

BACKGROUND

In September 2016, the Ministry of Education announced the plan to expand access to licensed child care for 100,000 additional children across the Province, over a five year period.

In June 2014, City Council approved the Child Care System Review report which recommended changes to ensure a high quality, efficient child care system that could operate within the new funding reality and would be positioned to weather potential future funding reductions.

(<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&id=731&itemid=8570&lang=en>)

At the May 15th, 2017 Community Services Committee meeting, a report was brought forward titled "Child Care System Review Update", which provided an update on progress made to date on the main recommendations in the 2014 System Review. <http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&agenda=report&itemid=1&id=1202>)

Further information has been announced by the Ministry of Education with regards to the Child Care Expansion and the Children Services Section is working with the community on potential strategies to ensure that the community is achieving the targeted expansion for approximately 300 children for year one of this five year Provincial initiative.

CHILD CARE EXPANSION

Subsequent to the Ministry of Education's announcement in September 2016, a series of public consultations were held across the province to learn how to enhance the early years and child care system, including one held in the City of Greater Sudbury. These consultative sessions included parents, caregivers, early years professionals, municipalities, school boards, employers, Indigenous partners and other key stakeholders.

As a result of the consultations, the Province published the document "[Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework](#)" (Appendix A), which outlines the Province's plan to transform Ontario's early years and child care system.

The Province identified a number of challenges within Ontario's early years and child care system which fall into the following four broad areas:

1. Child care has become unaffordable for many of Ontario's lower and middle class families
2. Too many parents and caregivers struggle to access quality care options
3. It is often hard to recruit and retain qualified early childhood educators and additional support is needed to improve the quality of care
4. The current system is not responsive enough to the changing needs of families

The Province's framework identifies how these challenges will be addressed and the following details seven key areas of action over the next five years:

1. Increasing access to early years and child care programs and services
2. Ensuring a more affordable early years and child care system
3. Establishing an early years workforce strategy
4. Determining a provincial definition of quality in the early years
5. Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in early years and child care settings
6. Creating outcomes and measurement strategy
7. Increasing public awareness of Ontario's early years and child care system

With this 2017 increase in the funding investment in the early years sector, the Province is moving ahead on its first two areas of action identified. As this child care access expansion plan is over a 5-year period, funding is anticipated to be provided annually to municipalities to support the new and ongoing expansion.

LOCAL IMPLICATIONS

The City of Greater Sudbury currently has approximately 5,700 licensed child care spaces within the community. These spaces can be accessed by subsidized and full fee paying families, and over the course of a year, could potentially serve more than 10,000 children moving through licensed child care. The Ministry of Education has established a target for the local increase to child care access. For the first year of the five-year plan, the City is expected to increase access to licensed child care for approximately 300 children in 2017-18.

The Children Services Section has developed some potential strategies to achieve the goal of increasing access to licensed child care in the community, including:

- Increase child care spaces in existing programs located in schools
- Create new child care spaces within community buildings (ie government, not-for profit, community hubs, etc)
- Revise current policies to increase eligibility for fee subsidies for parents
- Revise child care operator policies/practices to increase access through extended hours

The Children Services Section is committed to engaging its partners throughout this process, to ensure transparency, and to meet the needs of families requiring licensed child care to support employment, education or social/medical needs.

NEXT STEPS

The Children Services Section will research, develop and implement its identified strategies, as appropriate, in consultation with, and supported by the Community Early Learning Leadership (CELL) group representing all licensed child care providers who have an Early Years funding agreement with the City, school boards, Ministry of Education staff, and other children services providers who support the broader early years system in the community.

Within provincial funding guidelines, the City will provide financial support for eligible programs that expand their services and programs in helping achieve the goal of increasing access to licensed child care spaces. An initial meeting with a representative group of the CELL took place in August, and regular meetings and updates with the larger CELL group will occur beginning October 2017. As this is a multi-year provincial initiative, the consultative process will be ongoing, until the province achieves its goal of 100,000 new children accessing licensed child care.

The Children Services Section will provide updates to Community Services Committee on the local progress and expansion achieved.