMLIP is currently in the process of developing a new model for community planning and funding of settlement services in Middlesex -London. The intent of the model renewal is to develop a funding and planning model that meets the unique needs of Middlesex-London, while ensuring equity of access to services provided through newcomer services and minimizing administrative burden. Various representatives of Middlesex, from both the County and lower tier municipalities, took part in a preliminary focus groups. The County also had a representative on the LMLIP Settlement Project Advisory Panel.

A Middlesex County sub committee has been formed to support newcomers and immigrants. Representation from Middlesex County Social Services, Employment Ontario, Early ON and Settlement services are active members of this sub committee. This committee formed to support Ukrainian newcomers to Middlesex County. As there continues to be a growing newcomer population in the county this, committee will continue to grow to meet the needs of the community.

The Middlesex County website has been updated to provide information for immigrants and newcomers: www.middlesex.ca/living-here/immigrants-and-newcomers

Community Services Partnerships:

The Middlesex Social Services and Community Partners Network (MCSSPN) continues to bring together different community agencies in a way that had not been done before. With the support of Social Service management, this network continues to meet on a monthly basis in order to share pertinent information related to community needs and to create a space where the community partners can share issues and/or gaps that have or may impact our communities.

Social Services continues to be involved with these important community groups:



- Community Safety and Well Being;
- Middlesex Children's Services Network;
- Middlesex Workforce Development Partnership;
- Middlesex Situation Table;
- London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership;
- Middlesex Rural Alliance DVAW; and
- Social Housing Operational Advisory Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The programs are within budget and any new programs have been historically 100% provincially and/or federally funded.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
Cultivating Community Vitality 	Advance a diverse, healthy, and engaged community across Middlesex County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and support community wellness • Innovate social and community services • Attract, retain, and engage youth in our community
Promoting Service Excellence 	Innovate and transform municipal service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations • Engage, educate and inform residents, businesses, and visitors of county services and community activities • Strengthen our advocacy and lobbying efforts with other government bodies • Collaborate with strategic partners to leverage available resources and opportunities • Build organizational capacity and capabilities

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Social Services Update – March 2024 Report be received for information.