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Provincial budget affects many social services

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Many people have been wondering how the recent Ontario budget may affect them and the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB board members are no exception. The budget was a focus of discussion at the meeting of April 26, 2012.

Some of the Provincial Budget highlights include:

Social Assistance Rates

Initially, the province announced there would be no general rate increase in 2012 for the Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Programs (ODSP). It has recently been announced that there will be a 1% increase for ODSP in November 2012 and for OW in December 2012.

Community Start-up & Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB)

CSUMB will be removed as a mandatory benefit under social assistance program effective January 1, 2013.

In the Calendar year 2011 the DSB expended \$108,000 on the CSUMB benefit. Based on recent communications from the province for the period April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012, the DSB spent \$120,000 on CSUMB for OW clients and the province spent \$160,000 on CSUMB for ODSP clients in the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB jurisdiction, for a total of \$280,000.

The province has indicated it will transfer half of the provincial share, which in the board's case would be \$130,000, to the new consolidated housing and homelessness program managed by the MMAH (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing). The concern here is the MMAH will use their own formula based on households to re-distribute these dollars and the DSB may not see the full \$130,000 transferred to their program.

Home Repairs

The 2012 Budget announced that home repair benefits are being removed from social assistance effective January 1, 2013.

The province is suggesting individuals requiring home repairs can access the Investment in Affordable Housing Program delivered by DSSAB/CMSM's. For the calendar year 2011, the DSB spent \$6,265 on emergency home repairs for OW clients. In general, most emergency home repairs for social assistance clients involve emergency furnace repairs in winter.

The DSB was allocated \$1,015,176 under the Investment in Affordable Housing Program and the Board approved the Program Delivery and Fiscal Plan at the November 2011 Board meeting. In the plan, the Board allocated \$965,177 to the Ontario Renovates Program over the next three years. The waiting list for the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB - Ontario Renovates Program has 135 households with requests for repairs totaling in excess of \$2 million dollars.

Staff stipulated they will be contacting the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to determine the most appropriate method of ensuring social assistance clients have access to emergency home repairs particularly during winter months where the current application process under the Ontario Renovates Program would not be timely.

Discretionary Benefits

The existing formula of \$8.75 per case for non-health related discretionary benefits would be replaced with a new formula of \$10 per case on combined health and non-health related discretionary benefits effective July 1, 2012.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB will have an annual allocation of approximately \$145,000 for health and non-health related discretionary benefits effective July 1, 2012. Since their expenditures for the 2011 calendar were \$147,034, they may be able to manage within the new allocation.

However once the CSUMB is eliminated in January 2013, this will put a lot of pressure on the discretionary benefits allocation. DSB staff is currently reviewing the Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits policy and will be providing the Board with a revised policy before the July 1, 2012 changes take effect.

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