

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Employment Services Transformation for Ontario Works

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Acting Director of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That County Council receive Report HS 2025-05, entitled “Employment Services Transformation for Ontario Works”, as information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Employment Services Transformation (EST) was launched in a phased approach across the province with prototype sites established in 2020. The County was onboarded in January of 2024 under the London catchment area.
- The City of London, through its London Regional Employment Services (LRES) division, is the Service System Manager (SSM) overseeing the design of employment services across the London catchment area.
- EST includes the integration of employment programming under Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), into Employment Ontario (EO), under the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD).

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Staff will continue to monitor the implementation of EST and potential impacts on local service delivery. In addition, staff continue to work closely with community partners and LRES to ensure a seamless implementation process.

Financial Impact

At this time, there are no financial impacts as a result of EST implementation. The Ministry has indicated that there will be no changes to current cost sharing relationships or funding levels.

Communications

In October 2023, the County worked with the four other municipalities in the London catchment area to ensure common messaging was relayed to all clients and community partners. This messaging was made available via numerous electronic and printed communications. Existing OW clients were also advised of EST changes through a mail out.


Prior to the full implementation of EST in January 2024, staff met with neighbouring municipalities to explore best practices and ensure a smooth transition for staff, OW clients and Employment Ontario partners. As EST implementation continues, staff continue to monitor challenges and potential improvements to ensure staff, recipients and community partners feel supported through the transformation.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the **2023-2026 Strategic Plan** on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

| PILLAR 1 | PILLAR 2 | PILLAR 3 |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Promoting community vitality | Enhancing environmental sustainability | Fostering progressive government |
| <p>Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being</p> <p>Goal 1.4 – Connected people and places</p> | | <p>Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions</p> <p>Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities</p> |

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

On February 12, 2019, the Ontario Government announced its plan to transform and modernize employment services delivery across the province. The goal of this transformation was to create a more locally responsive employment services system to help more people find and keep quality jobs, including assistance to connect workers with the right skills. This transformation included the integration of OW and ODSP employment programming into Employment Ontario (EO) under the MLITSD, with the purpose of creating an efficient and cost-effective system focused on helping all jobseekers, businesses and communities.

The new delivery model includes the creation of 15 catchment areas across the province, to which Service System Managers (SSM) will assume responsibility for the provision of employment supports to OW and ODSP recipients. SSMs also have the ability to contract local EO providers to deliver employment supports, locally this includes:

- Community Employment Services
- Community Living Tillsonburg
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Employment Solutions
- Leads Employment Services
- Tillsonburg & District Multi Service Centre
- Women's Employment Resource Centre

For background purposes, prior to the implementation of EST, the County was responsible for planning and delivering employment services.

EST transformation began in 2020 with three prototype regions across the province. On June 10, 2021, EST was further expanded to include four additional catchment areas (Phase 1). In January 2024, the County (under the London catchment) joined Phase 2 of EST, along with four other areas. The City of London, through its LRES division, is the now the SSM overseeing the design of employment services across the London catchment area. This area includes Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford, St. Thomas and London.

The majority of 2024 served as a “test year”, using lessons learned to inform the full rollout. Full roll-out of EST is anticipated in 2025, with the onboarding of the remaining three catchment areas in Ontario.

Comments

With the implementation of EST, the Ministry is utilizing a client segmentation model of service delivery where a Common Assessment (CA) tool is used to assess each client's ability to attain and retain employment. The segmentation is used to inform operational funding and expected client service numbers and to incentivize the achievement of client employment outcomes through performance-based funding.

Common Assessment

County and Employment Ontario (EO) staff are responsible for completing CAs to identify what services or supports recipients may benefit from. The CA has two modules. Module 1 helps to identify service needs and/or barriers to employment, while Module 2 is completed by EO staff and has a focused lens on employment history, completed education and skill set to better support the client in reaching employment goals. If no significant barriers are identified after the completion of Module 1, a referral is made to a local EO provider. If significant barriers are identified, County staff collaborate with the client and community supports to address life stabilization needs.

The completed Common Assessment tool will determine which of the following three streams a client is assigned to:

1. Stream A: Rapid Employment (low risk of long-term unemployment) for clients who may be able to quickly obtain employment with supports.
2. Stream B: Employability and Employment (medium risk of long-term unemployment) for clients who may need to focus on improving employability in addition to obtaining employment.
3. Stream C: Employability Focused (high risk of long-term unemployment) for clients who may need to focus primarily on improving employability prior to exploring employment opportunities.

Referrals

County staff refer clients to the most applicable EO provider based on services offered and target demographic. Clients can also be referred outside of the County if the EO provider is within the LRES catchment. LRES sends monthly reports to the County detailing referral number breakdowns for each Service Provider and will advise of any areas for improvement. There are ongoing meetings with LRES to discuss areas for improved referral rates and ways to improve compliance.

Action Plans

After the EO referral, County staff create an individualized Action Plan identifying next steps in addition to other service needs. An Action Plan outlines what the client agrees to complete to fulfill the participation requirement of the OW program. The Action Plan typically includes employment goals, activities (i.e. job searches, workshops, training) and a specific timeline. The overall goal of an Action Plan is to move a client through the employment continuum towards self-sufficiency.

Several clients have not been referred to a local EO provider as they are currently working with County staff towards life stabilization as they currently have significant barriers to employment (i.e. mental health, addictions, housing instability). Furthermore, the province does not require sole support parents who have a child under school age to participate in employment services. The sole support parent demographic is encouraged to apply for a child care subsidy for a licensed child care space. LRES has been working with EO providers to develop workshops which will target the Stream C identified clients and support the transition from life stabilization to employability.

The LRES sends referral data sets to the County monthly. From January 2024 to January 2025, the County referred a total of 905 clients to local EO providers. It is important to note that many clients were already in receipt of employment supports by EO providers prior to EST implementation in January 2024. These clients may not be reflected in the noted referral number. Clients also have the ability to self-refer to an EO provider and may begin this process before being in receipt of social assistance. These client groups may continue to be connected with an EO provider, but their participation is not reflective in the referral from social assistance data.

During the period of January 2024 to January 2025, LRES reported that 158 of the 905 referred clients found employment. The EO provider continues to provide support to the client for 12 months after obtaining employment to assist with job retention. The EO provider also assists financially with job start needs such as clothing and transportation.

CONCLUSIONS

EST was designed to allow EO providers to support OW clients as they transition through the employment continuum and obtain employment. As County staff continue to make appropriate referrals to local EO providers, clients will be supported through workshops, individual appointments, and ongoing job retention supports.

With the implementation of EST, County staff are now able to better focus on life stabilization supports for clients who are not deemed appropriate for a referral to an EO provider.

SIGNATURES

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