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### **WAIT LIST FOR CHILD CARE FEE ASSISTANCE**

**The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, May 25, 2004, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:**

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. The Provincial government be requested to increase the funding approval by \$5 million, through 100% Federal funding for Early Learning and Child Care in order to address the wait list for Child Care Fee Assistance.
2. In the event of increased Federal or Provincial funding, funds from Reserves be applied as the Regional share of costs for 2004.

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to request that the Province increase the funding approval by \$5 million and that funds from Reserves be applied as the Regional share of costs. The report provides Committee and Council with an update on the allocation of funding to address the wait list for Child Care Fee Assistance. In addition, it provides statistical information regarding the 2003 utilization of, and need for, additional Child Care Fee Assistance in York Region.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

In June 1998, Council approved revisions to municipal policy to ensure child care fee assistance is distributed equitably and funding goes to the maximum number of families in the greatest need across York Region. These revisions included:

- The Region be divided into four geographical zones for the purpose of managing the wait list for child care fee assistance.
- Child Care Fee Assistance funds be allocated to each zone to ensure families across York Region have equitable allocation in each zone based on the current wait list, 0 to 9 year population and approved budget.
- Wait list applications be managed on a first come first serve basis with consideration being given to families with exceptional needs.

In addition, Council approved the policy changes including:

- Referrals for Child Care Fee Assistance be collected centrally through single point access and managed within four zones.

- Referrals be managed within an approved priority consideration system.
- Families to update/confirm their need annually to remain on the wait list.
- Families who are unemployed can be offered time-limited child care while they job search excluding two-parent families where one parent is earning an income and families with school age children only.
- Families have two rights of refusal before being removed from the wait list.
- Eligible former fee assistance recipients returning to employment from a parental leave will not need to register their infant on the wait list but are accommodated on returning to employment.
- Eligible families moving into York Region from other areas of the Province will be placed on the wait list according to the date of their previous eligibility in their former municipality.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

While the current level of child care fee assistance is being maximized and allocated equitably across York Region, a monthly average of 1,386 children were registered on the wait list for child care fee assistance in 2003.

##### 4.1 Child Care Fee Assistance Wait List 2001, 2002 and 2003

Table 1 compares the average number of children on the wait list, per month, from 2001 to 2003.

**Table 1**  
Average Number of Children on the Wait List per Month

| 2001  | 2002  | 2003  |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 1,038 | 1,181 | 1,386 |

Table 2 identifies the average monthly wait list by sole support and two parent families in 2003.

**Table 2**  
Average Monthly Wait List by Sole Support and Two Parent Families in 2003

| Families on Waitlist            | Total Number | % of Total on Waitlist |
|---------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Sole Support Families           | 480          | 35%                    |
| Two Parent Families             | 906          | 65%                    |
| Total Average Monthly Wait List | 1,386        | 100%                   |

\*Source – Ontario Child Care Management System Report R015

## 4.2 Wait List Activity for 2003

In 2003, the monthly average number of new applicant referrals to the wait list exceeded the monthly average number of applicants removed from the wait list (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
Average Number of New Referrals to the Wait List per Month

| <b>Referrals to Wait List</b>               | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Sole Support Families                       | 79           |
| Two Parent Families                         | 97           |
| <b>Total Average Referrals to Wait List</b> | <b>176</b>   |

Table 4 shows the average number of applicants removed from the wait list per month in 2003.

**Table 4**  
Average Number of Applicants Removed From the Wait List per Month in 2003.

| <b>Removals from Wait List</b>               | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Sole Support Families                        | 64           |
| Two Parent Families                          | 66           |
| <b>Total Average Removals from Wait List</b> | <b>130</b>   |

A referral is removed from the wait list when a child is placed, a family no longer requires child care fee assistance, an applicant can not be contacted or a child reaches 13 years of age.

## 4.3 Wait List Practices

Staff of Child Care Services in the Family and Children's Services Division have streamlined current wait list practices to ensure the following 2003 Business Plan objectives are achieved:

- Provide cost effective, customer centred service that is accessible, timely, knowledgeable, competent, courteous and fair.
- Increase service levels while ensuring that services are provided in accordance with Provincial legislation and Regional direction.

### 4.3.1 Streamlined Wait List Practices

Refined wait list practices include the following:

- In accordance with Ministry directives, child care fee assistance is provided only to those applicants who are involved in an approved activity (work, education, training, Ontario Works employment assistance).
- Wait list applicants who are involved in an approved activity are assigned a "regular need" wait list status and are contacted on a first come, first serve basis.

- Wait list applicants who are not in an approved activity are assigned a “future need” wait list status. These applicants are responsible to contact Child Care Services to report their involvement in an approved activity.
- Families registering on the wait list for child care fee assistance are provided with a Geographic Information System (GIS) map which provides them with information regarding the location of Purchase of Service child care programs, age group served, location of area schools, other related programs, transportation routes, and the location of Community Services and Housing Department area offices, etc.
- The Child Care Translation Language Line was implemented in March 2002 and provides additional supports to Italian, Chinese, Russian, Tamil, Farsi, Urdu and Spanish speaking families wishing to apply for child care fee assistance. A total of 65 calls were received in 2003.
- Families enrolled in Early Intervention Services are provided with information packages to assist them in their understanding of eligibility criteria for child care fee assistance and their option to apply for priority consideration on the Region’s wait list.

#### **4.3.2. 2004 Wait List Survey**

In January 2004, 1,170 surveys were sent to wait-listed applicants requesting confirmation of their ongoing need for child care fee assistance and confirmation of their involvement in an approved activity.

In January 2004, 1,720 children were registered on the wait list. As a result of the survey, 596 children were removed from the waitlist resulting in a wait list of 1,124 children.

Of those 1,124 children:

- 606 (54%) have parents who are engaged in an approved activity and will be contacted on a first come, first serve basis.
- 490 (44%) have parents who are not engaged in an approved activity; the parents will be responsible to report their involvement in an approved activity and to update their wait list status.
- 28 (2%) have been approved for priority consideration.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Provincial government recently announced Federal funding for an additional 4,000 subsidized child care spaces, for preschool children, across Ontario in 2004/2005. Should the Province require that this funding be cost-shared by municipalities, York Region’s share would be included in the 2005 Budget Proposal for Committee and Council’s consideration.

### **5.1 Child Care Fee Assistance Funding**

Child Care Fee Assistance funding is managed within approved budgets.

York Region is maximizing its current funding in the allocation of fee assistance funds in accordance with the *Day Nurseries Act*. At the same time, a monthly average of 1,386 children were required to wait for fee assistance funding in 2003.

Between 1999 and 2003, while the child population, age birth to 12 years, rose by 8.75%, the level of Provincial child care fee assistance funding has remained the same resulting in:

- A decrease in the percentage of licensed spaces which are subsidized from 17% in 1999 to 10.6% in 2003.
- A 9% decrease in the percentage of children of working parents for whom subsidy is available.

### **5.2 Additional Funding**

The Federal government recently announced an additional \$900 million for child care over 5 years. \$25 million in 2003/2004, \$75 million in 2004/2005 and \$200 million in each of the following three years.

In 2003/2004, \$753,000 of this funding was allocated to York Region for one-time funding to address health and safety concerns and for the purchase of new equipment by child care operators serving children birth to six years of age.

The Province has not advised Consolidated Municipal Service Managers how this funding will be allocated in 2004/2005 and beyond.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

While the current level of child care fee assistance is being allocated equitably across all municipalities, the need for child care fee assistance continues to exceed Provincial funding approval. Children from each municipality remain on the wait list for fee assistance funding.

Staff have assessed and implemented measures to more effectively manage the wait list to ensure families' needs are met as quickly as possible. Children of eligible families with an immediate need are placed, on average, in 3.1 days after the families have been determined to be eligible for child care fee assistance. However, due to the level of Provincial funding, child care fee assistance has become a rationed resource in York Region.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The Regional Municipality of York is currently maximizing child care fee assistance funding. The fact that Provincial funding levels have remained the same, while the child population 0 – 12 years of age has risen by 13% since 1996, contributes to increasing

pressure on the child care system and on low income families in York Region and results in an extensive wait list for child care fee assistance.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.