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PROPOSED POLICY CHANGES TO ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR CHILD CARE FEE ASSISTANCE

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, September 10, 2003, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve policy changes to eligibility criteria for Child Care Fee Assistance as indicated in Section 4 of this report.
2. The Commissioner of Community Services and Housing be authorized to implement the changes effective January 1, 2004.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to revise eligibility criteria so that they are more reflective of today's economic and social realities.. In addition, this report seeks approval to implement practices that support the equitable treatment of all applicants receiving Child Care Fee Assistance and to support those families who are most in need.

3. BACKGROUND

The Regional Municipality of York is legislated to administer Child Care Fee Assistance to families who meet eligibility criteria established by the *Day Nurseries Act (DNA)* and by policy set by the municipality. Eligibility for Child Care Fee Assistance is determined through a needs test that compares a family's assets and total household income to the budgetary needs of the household. The Province establishes ceilings for many allowable expenses, (basic needs amounts, shelter amounts, etc.), and allows Consolidated Municipal Services Managers (CMSMs) discretion to set maximum amounts to certain budgetary items/expenses, (travel and transportation, other expenses such as laundry, child support payments, life/car insurance, etc.) Regional eligibility criteria were last reviewed in June 1998 and changes were approved by Regional Council in Report No. 6 of the Health and Social Services Committee, June 11, 1998.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Eligibility Criteria

Staff of the Family and Children's Services Division have identified that the following revisions to the eligibility criteria are required:

- Establish a maximum limit to "other allowable expenses" to \$300.00 per month.
- Increase the maximum allowable car insurance expense to \$92.00 per car, per month, or \$184 per month for a two-parent family.
- Introduce an allowable expense for cable television of \$25.00 per month.
- Increase the allowable travel allowance to \$0.25 per kilometre.
- Establish a standard user fee for Ontario Works participants with the same level of income as *DNA* applicants.

4.1.1 Other Allowable Expense Maximum

The Province allows the municipality to set policy regarding other common budgetary expenses such as coin laundry, disposable diapers, life and property insurance, car insurance, books and tuition, etc. Currently, the municipality allows each applicant to claim all verified expenses with no established maximum.

A file review conducted in June 2003 shows that 84% of applicants claimed "other" expenses of \$300.00 per month or less. The implementation of a monthly maximum will ensure all applications for Child Care Fee Assistance are treated in an equitable manner and that funding supports those families most in need. Also, families who have available income, exceeding the proposed maximum, can contribute those dollars toward the cost of child care.

4.1.2. Increase Allowable Car Insurance Maximum

The Province allows the municipality to set policy regarding maximum allowable car insurance expenses.

Currently the municipality allows \$83.33 per month, per car, to a maximum of \$166.00 per month for a two-parent family. This maximum has not been increased since 1998. An increase to the maximum of \$92.00 per car, per month, or \$184.00 per two-parent, two-car households reflects the overall increase to insurance costs over the past five years.

4.1.3. Cable Expense \$25.00 per Month

In the 2001 Census, 38% of York Region's population reported a non-official language as their mother tongue. Television provides many non-English speaking families with a connection to resources and services in their home language. The implementation of a monthly maximum cable expense of \$25.00 per month would support this population to access information via multi-national/cultural networks.

4.1.4 Increase Travel Expenses to \$0.25 per Kilometre

Currently, the municipality allows an applicant to claim the cost of their round trip transportation to the day nursery and place of employment at \$0.10 per kilometer to a maximum of \$250.00 per month for a single parent family and \$400.00 per month for a two-parent family. This transportation allowance has not been increased for over 10 years.

An increase to \$0.25 per kilometer more accurately reflects the cost of gasoline today.

The current maximums would remain in effect.

4.1.5 Parental Contribution – Ontario Works

Currently the municipality supports the working poor, based on income and family composition, by assigning a \$2.00 per day, per family, minimum user fee for child care services. Current practice also exempts Ontario Works participants from paying any fee.

The parental contribution paid by families funded under the *DNA* will remain the same. Ontario Works participants with the same level of income as the working poor families funded under the *DNA* will begin paying \$2.00 per day for child care services.

4.2 Implementation Plan

All families in receipt of Child Care Fee Assistance will be notified of the changes in eligibility criteria and the effective date by mail. In addition, notice regarding the changes will be posted in all area offices' reception areas and intake rooms. Eligibility changes will be made at each family's next scheduled eligibility review after January 1, 2004.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The provision of funding that supports families most in need also enables access to services that aid in early child development and responds to children in need.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Child Care Fee Assistance funding is managed within approved budgets. The implementation of the above eligibility criteria will be managed within approved budget levels.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The proposed changes to eligibility criteria for Child Care Fee Assistance more accurately reflects today's cost to reside and raise a family in York Region. The changes continue to support applicants with an assessed financial need.

7. CONCLUSION

Revisions to current eligibility criteria for Child Care Fee Assistance more accurately reflect today's economic and social realities and support those families who are most in need.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.