

# 1

## "BEST START" CHILD CARE INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

*(Regional Council at its meeting on January 26, 2006 amended the following Clause to provide for the approval of an amended Attachment 1, the Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan, attached to the memorandum (January 26, 2006) from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing.)*

**The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 12, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:**

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve *Attachment 1, the Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan* that provides the framework to create 1,700 new child care spaces from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2008.

### 2. PURPOSE

As part of its broader Best Start Initiative, the Province has allocated an additional \$67.1 million over three years to York Region as Phase I funding to expand child care services. Council approved these funds in September 2005. This money does not require the usual 20% municipal share.

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for child care, it is the Region's responsibility to accept the dollars, develop a plan for expanded services, allocate the funds to service providers for the expanded services and perform due diligence activities relating to the services and the expenditures.

In September 2005, through Clause 2 of Report No. 6 of the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing, Council approved Phase 1 of the child care component of the Province's Best Start Initiative through approval of two plans: *Child Care Matters – the York Region Child Care Service Plan 2005 – 2008* and the preliminary *Best Start Transition Plan* (to March 31, 2006).

The Province requires that a third plan, the *Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan*, be approved by Regional Council and submitted to the Province for their approval, in-principle, by January 2006. The Infrastructure Plan provides the framework to create 1,700 new child care spaces for children 0 – 5 years from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2008 as required by the Best Start Provincial Guidelines. The proposed child care space

expansion of 1,700 spaces exceeds the Ministry target of 945 by 755 (80%) and will be implemented within the provincially approved funding allocation.

To implement the child care components of the Best Start Initiative, this report seeks Council's approval of the third component, the *Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan*.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

In November 2004, the Ministry of Children and Youth announced its Ontario's Best Start Initiative. Best Start is a comprehensive, evidence-based early learning and care strategy designed to help provide Ontario's children with the best possible start in life and help them to achieve success in school. The initiative which will be phased in over the next 10 years is comprised of a number of components including the expansion of the licensed child care system.

Phase I of Best Start (2005-2008) will focus on increasing the number of child care spaces and available subsidies for children in Junior Kindergarten (JK) and Senior Kindergarten (SK) as well as supporting moderate growth in the overall child care system for children birth to four years of age (not JK or SK).

To be eligible for the \$67.1 million, three plans have to be approved by Council and submitted to the Province. The first two of these plans, the *Child Care Service Plan 2005-2008* and the *Best Start Child Care Transition Plan* (to March 2006), were approved by Council in September 2005 and submitted to the Province. The third plan, which is the *Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan*, is the subject of this report.

#### **3.1 Funding – What York Region will Receive**

The Province has allocated \$67.1 million to York Region in new funds over a three-year period from October 2005 through March 2008 to expand the number of licensed child care spaces, increase the number of available subsidies, increase the number of children with special needs receiving services and improve wages for Early Childhood Practitioners. Within the allocated \$67.1 million, the Province has allocated \$22.5 million for infrastructure, including renovations to expand the number of child care spaces.

The Province is waiving the municipal cost sharing on this new child care funding beginning in 2005 and through to March 2008 (this coincides with what we understand to be the duration of the current federal/provincial agreements).

The provincial allocation is based on a funding model that recognizes child population under six years, low income population, education, geographic dispersion, language barriers and growth. This approach appears to take into account a number of pressures York Region now faces and is favourable to York Region.

Table 1 outlines the Allocation of Best Start Child Care Funding.

**Table 1**  
York Region Best Start Child Care Funding (000's)

| Description                                     | Oct-Dec<br>2005 | 2006            | 2007            | Jan-Mar<br>2008 | Total           |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Direct Program Funding                          | \$4,213         | \$13,541        | \$17,155        | \$4,683         | \$39,592        |
| Infrastructure (Capital)                        | 2,075           | 8,725           | 8,951           | 2,684           | 22,435          |
| Child Care Program<br>Administration & Planning | 580             | 1,781           | 2,127           | 575             | 5,063           |
| <b>Total</b>                                    | <b>\$6,868</b>  | <b>\$24,047</b> | <b>\$28,233</b> | <b>\$7,942</b>  | <b>\$67,090</b> |

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Province requires CMSMs to develop a *Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan* to plan and develop new child care spaces April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2008. The deadline set by the Province for approval of this Plan is January 2006.

##### 4.1 Staffing Impact

There is no additional staffing required above what was approved by Council in September 2005 in order to operationalize the *Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan* in 2006.

##### 4.2 Child Care Infrastructure Plan

York Region led the development of the *Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan* with support from the Child Care Expansion Task Force and Best Start Network. The Task Force included representatives of all school boards in York Region who identified the potential for child care space expansion in both existing and new schools. In addition, child care operators identified the potential for child care space expansion in existing and new centres near schools.

**Table 2**  
Potential for Child Care Space Expansion In and Near Schools

|              | Infrastructure Plan to<br>March 2007 | Infrastructure Plan<br>to March 2008 | Total        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| In Schools   | 410                                  | 961                                  | 1,371        |
| Near Schools | 145                                  | 184                                  | 329          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>555</b>                           | <b>1,145</b>                         | <b>1,700</b> |

The proposed child care space expansion of 1,700 spaces exceeds the Ministry target of 945 by 755 (80%) and will be implemented within the provincially approved funding allocation.

#### **4.3 Approval Process**

Upon approval from Regional Council, the Infrastructure Plan will be sent to the Province for their approval. In addition, the Plan will be provided to the Best Start Network for integration into the Best Start Network's Integrated Implementation Plan which will also be submitted to the Province.

#### **4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026**

The Best Start Phase 1 Implementation of child care service expansion, including the Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan, supports Vision 2026 by:

- Responding to children in need.
- Enabling access to services that aid in early child development.
- Anticipating and responding to the human service needs of a growing and changing population.
- Fostering effective working relationships with community partners.
- Working with federal and provincial government partners.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Province has approved an increase to York Region in base funding of \$67.1 million over a three-year period with no impact to tax levy. The increase in funding is intended to expand the number of licensed child care spaces, increase availability of child care subsidies, improve wages for Early Childhood Practitioners, and increase the number of children with special needs receiving services. Our funding allocation contains sufficient dollars to address reasonable increases to corporate service expenditures required to support this Department.

There is a financial consideration when the initiative ends in 2008. It is not known whether at that time, 100% funding will continue, or will be subject to its usual cost sharing.

### **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

According to York Region's Economic Strategy, a skilled workforce is one of the key drivers to retain the Region's competitiveness, attract investment and ensure future economic development. Access to quality child care is essential to allow parents to participate in the workforce and support York Region's economic prosperity.

In reality, quality child care is a strong economic development tool and a vital employment support. Local municipalities and local businesses benefit from a stable, expanded, quality child care system.

Additionally, it has been evidenced in studies and research papers that child care plays a key role in promoting healthy child development and helping children arrive at school ready to achieve success. It is also an essential support for many parents, helping them to balance the demands of career and family while participating in the workforce, or pursuing education or training.

Residents in all municipalities in York Region will benefit from the increased availability of child care spaces implemented through the Best Start Child Care Infrastructure Plan.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The Best Start Initiative provides York Region with a significant opportunity to address long standing wait list and service issues in child care and, at the same time, offers 100% funding for a minimum of three years.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(The attachment referred to in this clause was included in the agenda for the January 18, 2006 Committee meeting.)*