



County Council

Meeting Date: September 12, 2023

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Subject: Children's Services Update

BACKGROUND:

Middlesex County's Child Care and Early Years services has continued to support families and child care centres within the County of Middlesex.

This includes the planning and funding of licensed child care programs; administering financial assistance for eligible families through fee subsidy; allocating additional resources to families; programs that provide care to children with special needs and oversight of EarlyON Child and Family Centres. These programs include Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC), Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG), General Operation Grant (GOG), Fee Subsidy and other onetime provincial funding.

ANALYSIS:

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care:

The Child Care and Early Years system has been going through many changes over the past year. With the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement there have been many modifications to policies and processes both internally and for the licensed child care centres who are supported. The CWELCC program was implemented to help families afford child care regardless of their financial situations. In November 2022 Middlesex County approved 16 licensed child care organizations to provide the CWELCC program in the County. In December 2022 the first reduction of fees were issued to families. The second reduction which happened in January 2023.

The Access and Inclusion Framework, as shared in March 2023, continues to be a driving force to open new school and community based licensed child care spaces. In January 2023 the Ministry of Education assigned 2,080 spaces to London and Middlesex. In May 2023 that number for the CMSM was increased to 2,889 spaces and a portion of the

licensed spaces have been assigned to Middlesex County specifically. These space are targeted to be opened by 2026.

To support the framework, the ministry also announced funding for Start-up Grants. These grants will support the directed growth by enabling spaces creation. The funding will assist the creation of spaces by offsetting the costs of expanding or creating spaces. This includes the purchase of equipment and/or facility renovations.

With the implementation of CWELCC the number of children on waiting lists for centres has increased. Between January and June 2023 the number of children on the waiting list has almost doubled to 3,267. This has created an even larger strain on the child care system.

The lack of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) in the province and in Middlesex County has had direct impacts on the waitlist. The challenges of low wages and lack of benefits for RECE's has restricted the number of new hires, resulting in child care centres not being able to open all of their licensed rooms fully.

Wage Compensations through CWELCC have been implemented to increase wages and to support centres with the increases in minimum wage. Another increase to minimum wage will happen in October 2023.

The challenges in meeting the targeted 2,889 licensed spaces by 2026 is multifaceted. The lack of RECE's to staff the expanded or new centres may be difficult, some centres are already in need of staff. The provincial funding provided to increase licensed spaces, must support both London and Middlesex. In a preliminary ask to current and potential new centres there were 13 requests for 369 new licensed spaces in Middlesex alone. Currently there is not enough funding to approve all requests from centres, but County staff is working the City of London, as our CMSM, on an action plan to support as many centres as possible. Increased provincial funding is required to meet both of these challenges.

General Operating Grant:

London and Middlesex use a point system to determine allocations amounts to eligible licensed child care centres. General Operating Grant (GOG) funding helps to offset operating costs of a centre and provides a stable funding source to operators. Infants, Toddlers, Preschool and School Age children are assigned a set number of points. This point system determines the amount of GOG funding each centre receives. In September 2022 the total GOG points was increased to \$8 per point from \$7. This amount was retroactive back to January 2022 (\$157,456.80 annual increase). After further review in 2023 working with the City of London, as the CMSM, it was determined to increase the amount to \$11 per point (\$551,923.80 annual increase), and decrease the waiting period

of new eligible licensed child care centres ability to access GOG from two years to one year.

Fee Subsidy:

As of July 2023 there are 169 unique children/112 families who are accessing fee subsidy supports. There is a small waitlist of 9 families (15 children) for fee subsidy. This waitlist is not due to lack of funding to support the family, but mainly due to lack of spaces available for families to access. There has been an increase in Ukrainian families accessing summer camps; this summer 8 families accessed supports.

General Updates:

Service Plan:

The Child Care and Early Years Services plan is due to be updated in 2024. Kelly Smith, Oakley Frechette, Nadine Devin, and Joe Winsor have been working in collaboration with the City of London to ensure the updated service plan reflects the needs of Middlesex County. Focus groups and surveys have been completed or shared with community members and community partners to complete. A review of the 2021 Statistics Canada data will also provide demographic information on how the County has changed since the 2016 Statistics Canada data was available.

Survey's which have been sent out to date:

- Caregiver survey – approximately 450 responses
- Library Supervisor survey – 7 responses
- Operators/Directors survey – 5 responses
- Educator survey – 5 responses
- Community Service Provider Survey – 6 responses

Staff will be promoting survey's until their closure dates in August and September 2023.

An update on the service plan will be brought to council at a later date.

Licensed Spaces in Middlesex County:

From 2021 to 2022, the total number of licensed childcare spaces increased by 12%, with the largest increase of 19% in Toddler spaces. The total number of School Age spaces increased by 1%.

- Licensed child care spaces = 918
- School Aged licensed spaces = 1248

River Heights:

The River Heights Child Care and Family Centre is on track to open its doors in September 2023. The child care centre is fully enrolled for their infant spaces, 1 full toddler room, 1 full preschool room and half a second preschool room. Another toddler room will not be opened in September due to the lack of staffing.

Cross-Jurisdictional Boundaries:




The Ministry of Education is reviewing their boundary regulations on the access of care outside of all CMSM's. The amendment is intended to increase parent's access to licenced fee subsidized child care spaces that may not be within the County of Middlesex. This amendment would increase the number of families from other communities (London, Oxford, Elgin, Lambton) accessing County licensed child care spaces. The County currently has agreements with centres outside of the boundaries giving more access to County residents. Further information will be brought to council as it is received.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

No financial implications at this time. As of the date of this report the 2024 funding model has not been received.

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

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Children's Services Update be received for information.