

Region investigates hiking child-care fees ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Region of Waterloo's gold-star child-care programs may be more costly in coming years.

Politicians are questioning how they compare against other facilities.

"What are the fees that we charge people to enjoy that superior service and if there's room for those fees to increase appropriately, then we need to have that discussion," Coun. Sean Strickland said.

In October, politicians debated closing the five centres because of the premium it costs taxpayers to provide the service.

The recommendation came from a consultant who was hired to review the services the Region of Waterloo provides.

Consultants recommended taking the estimated \$2.5 million in savings from closing the centres to fund 200 new subsidized child-care spaces.

Under provincial legislation, the region is required to act as a service manager for child-care services. Responsibilities include determination of subsidy eligibility, ensuring compliance with the Day Nurseries Act and providing funding to support children with special needs in child care.

The region is not required to operate child-care centres.

Politicians got an earful from parents of the 250 children in those centres about the potential closure. Many shared child-care horror stories about other providers and said how lucky they felt when they got into a regional centre.

Many parents said they would be willing to pay more for their children's care at regional centres to keep them open.

In 2016, staff are expected to report back on the idea.

"I think we have to make sure that we are charging the right number, that we are not undercharging because apparently there are some not-for-profits that are charging more and given our level of service ... we should be near the top of the list on charges," Coun. Tom Galloway said.

Last week, the region released its fees and charges bylaw for 2016.

Weekly and daily child-care fees will increase between \$1 and \$10 depending on the age of the child and number of days they will attend.

About 8,775 children under the age of 12 receive care in 137 private and non-profit centres in the region.

Another 1,185 children are in licensed home child-care programs.

Most child-care spaces are in not-for-profit and private centres and just a handful get into the region's five centres, which are renowned for offering the coveted High Scope Curriculum and have been accredited as demonstration sites. Only four other programs in the province have achieved accreditation.

To access the child-care system the region oversees, parents sign up on a waiting list. They rank their top choices and those requests are then sent to the child-care centres. When a spot opens up, parents are contacted and arrangements to enrol are made.

-reprinted from The Record

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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