



INFORMATION REPORT

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| TO: | Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee |
| COMMITTEE DATE: | July 13, 2020 |
| SUBJECT/REPORT NO: | Child Care Reopening Framework (HSC20027) (City Wide) |
| WARD(S) AFFECTED: | City Wide |
| PREPARED BY: | Jessica Chase (905) 546-2424 Ext. 3590 |
| SUBMITTED BY: | Grace Mater Director, Children's Services and Neighbourhood Development Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department |
| SIGNATURE: | |

COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not Applicable

INFORMATION

Closure of the Licensed Child Care System

On March 17, 2020, the Province of Ontario declared a state of emergency and issued an order for all licensed child care centres to close in response to the COVID-19 coronavirus, with the exception of licensed home child care.

During this closure period, the City has worked closely with child care operators and the Ministry of Education to sustain the existing child care system. Funding has been provided within the existing budget to support lost parental revenues, fixed costs such as rent and utilities, and staff salary top-ups. The funding model throughout this closure period has evolved in order to maximize all available federal and provincial supports. Since the closure period, approximately \$8.8 M has been issued to child care operators to support the sustainability of the system.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Emergency Child Care for Healthcare and Other Frontline Workers

On March 19, 2020, Children's Services and Neighbourhood Development staff partnered with licensed home child care agencies to offer licensed home child care to essential City staff at a nominal fee. This included staff in Fire, Paramedics, HSR, Long Term Care and Public Health.

On March 22, 2020, the Ministry of Education announced plans to exempt some child care centres from the emergency closure order to provide emergency child care to healthcare and other essential frontline workers, free of charge. In Hamilton, emergency child care continued to be provided through three licensed home child care agencies. Home child care was selected due to the smaller group sizes to mitigate potential risk to children and providers.

Children's Services and Neighbourhood Development staff worked closely with Public Health staff and the three licensed home child care agencies to ensure that additional health and safety measures were put in place. This included enhanced cleaning, screening procedures and ensuring pandemic plans were in place.

Since March 22, 2020, approximately 272 children have been in receipt of emergency child care free of charge. The list of eligible positions for emergency child care has expanded during this closure period based on additional provincial announcements.

The Ministry of Education has now announced that emergency child care will end effective June 26, 2020. All families have been notified. Families have the option of returning to their original child care arrangements or remaining with their current home provider provided that a space is available. Families that choose to remain in child care after June 26, 2020 will be responsible for child care costs or will be returned to fee subsidy if eligible.

Reopening the Child Care System

On June 9, 2020, the Province of Ontario announced that licensed child care centres may begin to reopen as early as June 12, 2020. All centres are required to meet additional requirements to safely reopen including enhanced cleaning, mandatory screening of staff and children, limitations on non-essential visitors and ensuring there is a COVID-19 response plan in place. Restrictions on the size of groups are limited to 10 individuals per room, including both staff and children.

Based on the direction of the local Medical Officer of Health, the decision was made to require that all centres complete and pass an in-person Public Health inspection prior to reopening. All staff are also required to complete mandatory training.

Children's Services and Neighbourhood Development staff have worked closely with Public Health to provide several tools and resources to child care operators to support their plans to reopen. Examples of tools include checklists, policy documents, posters and signage, screening tools and community learning sessions. City staff have also arranged for the professional resource centre in Hamilton to supply Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to child care centres to support their initial reopening.

Based on the group size limitations, the capacity of the child care system will be significantly reduced during this initial reopening phase. Child care operators are in the process of contacting families to assess their current child care needs and determine their capacity to meet these needs. Initial estimates have indicated that approximately 55% of families that were previously in receipt of child care have indicated they will require child care during this initial reopening phase.

Families that choose not to return to child care at this time will not be charged fees and their child care spaces will be held. Child care operators are also required to maintain child care fees at pre-COVID-19 levels until August 31, 2020. The City will also be extending the affordability grant which reduces the cost of child care by \$10/day for families until August 31, 2020 to align with provincial timelines.

Given the smaller group sizes, PPE requirements, and additional staffing needed for screening and enhanced cleaning, the cost to operate child care will be significantly higher during this time. City staff will be working closely with the Ministry of Education and child care operators to maximize all provincial and federal supports and sustain the system to the best of our ability. The total investment to child care centres during this time is not yet known and will be monitored closely. If funding projections exceed the budget, staff will need to explore cost containment strategies, such as discontinuing the affordability grant or increasing the waitlist for fee subsidy.

City staff are committed to continuing to work closely with the child care community to ensure a safe and gradual reopening of the licensed child care system.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None