

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

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DATE 20 March 2000

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
 Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Social Services Commissioner

SUBJECT/OBJET **MCSS BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE INTAKE SCREENING UNIT (ISU) FOR EASTERN ONTARIO**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee recommend Council approve that the Social Services Department submit a Business Case Proposal to the Ministry of Community and Social Services to establish and operate a Social Assistance Intake Screening Unit (ISU) to serve Eastern Ontario.

BACKGROUND

In January 1996, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) signed a contract with Andersen Consulting to re-design the social assistance service delivery system in Ontario and to provide a new computer system to support it. Since then, enormous effort has gone into the design and development work. Municipalities, including Ottawa-Carleton, have contributed thousands of hours of staff time and many resources to the design effort. This has resulted in what is now called the new Service Delivery Model or SDM.

In January 2000, MCSS convened a meeting of all municipal and provincial delivery agents to announce its intention to implement the new SDM across Ontario by January 26, 2002. MCSS has the legislative authority and mandate to require this to be done.

An essential element of the new SDM is the use of telephone screening of all applications for social assistance, both Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, through a structure called an Intake Screening Unit, an advanced call centre model.

Seven Intake Screening Units

MCSS made a decision that there will be seven Intake Screening Units across Ontario. One of the locations will be the City of Toronto. The others will be located in six geographic regions as defined by MCSS.

Ottawa-Carleton is included in the geographic area of Eastern Ontario which also includes Prescott-Russell County, Cornwall (Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry), Lanark County, Renfrew County, Kingston (Frontenac), Hastings County, Leeds and Grenville County, and Lennox and Addington County.

The precise location of the Eastern Ontario ISU, and all the others, will be determined through a competitive process, in which interested Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) are required to present a detailed Business Case in accordance with guidelines provided by MCSS.

The deadline for submission of a proposal is April 19, 2000. The Ministry intends to announce its decisions in May 2000.

DISCUSSION

The requirements for the ISU Business Case are extensive and have many implications for the Municipality which is selected to establish and manage the Intake Screening Unit.

Reciprocal Service Agreements

Because the host municipality will be operating the ISU on behalf of several other municipalities in Eastern Ontario, there will be a requirement to negotiate Service Agreements with each of the municipal partners. The agreements will focus primarily on the funding of the ISU. However, there will be other factors to consider related to service standards and business practices.

To date, there is no formula established for the sharing of costs between the municipal partners. However, MCSS has indicated its intention to develop a formula in the near future. The Eastern Ontario service area currently includes 46,336 cases of which 26,676 (**57%**) are in the Region. It is clear that Ottawa-Carleton will pay its proportionate share, whether it is selected to host the ISU or if another municipality in Eastern Ontario is selected.

Human Resources

Based on Provincial guidelines, the Eastern Ontario ISU will require at the outset no less than 48 staff, comprised of 1 Manager, 4 Supervisors, 39 caseworker level staff and 4 clerical support staff. These staff resources will be employees of the host municipality. It is understood that every CMSM already employs a certain number of Full Time Equivalent staff (FTEs) who are handling Intake. It can be expected that any CMSM which is not selected to host the ISU will be required to reduce its staff complement by a proportionate number, since the Intake work will be done elsewhere.

Thus, if Ottawa-Carleton does not make a proposal or if Ottawa-Carleton is not selected, it can be anticipated that there will be a requirement to reduce the staff complement by an as yet unknown number, in recognition of the work transferred to the new ISU.

Physical Plant

The standards set by MCSS require the Eastern Ontario ISU to have about 10,000 square feet of space to accommodate initial requirements and to allow for a 50% increase in space and staff in the event that Intake volumes increase over time.

The space needs to be on one floor plate, with a significant degree of predictability in terms of cost, term of occupancy and infrastructure. While there can be some flexibility in location, there must be excellent telecommunications and technology capability. MCSS has set specific standards with regard to work stations, computers and physical environment, which also dictate space requirements.

Social Services does not have this amount of space already available under lease. Space options are currently being explored.

Telephony and Technology Requirements

The ISU will be a state-of-the-art Call Centre, requiring computer technology and telephone technology which is highly advanced. Clients will not go in person to this site.

The technology must support a service standard which will result in 80% of the telephone calls being answered within 60 seconds.

There is a requirement for advanced Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) hardware and software which, in addition to handling call distribution, will provide managers and supervisors with detailed reports, tracking all necessary performance management information.

There is also a requirement for an overhead Electronic Bulletin Board which monitors the status of the call centre queue and provides real time status information for the use of all staff.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Province will provide 100% funding for all approved facility start-up costs for the Intake Screening Unit. This includes: Professional design fees, leasehold improvements, furniture/ workstation systems, electrical system, HVAC, data cabling for LAN, telephones in addition to the ACD telephony system, teletypewriter, fire protection systems, security systems, plumbing and all moving costs.

The Province will provide 100% funding for all approved one-time costs for the ACD telephony system.

The Province will provide 100% funding for the first six months of operating costs for the telephony system and 50% funding thereafter.

The Province will cost-share 50/50 the on-going operating costs of the ISU. The municipalities served by the ISU will jointly pay the 50% municipal share in accordance with a formula either established by the Province or through negotiation.

Ottawa-Carleton will be required to pay its proportionate share of the on-going costs of the ISU whether or not the ISU is located in Ottawa-Carleton or in another municipality. This cost share is entirely unknown at this time.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Public consultation is not required for this report.

CONCLUSION

There will be an Intake Screening Unit located somewhere in Eastern/South-Eastern Ontario which will be the new service access point for residents of Ottawa-Carleton applying for social assistance.

Ottawa-Carleton offers many compelling reasons why it should be the site selected for the ISU. We have had some experience in piloting a call centre approach in the Department with the introduction of the 560-6000 access point. Our current service delivery model already separates intake screening and verification functions. As host municipality, we would be in a unique position to ensure that appropriate service standards are adhered to, including French language services. This would also enable the Department to influence the interpretation of Provincial regulation and directives in a more direct manner than were we required to negotiate a service agreement with another host municipality. Therefore, Social Services is seeking the approval of Council to prepare a Business Case and submit a bid to the Provincial government.

*Approved by
Dick Stewart*