Council Direction:

Not applicable.

Information:

Information Report ECS08024 is to provide Council with statistics concerning the size and composition of the City of Hamilton’s Ontario Works Caseload in 2007 and factors that influence the caseload size.

There are many variables that affect the size of the Ontario Works caseload. The chart below indicates the caseload figures for the past three years and the 2008 forecast:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City of Hamilton Ontario Works Caseload</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>Forecast 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yearly # of intake applications</td>
<td>12,017</td>
<td>13,895</td>
<td>13,767</td>
<td>13,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly caseload Jan. to Dec.</td>
<td>10,290</td>
<td>10,127</td>
<td>9,753</td>
<td>9,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per case (Basic needs, shelter &amp; temporary care only)</td>
<td>$754</td>
<td>$745</td>
<td>$762</td>
<td>$774</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In 2007, the number of Ontario Works intakes decreased by 128 applications, or less than 1%.
- The average monthly Ontario Works caseload decreased 3.69%, from 10,127 cases in 2006 to 9,753 cases in 2007.
The forecasted and budgeted amount for 2007 was 10,070 cases per month. The actual amount of 9,753 cases per month shows a decrease of 317 cases, or 3.2%, from the budgeted amount.

The forecasted average monthly caseload for 2008 is 9,868 cases, which is down 2% from the 2007 forecast.

The average cost per case in 2007 was $757 per month for basic needs, shelter subsidy or temporary care. This is $5 less than the forecasted cost per case of $762. Variance in family size and composition and the living circumstances of individuals and families affect the actual cost per case.

Family Composition of Ontario Works Caseload:

The family composition of the Ontario Works caseload has remained constant with little change from 2006. The following table shows the monthly averages of the caseload composition for 2007:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heads of Families</th>
<th>Singles</th>
<th>Temp Care</th>
<th>Total Cases</th>
<th>Dependant Adults (over 18)</th>
<th>Dependant Children (under 18)</th>
<th>Total Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,484</td>
<td>4,019</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>9,753</td>
<td>4,364</td>
<td>8,255</td>
<td>22,122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56% of the caseload was comprised of families, which include two adults with or without children and sole-support families;

41% of the caseload were single people without children;

3% of the caseload were Temporary Care cases (assistance available to an adult who is looking after a child in financial need of whom he or she is not the natural or adoptive parent); and,

37% of the total Ontario Works beneficiaries (which includes heads of families, spouses, dependent adults and children) are dependant children under 18 years.

Participation in Employment Activities:

Ontario Works participants are required to participate in employment activities that support progress toward sustainable employment. Participation in employment assistance activities may be deferred temporarily or restrictions on participation may apply in certain circumstances such as pending Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), child not of school age, caregiver for a family member and parental/pregnancy leave to name a few.

45% of the total cases on average are required to fully participate in employment activities;

32% have restrictions to full participation, but are still required to seek employment; and,

23% are deferred from any degree of participation.
Factors that Affected the Caseload in 2007:

There are a number of interconnecting factors that impact the size of the Ontario Works caseload. Reasons for a decrease in 2007 include increased transfers to the ODSP program, increased sustainable employment placements, a positive job market in Hamilton in the service sector, and increased client contacts in a number of different program areas including the Consolidated Verification Process (review of financial eligibility) and update meetings with their Ontario Works case manager. Further information on these factors is detailed below:

Local employment interventions for Ontario Works participants, resulting in a decreased number of caseloads:

- Design and implementation of the MPower (Managing and Providing Ontario Works with Employment) Pilot program which provides intensive employment case management services and streamlines the referral process to employment supports.
- Increased accessibility for clients to labour market information through the quarterly newsletter Career View and at the Career Development Centre.
- Continued focus on Job Skills Training, resulting in an increase in paid employment for Ontario Works participants and exit from the caseload. In 2007, 334 participants were assisted with Job Skills Training supports.
- Continuation of an intense case management model for highly employable participants which provides specialized supports to those nearer to employment.
- Continuation of the Ontario Works Addictions Services Worker to provide Ontario Works participants with supports to increase employability.
- New intake process for the pre-employment Youth Track program which is targeted to youth ages 18 - 24.
- The Essential Skills pre-employment program continued to gain momentum offering services to all Ontario Works participants.
- The accreditation program for foreign-trained professionals to attain Canadian certification.
- Enhancements to the Ontario Works Employment Placement Services such as group Employment Action Sessions and motivational speaker sessions.
- Improved communications for Ontario Works participants and the community including a quarterly newsletter, “Voice”, and several brochures.
- Development of the Job Retention Project to increase the length of time participants are employed, thus reducing recidivism.

Increase in the number of clients granted Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP):

- 43 more cases were transferred from Ontario Works to ODSP than in 2006 which is a 4.35% increase to a total of 1,032 cases for the year.
- The ODSP has streamlined their application process which has sped up the process for applicants.
• Improved accessibility to psychological and vocational assessments for Ontario Works participants with an emphasis on those who are applying for or appealing a decision for ODSP.

Annual client file reviews through the Consolidated Verification Process (CVP):

In 2007, 6,611 CVP client file reviews were completed. Twelve percent of the file reviews, or 799 cases, were terminated as a result of this review.

Labour Market Conditions:

For 2007, the unemployment rate in the Hamilton Employment Insurance Economic Region (includes Hamilton, Burlington and Grimsby) was 6.0%, which is lower than the provincial rate of 6.7%.

Length of Time on Assistance:

For the first three quarters of 2007, Hamilton Ontario Works cases were in receipt of social assistance for an average of 20 months; this is in line with the provincial average. It is interesting to note that for the last quarter of 2007, the Hamilton Ontario Works cases were in receipt of social assistance for 19 months, which is one month less than the provincial average.

The following information summarizes some of the characteristics contributing to the length of time Hamilton residents are in receipt of Ontario Works financial assistance:

Education:

Based on the provincial average from the 2006 Census Canada data, Hamiltonians are 4% less likely to have a level of education (high school diploma or post-secondary education), which will assist them in finding employment that will sustain a living wage. The Hamilton Training Advisory Board TOPS Trends Opportunities Priorities Report January 2008 indicates that there is an increasing demand for skilled workers in Hamilton. They estimate that 70% of future jobs will require some post-secondary education. Conversely, jobs that require a high school diploma or less will only make up 6% of future jobs.

Hamilton Ontario Works participants will spend a longer time on assistance while upgrading their education or acquiring employment-related skills to be competitive in today’s job market.
Immigration Trends:

Newcomers to Canada require more time on assistance while addressing language and other settlement issues.

The planning process for the City of Hamilton Immigration Strategy is underway. It is anticipated that this strategy will work in a coordinated fashion with key stakeholders towards attracting skilled immigrants to the City and addressing the challenges of those newcomers who are experiencing barriers to sustainable employment.

Homelessness:

The complex needs of those experiencing homelessness results in a longer dependence on social assistance. Vulnerable populations require more time on assistance to address complex barriers (including housing, mental health and addictions issues) before they are “employment ready” or, where appropriate, are able to access the ODSP.

With the opening of the Family Shelter, Hamilton averaged 72.4 emergency shelter beds per night (per 100,000 pop.) compared to the provincial average of 52.9 beds (per 100,000 pop.).

Disabled Persons:

Statistically, Hamilton is home to more disabled persons than the province as a whole. Hamilton carries 6% of the Province’s disability caseload, but less than 4% of the total provincial population.

Due to the complexities of their social and health issues, these individuals require more time and increased assistance to exit Ontario Works.

Factors Affecting the Caseload for 2008:

It is anticipated that the following factors will impact the Ontario Works Caseload for 2008:

**Provincial Social Assistance Restructuring**: The impact of the Ontario Child Benefit on caseload size has yet to be determined although it is anticipated that there will be a minimal decrease. The province estimates that approximately 250 cases (0.13%) across the province will be affected.

**Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)**: Since 2003, the number of cases per year granted ODSP has increased. For the first quarter of 2008 however, there is an 11% decrease, or 31 less cases granted ODSP.
Increase in Minimum Wage: The increase of minimum wage from $8.00 per hour to $8.75 per hour in March 2008 may have an impact on the Ontario Works Caseload. For participants who are working minimum wage jobs, the earning deductions will be greater which may result in them not qualifying for social assistance.

Major Shut downs in 2007: The affect of plant closures usually impact the Ontario Works caseload a year after the closure occurs. In 2007, National Steel Car, Hamilton Steel and Robertson Building Systems all experienced layoffs that may impact the Ontario Works caseload in 2008.

Conclusion:

Based on past trends combined with ongoing strategies within the Ontario Works Program, a 2% decrease was forecast for the Ontario Works caseload in 2008 from the 2007 forecast. There is a slight increase, 1% or 42 cases, in the number of intake applications for the first quarter of 2008 compared to 2007. However, caseload numbers to the end of March 2008 are positive. In March 2008, 9,833 individuals or families received assistance. This is 269 fewer cases than in March 2007.

The Ontario Works Program will continue to address the varying challenges facing Hamilton residents who are in need of assistance with the ultimate goal of supporting participants on their path to economic independence and sustainable employment.

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Jack Brown,
Acting General Manager
Community Services Department