Frequently Asked Question about the Children’s Centres Service Review (Updated November 30, 2020)

This FAQ was prepared to support parents and the community with questions about the Children’s Centres Review and its impacts on their Children’s Centres. If you have a question that is not covered, please email childrenscentrereview@regionofwaterloo.ca and we will answer it for you.

1. How will Council make the decision about whether or not to close the Children’s Centres?
   - Regional Council will discuss the third party review of the Children’s Centres and the recommendation to close the Children’s Centres at the November 17, 2020.
   - Two additional meetings have been scheduled to support decision making: a special input meeting on November 18, 2020 at 6 pm, and special council meeting on December 2, 2020 at 6 pm.
   - It is anticipated that Council will make their decision during the December 2, 2020 meeting.

2. How can I participate or watch Council meetings?
   - All Council meetings are being held virtually and recorded and broadcasted live on the Regional Website.
   - Please see the Regional website for how you can communicate with Council.

3. How soon could the Children’s Centres be closing?
   - Staff are recommending the Kinsmen, Cambridge, Christopher, and Edith MacIntosh Children’s Centres close in mid 2021 to align with children moving into Junior Kindergarten.
   - Due to obligations to continue child care operations at Elmira Children’s Centre the transition plan for Elmira will be completed separately. The plan will be created in collaboration with the Waterloo Region District School Board and Ministry of Education with consideration of WRDSB-ROW Joint Use Agreement and CUPE 1883 collective agreement. According to the Joint Use Agreement, 365 days notice is required to transfer operations at Elmira to a different child care operator.
4. If Council makes the decision to close the centres, are there licensed child care spaces available for my child(ren) elsewhere?
   - Yes there is capacity in both licenced home child care and child care centres across Waterloo Region. Enrollment is currently at 70% of operating capacity for children ages 0 to 4 and this is due to the impacts of COVID-19 including:
     - Lowered demand for licensed child care (e.g., due to changes in employment, health concerns, etc.).
     - Reduced child care capacity (e.g., due to new Public Health requirements).

5. What supports will the Region provide to help me find a new child care space(s)?
   - If Council approves the closure of the Children's Centres, a dedicated team of Regional staff will work with you to develop a plan to transition your child(ren) into another child care space.
   - Children's Services provides all families in Waterloo Region with access to OneList, the online application system for licenced child care in Waterloo Region. Families can search OneList for licenced child care providers by location and other criteria.

6. Will I lose my subsidy or special needs supports through this process?
   - No, your subsidy eligibility will not be impacted as long as your child remains in a licenced child care setting. You will need connect with your subsidy caseworker before the new placement begins.
   - Special needs supports will continue, as long as your child remains in licenced child care.

7. Do other licensed child care centres provide special needs supports?
   - Yes, all licensed child care operators are assigned a Resource Consultant through KW Habilitation and/or Kidsability. These agencies provides ongoing program and classroom special needs supports, such as training and general inclusion strategies based on the needs of the child(ren).

8. Should I start looking for another child care placement right away?
   - Council has not made a decision yet, however families are free to apply for licenced child care at anytime through OneList.
   - If you find a child care program you would like your child to attend, please contact them to discuss a possible placement.

9. If I find another placement for my child before the centre closes, can I move my child at any time?
• Yes, you can start your child in a new placement as soon as you find something. You will not be held to the 30-day notice period in your fee agreement; you can leave the centre at any time.

10. Will the centre still have a one-week closure in the summer?
• If Council approves a closure of the centres, the centres will not be closed for one week in the summer.

11. If the Region cannot directly operate child care out of their centres why can’t a community provider do it out of their locations?
• The steering committee did not recommend this direction because it was not financially viable.

12. If the centres close, what will happen to the staff?
• We recognize this process and potential outcome will be difficult for all staff. If the recommendation is approved the impacted staff will be provided with information about their severance and retirement options and will be supported through the process.

13. How much time will be given to parents to find alternative child care if Council decides to close the centres?
• Once Council makes a decision a full implementation plan will be developed including a time line for closure. Staff have recommended closure in September so that children who are entering junior kindergarten will not be impacted.

14. What will happen to the centre buildings if Council approves the closure?
• The Region’s Facilities department will create a strategy to sell the four buildings (Edith MacIntosh, Kinsmen, Christopher, Cambridge) for an alternative purpose other than child care.
• The Region of Waterloo leases the space for Elmira’s Children’s Centre from the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB). A plan will need to be created with WRDSB to find another child care provider for that site.

15. Who was on the Steering Committee?
• Jim Erb, Regional Council, Waterloo, Michael Harris, Regional Council, Kitchener (Chair), Karl Kiefer, Regional Council, Cambridge, Geoff Lorentz, Regional Council, Kitchener, Sandy Shantz, Regional Council, Woolwich, Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Community Services, Linda Bird, Manager, Children’s Centres, Barbara Cardow, Director, Children’s Services, Cathy Deschamps, Director, Treasury Services, Craig Dyer, Commissioner, Corporate Services/Chief Financial Officer, Ellen McGaghey, Director, Facilities & Fleet Management, Colleen Rickert, Human Resources
16. **How was this Service Review different than the previous one?**

- The goal of the 2015 Service Review was to identify opportunities to reduce costs and/or help make Regional programs more efficient and effective. The 2015 Review identified 19 opportunities for Regional Council to consider including the service delivery model of the Region’s directly operated Children’s Centres.
- In 2019 the province provided funding to municipalities and Regional Council contracted with KPMG to update the 2015 Service Review. Council identified a need for more in-depth independent review of the Region’s Children’s Centres.
- KPMG conducted the third party review of the Children’s Centres which involved: stakeholder engagement, environmental scan, current state analysis of the system and centres, and identification of service delivery options and improvements.

17. **What are the primary costs of the Children’s Centres and why are they so much more expensive to operate than a child care centre in the community?**

- This information can be found in [KPMG final report](#) on page 21-23.

18. **Can you provide more information on current waiting list and enrollment?**

- Regional staff have sent a request for data regarding current capacity and occupancy for licensed child care centres with a Purchase of Service with the Region of Waterloo. We are in the process of working with child care operators to ensure all data is accurate. Once the data has been verified, we will further analyze and summarize it, including by municipality and other variables. At this time the following system data is available:
  - There are approximately 2,000 unused centre-based licensed child care spaces in Waterloo Region for children ages 0 to 4 years as of October 16, 2020
  - Enrollment is approximately 71% of current operating capacity for centre-based spaces for children ages 0 to 4 years as of October 16, 2020
  - Enrollment is approximately 64% of current operating capacity for centre-based spaces for children ages 4 to 12 years as of October 16, 2020.

   Most of these spaces are before- and after-school spaces located in schools.
19. The Federal government has announced they are in support of universal child care that would allow for parents to pay an affordable standard fee ($10 dollars). Why would Council close the Children’s Centres now before we find out the governments plan?

- The Federal government has not released a firm commitment or the associated plan related to universal child care. The timeline of this process is unknown and uncertain and the Region as the service manager has a responsibility to be responsive to the entire child care and early years systems within the existing government priorities.

20. Why doesn’t the Region look for other ways to respond to their deficit beyond closing the centres?

- The Region of Waterloo regularly looks for opportunities to maximize the value of every taxpayer dollar to ensure services are achieving the highest value for money.
- KPMG findings showed that 10.2% of the Children’s Services budget was used to provide 1.9% of the spaces across the region.
- The Steering Committee made the recommendation to close the Children’s Centres so that $4.3 million dollars could be re-invested to support affordability, equity, sustainability, access, and quality across the entire child care system.
- There will be annual savings of approximately $678,000 from the tax levy and $294,000 from tax supported reserve contributions. Council will have the opportunity to determine priorities for these tax levy savings.
- More information regarding the follow up to the 2019 Service Review can be found in Nov 17, 2020 council report (HRC-PER-20-02) as well as the 2021 Budget process.

21. Why didn’t the Steering Committee choose one of the other service delivery options?

- The Steering Committee made their recommendation as it was the only choice that ensured the funding would be distributed more equitably to support the entire system.

22. How will the Region ensure that quality of child care is actually improved if the children’s centres close?

- If the recommendation is approved, the Region will be implementing a quality measurement tool and enhanced quality improvement supports for all licensed child care programs.
23. Why did the Steering Committee not have greater community and parent representation?
   • The Steering Committee consisted of Regional Councillors, Senior Staff from relevant Regional departments, and community child care expert.
   • Input was collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups from a wide range of stakeholders including: parents, child care providers, staff, community organizations, and other municipalities.

24. If the centres close, will the impacted children go to the top of the community provider’s waiting list?
   • The Region does not direct how child care centres manage their own waiting list. Each provider sets their own internal wait list policies and manages it accordingly (e.g., prioritizing siblings of children already in attendance, children with special needs, etc.).

25. Why can’t a community provider take over the centre buildings and provide child care in those spaces?
   • The Steering Committee did not recommend this direction because it was not financially viable.
   • For more information, please see option 3 in the KPMG final report starting on page 60 of that report. The KMPG report starts on page 21-23 of the document in that link.

26. Why couldn’t we phase out all of the children in the Regional child care centres over time?
   Unfortunately, phasing out all of the Regional child care centres would take until 2023 and would not allow us to maintain adequate staffing and a consistent environment for children. In KPMG’s engagement with other municipalities that have divested child care, having a long transition period was not advisable due to challenges it created for staff and children. We recognize that transitions are difficult and we will work with parents to support all childrens’ transitions into their new child care programs.

27. Will the virtual meeting with parents and the comments be recorded and sent to Regional Council?
   • Due to privacy considerations the recording of virtual meetings is not permitted.
   • All of the questions have been summarized and added to this FAQ document. The FAQ document is posted on the Region’s website and is publically available.
   • Please see the Regional website for how you can communicate with Council.
28. Why is the Region facing such a large deficit? Did the Federal and Provincial government provide funding to address COVID related spending?

- Please see the Region of Waterloo 2021 budget process for more information.

29. Has a decision regarding the closure of the Children’s Centres already been made? Is it even worth contacting Council about my opinion?

- Regional Council will make a decision about the future directions of the Children’s Centres on December 2, 2020.
- Please see the Regional website for how you can communicate with Council.

30. How is quality defined in child care and early learning in Ontario?

- No single characteristic ensures overall program quality, but rather, many factors contribute to the quality of early learning and childcare (ELCC) settings. Quality is often measured in ELCC programs by using two factors:

  1. **Structural Factors** such as adult to child ratios, group size and composition, physical environments, and educator education and working conditions.
  2. **Process Factors** including the nature of the leadership within the program, interactions between both teacher and child and child and other children and learning opportunities for children.

- Indicators of high quality programs include small child group sizes, high staff-to-child ratios, adherence to health and safety policies, highly trained, well-compensated staff and approaches that align with the Provincial guidance document *How Does Learning Happen?* and well planned physical environments. Despite the previous indicators, no universal definition for quality in ELCC exists to date. However, research suggests that positive outcomes for children are strongly connected to high quality ELCC experiences.

31. How does the Region of Waterloo support quality in child care and early learning and child care programs?

- Our vision for quality in Waterloo Region was developed by our community of child care operators. All operators who have a contract with the Region participate in a continuous quality improvement program called Early Years Engage.
- With “Our vision for Quality” document as a reference point, Early Years Engage requires programs to continuously improve to positively impact children and families. Moving forward, Children’s Services will be
implementing a quality measurement tool and enhanced quality improvement supports for all licensed child care programs.

32. How are centres in the community regulated?
   • Licensed child care programs are regulated by the Ministry of Education through the Child Care and Early Years Act (2014). As the early learning and child care system manager, the Region of Waterloo has the responsibility to increase quality of child care across the child care system.

33. How many families are enrolled in the Region’s child care centres?
   • The children’s centres are operating at lower capacity due to COVID-19. Currently, 152 of the 207 Regional operated child care spaces are occupied. More than half of the children enrolled (79) will be of Junior Kindergarten age in the fall, and 72 will be supported to transition to community operated spaces.

34. Do other licensed child care centres provide special needs supports?
   • Yes, all licensed child care operators are assigned supports through KW Habilitation and/or Kidsability. These agencies provide ongoing program and classroom special needs supports, such as training, general inclusion, individualized plans and strategies based on the needs of the child(ren).

35. How many licensed spaces are there in the system, and how many spaces are vacant?
   • The Region of Waterloo, as service manager for licensed early learning and child care, oversees the provision of approximately 14,000 licensed child care spaces through centres and home child care programs. This service is provided by 67 different child care operators. About 2,000 licensed child care spaces for children from birth to four years old are currently vacant.

36. The vacancies are due to COVID-19 but won’t we need those spaces when the pandemic is over?
   • We do not know what the long term impacts of the pandemic will be, so while we must plan for the future, we must also address the challenges facing the system now and in the foreseeable future. Due to more parents working from home, there are about 2,000 unfilled licensed child care spaces for children from birth to age four. Consequently, 70 percent of licensed child care operators in the community have identified that lack of parent interest and demand has had the most significant impact on current enrollment. These challenges are impacting the sustainability of some child care programs and additional funding is required to maintain child care spaces and prevent further closures across the system. Over the long term, as demand increases
and more spaces are needed, the Region will work with the Ministry of Education and the community to address those needs.

37. If these centres close, are those spaces lost forever?
- Elmira Children’s Centres will continue to offer child care, but with a different provider. If the other four centres (name these) close, the families enrolled will be supported as needed. With the current 2,000 unfilled licensed child care spaces in the community, the focus would be on ensuring no additional spaces are lost by supporting the sustainability of licensed operators in the community who are struggling with the impacts of the pandemic. Over the long term, as service system manager for child care and early learning in Waterloo Region, the Region would identify and plan for changing needs in the community, including an increase in demand.

38. Are there plans for future expansion of child care in Waterloo Region?
- Before the pandemic, the Ministry of Education had approved plans for five new licensed child care centres to be co-located in schools. These would be funded by the Ministry. We are awaiting updated projected timelines from the Ministry for these future programs.

39. How many municipalities in Ontario directly operate child care centres?
- There are 47 municipalities across Ontario. Currently, 13 municipalities directly operate child care centres and 10 others have divested their child care centres. Below is a full list of each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipalities that have divested</th>
<th>Municipalities currently operating child care centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Brantford</td>
<td>City of Cornwall</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Greater Sudbury</td>
<td>City of Hamilton</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Kingston</td>
<td>City of Ottawa</td>
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<td>City of Windsor</td>
<td>City of Peterborough</td>
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<td>County of Dufferin</td>
<td>City of Stratford</td>
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<td>County of Lambton</td>
<td>City of Toronto</td>
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<td>County of Oxford</td>
<td>County of Hastings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipality of Chatham-Kent</td>
<td>County of Wellington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Municipality of Peel</td>
<td>District of Parry Sound Services Administration Board</td>
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<td>Regional Municipality of York</td>
<td>Regional Municipality of Durham</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Regional Municipality of Halton</td>
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<td>Regional Municipality of Niagara</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Regional Municipality of Waterloo</td>
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</table>
40. Can I delegate to the December 2, 2020 Council meeting?
   • Yes, the December 2, 2020 is open to delegations who have not delegated yet on this matter. Please see the Regional website for how you can communicate with Council and register to speak.

41. Can you explain why the funding for 0-4 year olds and before and after school programs are together?
   • Child care funding can’t be split into 0-4 versus school age spaces at this time. The challenge is that a number of funding streams (such as Wage Enhancement, Operating Funding and Capacity Building) are provided to programs that serve both 0 to 4 and school age children. The funding for programs serving 0 to 12 is provided as one grant and is not divided based on ages served.

42. Are the 2,000 spaces strictly centres aged 0-4yrs?
   • Yes. Only infant, toddler and preschool spaces are included in this figure.

43. Can you please explain the difference between "empty"/"vacant" or "unused" in regards to the 2,000 spaces?
   • In total, there are approximately 2,000 vacant spaces in licensed child care centres in Waterloo Region for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
   • There are approximately 1,000 vacant staffed spaces for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. This is calculated based on the difference between the reported enrollment and operating capacity (capacity based on current staffing) of centres in Waterloo Region as of October 13, 2020.
   • In addition, there are approximately 1,000 vacant spaces that are currently unstaffed for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. This is calculated based on the difference between reported operating capacity (capacity based on current staffing) and licensed capacity of centres in Waterloo Region as of October 13, 2020.

44. I am wondering if more information can be provided vis-à-vis the “Environmental Scan” undertaken by KPMG as part of the preparation of their report.
   • We have posted all three of KPMG reports on the Region’s website.

45. Can you provide the reference to where I can find the RFP bid document for the Third Party Review of the Children’s Centres?
46. Where can I find a copy of the 2019 Service Review Report and Outcome?

47. The Steering Committee was made up of almost all Council members, does that not seem like a biased starting point from the get go? How many additional councillors will be participating in the vote and what is the number/majority needed to keep the centres open?
   • Regional Council is composed of the Regional Chair, 8 directly elected Regional Councillors, and Mayors of the 7 local municipalities; the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo and the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, WiImot and Woolwich.
   • Please see the following link for more information about how Regional Council makes decisions. If you have further questions please follow up with the Clerk’s office (there is a tab on the website that says “Contact us”).

48. Can you please explain why you are comparing the Children’s Centres budget to the entire Children’s Services budget and not just the 0-4 year old budget? Can you provide a breakdown of the Children’s Services Budget.
   • Here is a further breakdown of the 2020 Children’s Services Budget:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020 Budget Items</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>% of Total Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Centres Expenses</td>
<td>$7,095,522</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Expenses (not including Children’s Centres)</td>
<td>$57,673,658</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EarlyON, Journey Together and Children &amp; Youth Planning Table Expenses</td>
<td>$4,661,086</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$69,430,266</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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49. Of the 1,000 vacant staffed spaces for 0-4, which of these were vacant pre-Covid?
   • Before COVID (as of October 2019), there were approximately 500 vacant unstaffed spaces for children ages 0 to 4 years based on the difference between licensed capacity and operating capacity. Children’s Services did not collect information regarding enrollment in staffed operating spaces – we have now
implemented new monthly data collection processes to gather this information ongoing.

50. Has the Region, as service manager, implemented a plan to try and match waiting list families with the above mentioned 1,000 vacant staffed spaces? There must still be people on waiting lists. This would help the existing providers as well.

- The Region does not direct how child care centres manage their own waiting list. Each provider sets their own internal wait list policies and manages it accordingly (e.g., prioritizing siblings of children already in attendance, children with special needs, etc.). All centres currently have a waiting list but the applications could be for a future date, parent has deferred application during COVID, waiting for part time care or certain days of the week, etc.

51. What funding has the Province provided to cover COVID related losses or expenses?

- In 2020, the Province provided funding to support new COVID-19 related costs. For example, Children’s Services received $5.7 million in Safe Restart Funding to distribute to child care programs and EarlyON to support additional costs (e.g., cleaning, screening, PPE) and short-term vacancies. This funding can be used between September 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021. Locally, the majority of funding is being provided to operators to use flexibly for eligible expenses and some funding is being used to replace parent fees when rooms have to be closed due to a positive case of COVID-19.

- Operators have indicated that the funding is very helpful in covering some of the new costs (such as cleaning costs), but is not sufficient to cover their lost fee revenue from reduced enrollment. There is no information about funding that will be available in 2021 and operators are have expressed concern regarding financial viability without additional funding and with the ending of CEWS.

52. KPMG report indicates that the Region could provide funding support for between 350 to 791 licensed spaces. Is this "funding support" for existing spaces? Or is this to create new spaces? The recommendation to Council did not include creating more spaces so I am wondering the relevance of this claim if it is for new spaces.

- Child care programs across the Region are reporting a higher number of vacancies and lower demand for spaces. Therefore, “funding support” or investment in new child care spaces is not being prioritized at this time.

- KPMG’s funding calculations related to funding support for between 350 and 791 refers to unfunded spaces in the system which could include a
53. How much was KPMG paid to complete the review of the Children’s Centres?

- KPMG was awarded the contract to complete the third party review of the Children’s Centres through a competitive RFP process. You can find a copy of the bid document here: https://regionofwaterloo.bidsandtenders.ca/Module/Tenders/en/Tender/Detail/faaffd79-fb53-4313-8034-c881a3641316/#Document.
- In the Bid document it outlines the available funding (up to $150,000 dollars) as well as the terms and conditions related to eligible costs.

54. Of the 4.3 million funding for all 5 centres, how much goes to Elmira? Or after providing funding to Elmira to continue running with a new operator, with the same staff and same salaries, how much money is left over to re-invest "to support affordability, equity, sustainability, access, and quality across the entire child care system."

- Of $4.3 million in Provincial Funding in the 2020 budget, $904,598 is budgeted for the Elmira Children’s Centre (see page 80 of the KPMG Report). $217,722 in Regional levy funding is budgeted for Elmira in 2020 (see page 81). There is also $424,600 in Provincial funding and $119,021 in Regional levy funding that is allocated to overall program costs in the 2020 budget that are shared between all five child care sites. If Elmira was to continue to operate and the other four centres were no longer operating some of these program costs may continue to be incurred.
- Therefore, the total Provincial funding that could be reinvested if Elmira continued to operate at the same expense level as 2020 is: $3,020,168 plus a portion of the $424,600 in Program Costs (as noted above, Programs Costs are for all five programs, and a portion may be needed to support Elmira operations) (see page 80).

55. “At present, centres are operating with more than 30% vacancy rates, due to the number of parents who are currently not working or working from home.” Does this statement imply that there are no waiting lists to access licensed child care in Waterloo Region?

- The Region does not direct how child care centres manage their own waiting list. Each provider sets their own internal wait list policies and manages it accordingly (e.g., prioritizing siblings of children already in attendance, children with special needs, etc.). All centres currently have a waiting list but the applications could be
for a future date, parent has deferred application during COVID, waiting for part time care or certain days of the week, etc.

56. What is Regional Council planning to do with the annual cost savings of $678,000 from the tax levy and $294,000 from tax supported reserve contributions? Will this funding be re-invested into the child care system?

- Regional Council will have the opportunity to determine priorities for these tax levy savings through the December 2, 2020 at 6:00 pm special Council meeting and the public budget meeting scheduled on December 16, 2020 at 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm.
- If you would like to communicate with Council regarding where the annual savings should be prioritized please see the Regional website for how you can communicate with Council.

57. Before the pandemic, can you provide some information on the waiting lists for child care spaces?

- Please see KPMG Final report on page 24 for more information on the waiting lists pre-pandemic.