



## Committee of the Whole

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**Meeting Date:** May 28, 2024

**Submitted by:** Cindy Howard, General Manager of Finance and Community Services  
Joe Winsler, Manager of Social Services

**Subject:** Children's Services – 2024-2028 Service System Plan

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* the City of London is identified as the Service System Manager (SSM) for Child Care and Early Years for London-Middlesex. The County of Middlesex has a contract with the City of London to deliver child care and early years programs and services in the geographic area of the County of Middlesex, excluding the geographic area of the City of London.

These programs and services include licensed child care, EarlyON programs, special needs resourcing, child care fee subsidy, recreation programs and professional learning opportunities for early years professionals. Locally there is also support to the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC).

The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) requires Service System Managers to establish a child care and early years programs and services plan (service system plan) that addresses matters of Provincial interest under the Act. SSMs are to update their plans at a minimum every five years and consult with service providers and families in the development and implementation of plans.

The first year this service system plan was required was in 2019. A [Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan \(2019-2023\)](#) was developed that outlined five strategic priorities for Middlesex. This plan was submitted to the Province in June 2019.

## Provincial Interests

In 2017, the Province released the renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (renewed framework) which outlined seven key directions the Ministry of Education is taking to transform the child care and early years system:

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

The renewed framework also identified four important pillars:

- **Affordability:** Ensuring that early years programs and services, including licensed child care, are within affordable reach for families.
- **Access:** Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services.
- **Quality:** Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff.
- **Responsiveness:** Providing a range of early years and child care programs that are inclusive and culturally appropriate, located in schools, communities, workplaces and home settings so that parents – including parents who work irregular hours – can choose the options that work best for their family.

Locally, the research-based, evidence-informed Early Years Policy Framework developed by Fanshawe College offers considerations for the child care and early years system in London and Middlesex that align with the provincial policy framework, with the addition of a pillar focused on relationships. This framework has been vetted and validated by professionals, students, and others from across the child care and early years sector.

Since the establishment of the renewed framework, the Province, in support of the identified key directions, has implemented the following:

*Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC):* CWELCC, signed by federal and provincial governments on March 27, 2022, aims to make child care more affordable. The framework established under CWELCC seeks to lower costs while improving accessibility, quality, and inclusivity in Ontario's child care and early years sector. Ontario, under this agreement, plans to facilitate the creation of 86,000 new CWELCC licensed child care spaces by the end of 2026. London and Middlesex were

allotted 2,889 licensed child care spaces, this encompassed community based, school based and home based spaces. The agreement between the provincial and federal government also identified the ratios between for profit and non-profit organizations, these ratios were set at the 2022 levels.

*Ontario Child Care Workforce Strategy:* This strategy aims to support the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals, help achieve system growth, and ensure increased access to high quality licensed child care in the province. The Ontario Child Care Workforce Strategy will support Ontario's child care and early years professionals by implementing better wages and working conditions, supporting career laddering and entry to the profession, and building the profile of the profession by implementing new programs and building on existing initiatives.

### **Elements of the Service System Plan**

According to Provincial guidelines, key elements of the service system plan are to include:

- Environmental scan results that assess current and future child care and early years service gaps and opportunities;
- A description of the community planning processes that was used to inform the development of the plan and a commitment to consult, at regular or relevant intervals, through the life of the plan;
- Strategic priorities and intended outcomes that are responsive to community needs and align with Ontario's vision for child care and early years and provincial interest;
- A measurable and action-oriented implementation plan that describes how strategic priorities and outcomes will be met; and
- Accountability methods including the public posting of plans and reporting in accordance with the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014.

### **ANALYSIS:**

In 2023, a comprehensive engagement plan was developed to effectively connect, consult, listen, and respond to a diverse range of parties interested in and impacted by the local child care and early years system. The engagement plan involved several key audiences, including:

- Licensed Child Care operators and educators
- Early Years Service Providers
- Members of the Middlesex Children's Services Network, School Boards partners and other community stakeholders
- Families (parents and caregivers with children 0-12 years of age)

Data and engagement of the above groups prioritized connections with operators and families with the following backgrounds or experiences:

- Indigenous
- Francophone
- Children with special needs
- Black and racialized
- Low-income
- Newcomers
- Family Support program providers
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Low proximity to child care or early years programming sites
- Other equity denied groups

To gather data from interested key audiences, the following engagement activities were implemented through 2023:

- Workshops/Focus Group Sessions
- One-to-One and Small Group Interviews
- Surveys

Information collected resulted in a comprehensive set of data that reflects successes, challenges, and opportunities with respect to access, inclusion, affordability, responsiveness, and quality of the system. This data and information collected informed the priorities identified in the renewed service system plan.

Highlights of the data and information collected can be found in the attached ***Renewed County of Middlesex Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (2024-2028)***.

### **Elements of the Renewed Service System Plan**

The renewed service system plan focuses on five strategic priorities, called **Building Blocks**.

- **Accessibility:** Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services. This includes ensuring programs are affordable and responsive so that parents can choose the options that work best for their family.
- **Inclusion:** Creating inclusive environments where all children and families feel included and connected.
- **Quality:** Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff.
- **Collaboration:** Focusing on relationships, partnerships and collaboration to establish a seamless and family-centred service system.
- **Backbone:** Supporting the child care and early years system through responsive and accountable service system management.

Over the course of the five years of the plan, **Areas of Focus** in each of these building blocks will be explored and then actions **Put into Play** designed to create forward momentum. Timelines for implementing these actions over the five years of the plan have also been identified.

The following **Outcomes** have been identified for each Building Block:

- **Accessibility:** Families can easily access programs and services they need
- **Inclusion:** Families feel a sense of belonging and inclusion within child care and early years services
- **Quality:** Child care and early years programs, services and staff are high quality
- **Collaboration:** The Child Care and Early Years Service System is seamless and family-centered
- **Backbone:** Service System Management is responsive and accountable

To ensure continuous progress, a number of **Measures** have been identified for each outcome. Measuring progress will involve a number of different methods, including surveys, social media and the review of data collected as part of service and program delivery.

Details of the areas of focus and actions under each Building Block, as well as timelines and outcome measures, can be found in the attached ***Renewed County of Middlesex Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (2024-2028)***.

Full implementation of the plan is dependent on continued provincial and federal funding, as well as, collaboration between the County of Middlesex Children's Services Division, The City of London and an engaged, well-resourced child care and early years community.




The full plan and community profiles will be posted on the Middlesex County website: [www.middlesex.ca/socialservices/childrensservices](http://www.middlesex.ca/socialservices/childrensservices)

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

There is no financial impact.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:**

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
Cultivating Community Vitality 	Advance a diverse, healthy, and engaged community across Middlesex County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and support community wellness</li> <li>Innovate social and community services</li> <li>Attract, retain, and engage youth in our community</li> <li>Champion and encourage active transportation and public transit opportunities</li> </ul>
Strengthening Our Economy 	Encourage a diverse and robust economic base throughout the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support opportunities to create a stronger and sustainable agricultural sector</li> <li>Create an environment that enables the attraction and retention of businesses, talent, and investments</li> <li>Attract visitors to Middlesex County</li> <li>Support the development and prosperity of downtown core areas in Middlesex County</li> </ul>
Promoting Service Excellence 	Innovate and transform municipal service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations</li> <li>Engage, educate and inform residents, businesses, and visitors of county services and community activities</li> <li>Strengthen our advocacy and lobbying efforts with other government bodies</li> <li>Collaborate with strategic partners to leverage available resources and opportunities</li> <li>Build organizational capacity and capabilities</li> </ul>

**RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT the *Middlesex Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (2024-2028)* be approved; and

THAT the Plan be forwarded to the City of London as the Service System Manager for Child Care and Early Years for London-Middlesex and the Middlesex content will be incorporated into the larger Service System Manager Plan.

Attachments