

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.
 Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 15 December 1999

TO/DEST. Coordinator
 Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner
 Social Services

SUBJECT/OBJET **PRIORITIES FOR 2000 BUDGET -
 TASK FORCE ON POVERTY**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That Community Services Committee recommend Council approve the priorities for the 2000 budget outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to identify the priorities for \$1m earmarked in the 2000 budget to implement specific recommendations of the Task Force on Poverty. This report has been prepared in response to revised budget timeframes. The priorities have been identified on the advice of the Task Force on Poverty and its broadly based consultation process.

Priorities for 2000 Budget Report

This report has been prepared to assist the 2000 budget process. It does not replace or pre-empt the final report of the Task Force on Poverty.

Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty

The final report of the Task Force on Poverty will be forthcoming in January. It will reiterate the funding priorities for the \$1m earmarked in the 2000 budget, as identified in this report. It will also identify those recommendations which do not require funding but require directives to Regional staff for action. Thirdly, it will contain those recommendations which the Task Force on Poverty strongly supports but which coincide with, and are more appropriately funded through, other initiatives e.g. Partners for Jobs. Lastly, it will contain recommendations to support the public participation of people living in poverty.

BACKGROUND

The People's Hearings was a process developed by a group of community organizations to provide a forum for the voices of the poor. Testimony from the hearings was captured in a report entitled People First/Les gens d'abord (October 1997) which was presented to Regional Council. Subsequently, Community Services Committee approved a motion that a Task Force on Poverty be struck, including people who have experienced living in poverty and Regional Staff across a number of departments, to ensure the recommendations in People First became the basis for action.

Under the Task Force, elected representatives of communities of the poor came together with appointed delegates of Regional government to work together to find ways to improve the lives of people living in poverty. The Task force was established in September, 1998, chaired jointly by a community representative and a Regional representative (Social Services). The Task Force's Interim Report, People First: Creating Hope Through Change, was presented at the Community Services Committee of July 8, 1999. Committee received the report and directed Social Services to co-ordinate the preliminary costing of the report's 27 recommendations.

In October 1999, Community Services Committee received the staff report Preliminary Costing of Task Force on Poverty Recommendations and approved the following motions:

1. *That 30% of the savings from the decline in social assistance caseload, to a cap of \$1m, be earmarked, in the 2000 budget, to implement specific recommendations of the Task Force on Poverty which assist people in making the transition from social assistance to employment and/or which help the working poor remain off assistance; and,*
2. *That the Task Force on Poverty, working with regional staff, prioritize their recommendations within the framework of helping the transition off social assistance and helping the working poor.*
3. *That Recommendations 21 through 24 of the Task Force on Poverty Interim Report be referred to the Transit Services Committee (the Community Services Committee believes strongly in the need for mobility in order to obtain employment).*

DISCUSSION

The following tables indicate the recommendations related to each priority item, the priority item requiring funding and the recommended amount. Comments are also provided. The list of recommendations related to priority items appears in Annex A.

Table 1.

Recommendation #'s related to priority items	Priority Item	Recommended Funding
#1, 3, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 25*	1 community-based position for public participation coordination	\$50,000

*additional recommendations will be identified in the final report of the Task Force on Poverty related to this priority item (e.g. housing).

Comments

The community-based position proposed here will not be geographically focused or single issue focused. This will be a community development position, to be located in an existing community agency. The position will have the responsibility for mobilizing low income persons across the city to help ensure they have a voice on a full range of issues. The position is not one of being a spokesperson for low-income people. Rather, the position will support and coordinate public participation of the community of the poor.

This voice will be a valuable resource in identifying barriers to employment in the community and bringing these forward so that the municipality can provide mechanisms to help in the transition to employment.

Table 2.

Recommendation #'s related to priority items	Priority Item	Recommended Funding
#7, 11, 22(a)	a) EHSS b)Transportation Assistance c) community consultation, marketing strategy and implementation plan for the dissemination of information on benefits and services which help with transition to work and sustaining employment	\$435,000 (estimate) \$350,000 (estimate) <u>\$100,000</u> \$935,000 (Total)

Comments

Social Services has developed a new, more appropriate needs test for Essential Health and Social Support and is undertaking staff training and a targeted advertising strategy for EHSS.

Providing the same or similar range of discretionary benefits for working poor as for social assistance recipients, within an expanded EHSS budget, helps people make the transition from assistance to employment and sustain their employment. It targets supports to people entering the workforce or working in the low-wage sector of the economy.

Changes to the National Child Benefit System (NCB) and changes to the Supports To Employment Program (STEP) mean that increasing numbers of working families living in poverty will not be eligible for partial social assistance benefits. Families and individuals working in the low wage sector of the economy will be able to receive a top-up (STEP) for a maximum of two years. Increasingly families will no longer qualify for partial social assistance because of current and future changes to the NCB, yet their overall income level will not have increased. Only the level of government from whom they are receiving a cheque (as a supplement to their working income) will have changed.

These families and individuals will need the same range of essential health and social supports as they might have received on full or partial assistance, e.g. surgical supplies, other health related items, special diets, vision care, layettes and baby supplies, beds, fridges and stoves. Poor families working in the low-wage sector of the economy will continue to rely on municipalities to meet these essential needs, although in many cases they will no longer be part of the regular Ontario Works caseload.

Lack of mobility is a major barrier to moving off social assistance and maintaining employment. Increased transportation assistance can be provided with expanded funds within the Essential Health and Social Supports envelope. It is recognized that this amount is insufficient to meet the need and solve the problem of lack of mobility for people with low incomes. Nevertheless, the Region has done a number of things to incrementally address the problem of lack of mobility e.g. Social Services is now able to purchase bus passes at a 20% discount from OC Transpo; OC Transpo has introduced individual day passes and Sunday family passes. The targeted use of EHSS dollars for transportation assistance will continue this process of incrementally solving this problem.

Lastly, it is essential that a community based consultation, marketing strategy and implementation plan be developed for the dissemination of information on regional benefits, with a focus on EHSS, transportation assistance and other services and benefits that help with the transition to work and maintaining employment.

Table 3.

Recommendation #’s related to priority items	Priority Item	Recommended Funding
#14	Booklet: checklist for choosing child care (printing and distribution costs).	\$15,000

Comments

Given the provincial freeze on additional formal licenced child care spaces, there is an increased emphasis on finding child care in the informal sector. A booklet providing information to assist people to make informed child care choices in the informal sector is currently available and is in the process of being updated, but the \$5.00 price tag has prohibited maximum distribution among people who have low incomes. The funding for this priority item will ensure the printing and distribution of the booklet. Making this information more widely available will help parents ensure their children are in a safe and stimulating child care environment which will, in turn, help to remove a barrier to accepting employment.

While it is recognized that the money recommended in this critical priority area of child care is small, efforts will need to be concentrated on lobbying the provincial government to expand the number of child care spaces.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

These priorities have been identified on the advice of the Task Force on Poverty and its broadly based consultation process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

The funding for the priority items totals \$1m. Funding for these items involves existing funds i.e. 30% of the net savings resulting from the decline in the social assistance caseload, to a cap of \$1m.

*Approved by
Dick. Stewart*

CP/

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO PRIORITY ITEMS FOR 2000 BUDGET**Priority Area: Public Participation Coordination**Recommendation 1

That the Region in partnership with the community lobby the Province to increase social assistance rates for basic needs and shelter to reflect the actual costs of a nutritious diet and adequate housing and utilities.

Recommendation 3

That the Region in partnership with the community lobby the Province to increase asset limits and earnings before claw-back for both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) given that the current limits act as a barrier to increasing social assistance recipients' economic self-sufficiency.

Recommendation 16

That Regional Council advocate for more subsidized licensed [child] care in Ottawa-Carleton.

Recommendation 17

That Regional Council advocate more specifically for flexible licensed [child] care for evening and night time child care.

Recommendation 18

That the Region of Ottawa-Carleton provide resources (funds and staff) to prepare a project proposal to create a 24 hour child care services which would provide flexible child care arrangements for people working evenings, night or rotations, and that Social Services lead this project in collaboration with community partners.

Recommendation 19

That the project seek creative funding arrangement from different funding sources that it be based on a combination of new child care spaces and the re-allocation of existing spaces, and that the project proposal explore the use of space vacated by school closures.

Recommendation 20

That the Region approve in principle that parents working night shifts have access to subsidized child care in the parent's home, and that Regional Council lobby the Province to allow in home licensed and subsidized night care for reasons other than a disability.

Recommendation 25

That the Region, community members and organizations lobby the Provincial government to create new funds to cover hydro and telephone basic fees, along with "basic needs" and "shelter", as part of basic monthly social assistance rates.

Priority Area: Essential Health and Social Supports, Transportation Assistance, and Provision of Information on Benefits to Support Transition to Work

Recommendation 7

That Social Services review its policies for the provision of Essential Health and Social Supports (EHSS) to ensure an appropriate needs test and to ensure that the working poor have as complete access to the range of items under EHSS as are available to social assistance recipients, and report back to Community Services Committee.

Recommendation 11

That the Region financially support and maintain a complete resource centre in all community health and resource centres or other public institutions (e.g. libraries in rural areas) to provide access to a wide range of information on services for people living in poverty.

Recommendation 22

(a) That reduced fare bus passes be made available to low income individuals and families. For the purpose of this recommendation, low income includes social assistance recipients, employment insurance recipients, people receiving disability benefits (ODSP) and the working poor.

Priority Area: Child Care Pamphlet

Recommendation 14

The information on how to choose a caregiver be more widely available to parents at an accessible price and/or no cost to parents, that a one page check list on key safety concerns in choosing safe child care similar to that produced by the Infant and Toddler Safety Association be available to all parents, in the official language of their choice, and that the checklist be widely distributed to hospitals, midwives, community resource and health centres, community houses and schools.