

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Five Year Child Care and Early Years Plan

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That County Council receive Report HS 2024-02, entitled, “Five Year Child Care and Early Years Plan” as information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) requires Oxford County, as the Service System Manager, to establish a child care and early years programs and services plan that address matters of provincial interest under the Act and to review the plan at a minimum of every five years.
- Oxford County Human Services has engaged the services of Beam Group through the Request for Proposal process to assist with the development of the next Five Year Child Care and Early Years Plan covering from 2025 through 2029.
- Jurisdictional scans and community engagement opportunities are anticipated to begin in April 2024 and the plan will be presented to County Council for approval in November 2024.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

County staff (in conjunction with Beam Group) will commence public consultation targeting parents/caregivers, service providers, community and municipal stakeholders to invite feedback that will inform priorities for Oxford County’s Child Care and Early Years Plan for the next five years. It is anticipated the final report will be brought to County Council for approval in November 2024. The Plan will be made available to the public and posted on the County’s website after Council approval.

Financial Impact

There will be no financial impact beyond what was approved in the 2024 budget.

Communications




The Strategic Communications Team will launch a consultation plan to elicit feedback and participation from parents/caregivers, municipal stakeholders and service providers across the County.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being		

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

Oxford County is the designated child care and early years Service System Manager (SSM) responsible for planning and managing licensed child care services and EarlyON Child and Family Centres in our community. Legislation sets out the requirement for the SSM to develop a local plan that reflects the “provincial interest” for child care and early years programs and services established in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.

Local service planning should reflect current legislation, regulations and policies/directives, including the Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centre Service Management and Funding Guideline. In 2018 staff engaged with community stakeholders in the development of the most recent Child Care and Early Years Service Plan that was approved by Council in 2019. The current Service Plan is in place until the end of 2024 and has been attached to the report for your reference.

On March 27, 2022, the federal government and Ontario reached a \$13.2 billion agreement on a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. The new system is intended to lower child care costs and improve access, quality and inclusion across Ontario’s child care and early years sector. CWELCC was implemented in Oxford County in 2023 as required by the Province.

In December 2023 the Province released their Access and Inclusion Framework to support Service System Managers with developing and implementing local service plans with an increased focus on access as it relates to inclusion. It is also closely linked with the Directed Growth strategy, and the Ministry’s commitments under the Ontario’s CWELCC Action Plan.

CWELCC and the Access and Inclusion Framework will inform the revised Service Plan and the development of the County’s Directed Growth Plan in alignment with Ontario’s vision to create a system where more families in Ontario have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care no matter where they live.

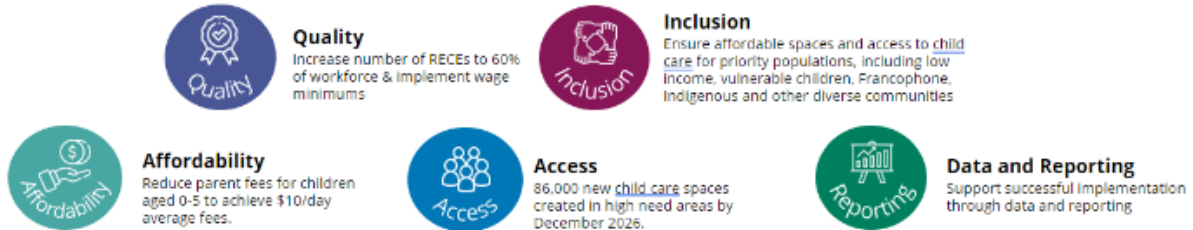
The ability to strengthen the quality of child care and early years experiences and enhance system integration requires the strategic leadership of Oxford County to initiate, sustain and monitor local planning and development.

Comments

The current Service Plan was developed around Ontario’s pillars in *Ontario’s Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (2017)* identifying affordability, access, quality and responsiveness as areas of priority for the province. The recent implementation of CWELCC and the Access and Inclusion Framework builds upon these provincial priorities to be included in the Child Care and Early Years Plan for 2025-2029.

Ontario's Action Plan below identified five key pillars for their vision of child care and early learning programs across Ontario.

- Ontario has developed an Action Plan with **five key pillars to achieve this vision:**



Ontario's vision and goals pertaining to child care and early learning programs will guide the review of the Service Plan to create Oxford County's Child Care and Early Years Plan for 2025-2029.

Beam Group will work alongside Oxford County's project team throughout the coming months with the goal of bringing a revised Child Care and Early Years Plan for 2025-2029 to County Council in November 2024 for approval. The project team will support and facilitate the work of Beam Group to ensure inclusive and meaningful engagement with key stakeholders.

Beam Group will conduct an assessment of the needs in the child care and early years services within Oxford County to produce a report which identifies service gaps, offers recommendations, and identifies goals and priorities for the next five years. Key focus areas for this plan include, but are not limited to:

- comprehensive service delivery that ensures that children and families have access to a wide range of high-quality early years services, including special needs resourcing, early years programming, mental health support and family supports;
- promoting inclusivity and equity by addressing the needs of all children, including those from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities;
- emphasizing the importance of early childhood development, with a focus on providing early intervention and support;
- a strategy for the child care and early years sector to support the recruitment and retention of a high-quality child care and early years workforce;
- improving educational outcomes for children, with an emphasis on supporting the transition from child care and early years programs to school;
- collaboration with local agencies, community partners, and stakeholders to create a coordinated and integrated network of services; and
- developing a directed growth plan in alignment with the Provincial Access and Inclusion Framework to better support access to child care.

The current Child Care and Early Years Plan was developed almost five years ago and much has changed in our communities. The pandemic has had a significant impact in many areas impacting the Child Care and Early Learning sector including but not limited to children, families,

child care providers, early learning programs, the workforce, population growth and municipalities. We anticipate and look forward to the revised Child Care and Early Years Plan for 2025-2029 to inform current and future needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The Child Care and Early Years Plan for 2025-2029 will serve as a comprehensive and strategic roadmap that outlines local priorities and direction in Oxford County. It will encompass a range of initiatives and actions aimed at addressing various aspects of children's services.

SIGNATURES

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Original signed by

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Departmental approval:

Original signed by

Kelly Black
Director of Human Services

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023
Attachment 2 - Oxford County Child Care and Early Year Service System Plan 2019-2024