

Ottawa in line for workfare 'reward' cheque

Surpasses provincial targets months after threat from Tories

BY CAROLYNNE WHEELER



Councillor Alex Munter, left, says the city has proven to Social Services Minister John Baird, right, that Ottawa's less punitive approach to workfare 'has produced better results.'

The provincial cabinet minister who threatened to pull Ottawa's money for workfare last year after it fell behind on quotas has been invited to hand over a bonus cheque, now that the city has gone beyond provincial targets.

Last summer, Community and Social Services Minister Nepean-Carleton, warned the city's abysmal record of finding work placements for welfare recipients could cost it millions in provincial funding.

A ministry report showed the city had only placed 577 of 22,732 welfare recipients in work programs by December, far below the 15-per-cent requirement.

But the city counterattacked by arguing it was focusing on training people for paid work that took them off welfare rolls, instead of using placements to fill time while collecting a government cheque.

Training programs for paid work didn't count toward provincial quotas at the time.

But those rules changed and the city's programs continued. And yesterday, a councillor announced the city will exceed this year's target of 5,216 workfare placements by a few hundred people.

The province gives \$1,000 per placement to municipalities that overachieve, which means the city is expecting a cheque for between \$200,000 and \$400,000.

"We have used a different ap-

proach here. It is a more positive, less punitive approach and it has produced better results," said Alex Munter, chairman of the city's health, recreation and social services committee.

He who said Mr. Baird's office called with congratulations yesterday.

"They were so negative about our approach that it's nice to see that they are open-minded, that perhaps the Ottawa way is the better way to go," Mr. Munter said of provincial officials.

Dan Miles, press secretary to Mr. Baird, said the minister was "extremely pleased" to learn of Ottawa's achievements and

would be happy to present a bonus cheque, once the final numbers are collected.

However, that won't happen at the health, recreation and social services committee's next meeting. Mr. Miles said it will take about two months to collect and confirm Ottawa's work-for-welfare numbers.

"If they indeed surpass their target, the minister has made it perfectly clear he will be more than happy to come down and present them with a reward cheque," Mr. Miles said.

"If this is the case, the minister applauds their success, and is very encouraged and happy that Ottawa is doing so well."