

DATE: February 26, 2020

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Chris Bone, Associate Director Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships

SUBJECT: City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan 2020

ATTACHMENT(S): City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan 2020
City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan – Power Point Presentation

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated February 26th, 2020 from the Associate Director of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships titled “City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan 2020”.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the opportunity to receive and review the City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan 2020.

BACKGROUND:

The Province of British Columbia is working to address shortages in access to child care through investments in child care space creation, the building of quality child care facilities, and in the training of early childhood educators. This expanded investment in the child care sector will represent \$1 billion over three years. This includes \$237 million to create 22,000 new licensed child care spaces across British Columbia.

The Community Child Care Planning Program administered by UBCM, is one of several BC government initiatives designed to improve access to child care for British Columbians. This program supports municipalities to undertake child care planning activities and create a child care action plan. The City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan was developed with funding provided by the Community Child Care Planning Program Grant from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM).

The City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan Overview

The City of Prince George Child Care Action Plan presents an examination of the current state of access to child care in Prince George, including the availability of spaces according to age, license type, location, timing and schedule, child care preferences and needs, and access to child care for underserved populations. It describes the results of the inventory of licensed child care spaces, and includes space creation targets for the community. The report concludes with recommendations and

suggestions for the City of Prince George and community partners to create new child care spaces and improve access to affordable, quality child care in the community.

A. Data Collection - Key Components of the Community Child Care Planning Process

- 1. Child Care Space Inventory:** Recipients of the grant were required to complete a comprehensive inventory of licensed child care spaces in Prince George. The inventory was populated from databases held by the Ministry of Children and Families and Northern Health Licensing. Other sources that contributed to the inventory included community engagement activities and property databases from City of Prince George.
- 2. Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Recipients of the community child care planning grant were also required to complete an inclusive community engagement in order to collect information regarding child care needs in the community. The City of Prince George conducted a variety of engagement activities with child care stakeholders, parents and child care providers. A parent survey, a provider survey, a poster display, interviews with key stakeholders and a focus group for child care providers were among the activities implemented as part of the community engagement. While all the various engagement activities provided valuable information to inform the action plan, of particular significance was feedback collected from the parent survey. The parent survey was disseminated online using Simple Survey electronic survey software. The survey was open from September 7–October 29, 2019 and in that timeframe a total of 805 surveys containing at least partial data were received. The survey response rate confirmed the urgency of this issue for parents and families with young children and the specific feedback validated many of the themes that anecdotally we have been hearing in the community related to the child care needs of families.

The child care space inventory data, along with the engagement activities, provided an analysis of the current state of child care in Prince George. This included an assessment of child care space availability, child care utilization patterns, and current issues and concerns regarding child care in the community.

B. Assessment of Need - Key Findings

Utilizing the information from the community engagement and data collection activities (identified above), several key findings about child care in our community became evident:

1. Shortages for child care spaces were identified for children of all ages; however, the most substantial shortages were for infant and toddler care (0-36 months) and school age care (ages 6-12).
2. Families also experience difficulty accessing care that meets their specific needs and preferences, including location, timing/schedules, staff qualifications, and programming.
3. The inability to access suitable child care had multiple consequences, including parents leaving their employment, working reduced hours, or changing positions, or accepting spaces in unsatisfactory child care arrangements.
4. An existing shortage of ECE trained staff was identified as a critical issue underlying shortages of quality child care spaces. In particular, shortages of ECE trained staff affects access to child care for underserved populations, such as children who require extra supports.

Action Plan Recommendations

The Action Plan concludes with proposed child care space creation targets as well as a series of recommendations, strategies and actions for how, as a community, we can effectively, efficiently, and creatively work towards meeting these targets. The Child Care Action Plan includes 17 recommendations centralized around themes that emerged from the surveys and engagement activities. Themes included:

Space creation

While there are shortages of spaces for all ages, care for ages 0-36 months and school age care have the largest shortages. Therefore, there must be a concerted effort to establish infant/toddler and school age spaces.

Staffing for child care

Throughout the engagement process, stakeholders acknowledged appreciation for government funding that would enable the creation of new child care spaces. However, it was noted that it was equally important to address staffing shortages. If this is not done, qualified staff from one location will be “poached” by another, ultimately impacting accessibility to quality care throughout the community. Compounding the issue of staff shortage is a general “undervaluing” of child care work.

Co-location of desired services

Emphasis was also placed on the need to consider a “hub” approach to child care, which would include the co-location of supportive services that could benefit underserved populations.

Flexible child care

Very few spaces in Prince George accommodate the needs of people who do shift work and/or work part time. Therefore, it will be important to increase the availability of child care for those with varying schedules and hours. Examples of non-mainstream schedules and times that are particularly in demand include part-time care, extended hours, statutory holidays, weekends, overnight, and drop-in/occasional care.

Reducing barriers for underserved populations

Feedback emphasized the need for child care providers to partner with organizations working with underserved populations to develop child care spaces. Examples include Indigenous organizations, organizations serving low income families and/or organizations serving minority language and cultural groups.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Prince George’s City Council identified a number of focus areas for the year 2020 including initiatives related to the City’s role in advancing poverty reduction, aligned with the provincial poverty reduction strategy. Recommendations identified in the Prince George Child Care Action plan will contribute to improving access to child care services, which is a key means to reducing poverty for families with young children.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

With funding from UBCM, the City of Prince George prepared a Child Care Action Plan. The plan includes themes emerging from a comprehensive consultation process, recommendations, and child care space creation targets. The plan will be considered as the City advances 2020 work plan priorities, including the identification of its role in poverty reduction at the local level. The plan will also serve as a key reference for organizations seeking funding and/or working to improve access to affordable, quality child care in the community.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Chris Bone, Associate Director of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships

PREPARED BY: [Sarah Brown, Supervisor Community Well-being and Partnerships]

APPROVED:

Kathleen Soltis, City Manager

Meeting Date: 2020/03/23