

Subject: Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029

File Number: ACS2025-CSS-GEN-002

Report to Community Services Committee on 22 April 2025

and Council 30 April 2025

Submitted on April 9, 2025 by Clara Freire, General Manager, Community and Social Services

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Ward: Citywide

Objet : Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2025-2029

Numéro de dossier : ACS2025-CSS-GEN-002

Rapport présenté au Comité des services communautaires

Rapport soumis le 22 avril 2025

et au Conseil le 30 avril 2025

Soumis le 2025-04-09 par Clara Freire, Directrice Générale, Services sociaux et communautaires

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Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Community Services Committee recommend that Council:

- 1. Approve the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 (Document 1) that establishes eight strategic priorities for the planning, management, and delivery of early learning and licensed child care programs and services and the Funding Policy Statements (Document 2) for 2025-2029.**
- 2. Delegate authority to the Director, Children's Services, to manage and administer the budget as detailed in this report and allocate all funding according to the Funding Policy Statements for 2025-2029 in Document 2, provided such allocations are in accordance with Provincial guidelines, the strategic priorities in the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029, and are within approved budgets.**

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des services communautaires recommande au Conseil :

- 1. d'approuver le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2025-2029 (document 1) qui présente huit priorités stratégiques relatives à la planification, à la gestion et à la prestation des programmes et services de garde d'enfants agréés et de la petite enfance , ainsi que les énoncés de politique du financement (document 2) pour la période de 2025 à 2029; et**
- 2. de déléguer au directeur des Services à l'enfance le pouvoir de gérer et d'administrer le budget conformément au présent rapport et d'allouer les fonds selon les énoncés de politique du financement 2025-2029 (document 2), pourvu que ces allocations respectent les lignes directrices provinciales, les priorités stratégiques énoncées dans le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2025-2029, et les budgets approuvés.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council approval of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 report and supporting documents would establish eight strategic priorities for the planning and management of early learning and licensed child care programs and services for children from 0 to 12 years old. Delegated authority for the Director, Children's Services, to manage and administer the budget as detailed in this report is

also recommended. Funding would be allocated according to the Funding Policy Statements (Document 2) provided such allocations are in accordance with Provincial guidelines, the strategic priorities in the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029, and are within approved budgets.

As the Service System Manager (SSM), the City's Children's Services is legislated to have a Council-approved early learning and child care programs and services plan for its service area. The Service System Plan guides the planning and delivery of local early learning and child care services, ensuring programs are responsive to the needs of children 0 to 12 years old and their families.

Early learning and child care programs play an essential role in building a strong, healthy and resilient community. The early learning and child care sector is undergoing a period of significant change and opportunity. Key changes include the historic launch of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system in 2022 and the introduction of a new cost-based funding formula for child care in 2024.

As Children's Services navigates this rapidly evolving transformation of services into a publicly funded and managed system, it continues to operate within the constraints of Provincial guidelines and funding allocations. Adapting to recent reductions in Provincial base funding for program delivery while taking on increased responsibilities and responding to an unprecedented increase in demand for affordable child care spaces poses challenges for the City.

With this context in mind, Children's Services set out to develop a balanced and evidence-based Service System Plan that addresses unique local challenges and opportunities, aligns with Provincial priorities, and remains adaptable to potential emerging issues and priorities. Children's Services also approached the development of the Service System Plan in an equitable manner, ensuring that the needs of all families, including those facing the greatest challenges and those that are underserved, were considered.

The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (SSP) 2025-2029 (Document 1) builds upon the strong foundation established over the past few years with the help of sector partners. The SSP framework establishes a shared vision, eight guiding principles, eight strategic priorities, and 55 clear actions to simplify access for children and families, reduce barriers and systemic inequities, come together for meaningful reconciliation, and strengthen the early learning and child care sector.

The SSP identifies both sector-wide and distinct actions under three program streams: Mainstream, Indigenous-led stream, and French-language stream to address the unique needs of children, families, and service providers in Ottawa.

The SSP framework elements are informed by the findings from research and data reviews and extensive engagement with families, service providers, and other sector partners and community organizations.

The Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the Indigenous Early Years Circle and the Table Francophone played an active role in the development of the SSP and endorsed the framework in November 2024.

Financial Implications

The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 will be implemented within the Provincial funding allocation and the existing municipal contributions. There is no increase to the municipal contributions as a result of the recommendations.

Public Consultation/Input

Children's Services applied an equity and inclusion lens to design and carry out a comprehensive engagement plan. Over 2,100 community members were engaged, including families and caregivers, licensed child care and EarlyON providers, community partners, organizations serving diverse families and City of Ottawa staff. Multiple engagement activities, including an online family survey and a provider survey, targeted focus groups with underserved families and families facing additional barriers to access, direct engagement with community organizations, as well as community action planning sessions, ensured the voices of diverse groups, including Indigenous, Francophone, newcomer, low-income families, and families of children with special needs were included.

The Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group (SPAG) played an active role in shaping the Service System Plan by providing ongoing feedback and input. In November 2024, 100 per cent of SPAG members endorsed the framework for the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029, which includes a shared vision, a five-year strategy statement, eight guiding principles, eight strategic priorities, and clear actions. Children's Services also collaborated with the Indigenous Early Years Circle and the Table Francophone throughout the process to co-develop actions specific to the needs of Indigenous and Francophone communities.

RÉSUMÉ

S'ils sont approuvés par le Conseil, le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2025-2029 et les documents à l'appui établiront huit priorités stratégiques pour la planification et la gestion des programmes et services de garde d'enfants agréés et de la petite enfance pour les enfants de 0 à 12 ans. Il est également recommandé de déléguer au directeur des Services à l'enfance le pouvoir de gérer et d'administrer le budget conformément au présent rapport. Les fonds seraient alors alloués selon les énoncés de politique du financement (document 2), pourvu que ces allocations respectent les lignes directrices provinciales, les priorités stratégiques énoncées dans le Plan de système de services 2025-2029, et les budgets approuvés.

En tant que gestionnaire de système de services, les Services à l'enfance de la Ville sont tenus par la loi de faire approuver par le Conseil un plan de programmes et services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance pour le secteur d'activité. Un tel plan oriente la planification et la prestation des services locaux de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance afin que les programmes offerts répondent aux besoins des enfants de 0 à 12 ans et de leurs familles.

Ces programmes jouent un rôle essentiel dans l'établissement d'une communauté forte, saine et résiliente. Le secteur des services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance vit une période de grands changements, qui vient avec son lot de possibilités. Parmi les principaux changements, notons le lancement historique du Système pancanadien d'apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants (SPAGJE) en 2022 ainsi que l'intégration d'une formule de financement basé sur les coûts pour les services de garde d'enfants en 2024.

Parallèlement à cette transformation rapide des services en un système financé et géré par le secteur public, les Services à l'enfance doivent toujours composer avec les contraintes des lignes directrices et des allocations de financement provinciales. La Ville fait donc face à un défi : s'adapter aux récentes réductions dans le financement provincial pour le fonctionnement général de base des programmes, tout en endossant des responsabilités supplémentaires et en répondant à une demande croissante et inégale de places en services de garde abordables.

Dans ce contexte, les Services à l'enfance ont entrepris d'élaborer un plan de système de services équilibré et basé sur des données probantes permettant de relever les défis et de saisir les occasions qui sont uniques à la localité, de suivre les priorités provinciales et de continuer de s'adapter aux problèmes et priorités éventuels. Les

Services à l'enfance ont également approché la création du Plan de système de service sous un angle d'équité pour que les besoins de toutes les familles soient pris en compte, y compris celles qui sont confrontées aux plus grandes difficultés et celles qui sont mal desservies.

Le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2025-2029 (document 1) s'appuie sur de solides assises, établies au cours des dernières années avec l'aide de partenaires du secteur. La structure cadre du Plan de système de services établit une vision commune, huit principes directeurs, huit priorités stratégiques et 55 mesures claires pour simplifier l'accès aux services, réduire les obstacles et les inégalités systémiques, s'allier pour une réconciliation significative et renforcer le secteur de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance.

Le Plan de système de services propose tant des mesures sectorielles que distinctes, au titre de trois volets de programme – le volet principal, le volet géré par les Autochtones et le volet des services de langue française –, pour répondre aux besoins uniques des enfants, des familles et des fournisseurs de services d'Ottawa.

Le contenu de la structure cadre est basé sur des conclusions de recherche, l'analyse de données et de vastes consultations auprès des familles, des fournisseurs de services et d'autres partenaires et organismes communautaires du secteur.

Le Groupe consultatif sur la planification du réseau de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance (GCPR), l'Indigenous Early Years Circle et la Table francophone ont participé à l'élaboration du Plan de système de services et ont approuvé sa structure cadre en novembre 2024.

Répercussions financières

Le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2025-2029 sera financé par l'allocation provinciale et les contributions municipales actuelles. Les recommandations n'entraîneront aucune augmentation des contributions municipales.

Consultations publiques et commentaires

Les Services à l'enfance ont appliqué une perspective d'équité et d'inclusion pour concevoir et mettre en œuvre un plan de consultation complet. Plus de 2 100 membres de la communauté ont été consultés, y compris des familles et tuteurs et tutrices, des services de garde agréés et des fournisseurs de services ON y va, des partenaires communautaires, des organismes au service des familles issues de la diversité, et des membres du personnel de la Ville d'Ottawa. Plusieurs activités de consultation ont

permis d'entendre l'avis de groupes diversifiés, notamment les Autochtones, les francophones, les personnes nouvellement arrivées, les familles à faible revenu et les familles d'enfants ayant des besoins particuliers. Parmi ces activités, notons un sondage en ligne pour les familles et un autre destiné aux fournisseurs de services, des groupes de discussion composés de familles mal desservies et rencontrant des obstacles d'accès supplémentaires, des consultations directes auprès d'organismes communautaires ainsi que des séances de planification communautaires sur les mesures à prendre.

Le GCPR a activement contribué à façonner le Plan de système de services en fournissant régulièrement de la rétroaction et des suggestions. En novembre 2024, ses membres ont approuvé à l'unanimité la structure cadre du Plan de système de services 2025-2029, qui expose une vision commune des services, un énoncé de stratégie sur cinq ans, huit principes directeurs, huit priorités stratégiques ainsi que des mesures concrètes. Les Services à l'enfance ont également collaboré avec l'Indigenous Early Years Circle et la Table francophone pour codéfinir des mesures adaptées aux besoins des communautés autochtones et francophones.

BACKGROUND

As Service System Manager (SSM), Children's Services plays a central role in the planning, funding and management of early learning and licensed child care programs and services in Ottawa. The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* requires SSMs to create a Council approved early learning and child care service system plan for their service area. The Service System Plan provides local system-level direction to address the needs of children and families while aligning with the Provincial legislative and regulatory context.

Subsection 51 (2) of the Act, stipulates that the child care and early years programs and services plan must address the fourteen (14) matters of Provincial interest listed in Section 49 of the Act and be consistent with policy statements issued by the Minister of Education under Subsection 55 (2) of the Act on matters relating to child care and early years programs and services that are of Provincial interest under Section 49 of the Act.

According to Provincial direction, SSMs should actively engage with families, a variety of local community partners, including school boards and use local service data to identify current and future gaps and opportunities for early learning and child care services. The Service System Plan should define strategic priorities and intended outcomes that address community needs, align with Ontario's vision for early learning

and child care, and include an action plan detailing how these priorities and outcomes will be achieved.¹

The Service System Plan should align with and advance the local equity and inclusion objectives outlined in relevant municipal strategies, including the City Strategic Plan, the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, the Reconciliation Action Plan, and the Anti-Racism Strategy.

On September 11, 2019, City Council approved the [Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2019-2023 \(ACS2019-CSS-GEN-0011\)](#) that established ten strategic priorities for the planning and management of early learning and licensed child care programs and services for children aged 0 to 12 in Ottawa. The Service System Plan was grounded in four key provincial priorities that were identified in 2018; Access, Affordability, Quality, and Responsiveness. In June 2021, Children's Services presented a 2021-2022 workplan update to City Council ([ACS2021-CSS-GEN-0009](#)).

The strategic priorities of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2019-2023 guided the direction of Children's Services and the broader sector during a period of significant growth and change, highlighted by the launch of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system in 2022. The shared vision and commitment enabled the sector to effectively support families during the COVID-19 pandemic and laid a strong foundation for the continued transformation of the early learning and child care sector. A few key accomplishments from the Child Care and Early Years Services System Plan 2019-2023 include:

- **24,056** children immediately benefited from lower child care costs, when **94** per cent of licensed child care centres and **100** per cent of Licensed home child care agencies enrolled in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system in 2022.
- **800** children with special needs were supported by Children's Inclusion Support Services during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) through a **\$14.24** million funding allocation.

¹ Ministry of Education, [Ontario Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Resource](#).

- **1,733** new community-based CWELCC-funded spaces were allocated through Ottawa’s directed growth strategy. Of these, **280** new CWELCC-funded Indigenous-led spaces and **125** CWELCC-funded French-language spaces were protected and allocated.
- Approximately **2,700** Early Learning and Child Care professionals participated in the Professional Learning Pilot in 2022, which focused on four key learning areas: Anti-racist and inclusive practices, Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies, mental wellbeing, and inclusive environments
- A new Family Experience was launched (2022) to make information on the City’s Child Care Registry and Waitlist system easier to find and navigate.
- **1,255** ELCC professionals participated in the first-ever Ottawa Child Care and Early Years Workforce Survey (2022) on job satisfaction and working conditions.
- **\$13.03** million in Safe Restart funding was allocated up to December 2020 to help child care service providers reopen safely after COVID-19 pandemic closures.
- **\$191** thousand was equitably allocated to all **25** EarlyON service providers in 2023 to increase awareness of local resources and support the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce.

DISCUSSION

1. Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029

The purpose of this report is for Council to approve the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 (Document 1) that establishes a shared vision, eight guiding principles, eight strategic priorities and 55 actions to simplify access for children and families, reduce barriers and systemic inequities, come together for meaningful reconciliation, and strengthen the early learning and child care sector.

Context

The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 was developed and will be implemented during a period of significant change and opportunity in the early learning and child care sector.

Key recent changes include the launch of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system in 2022 and the introduction of a new cost-based funding

formula for child care in 2024. Starting in 2025, additional child care fee reductions will be implemented, bringing the cost of child care to an average of \$10/day by 2026.

These historic initiatives mark a move toward a publicly funded and managed system designed to make child care more accessible and affordable for families, with a focus on reducing fees, expanding access, and ensuring high-quality services.

The implementation of CWELCC and the new cost-based funding formula for child care has come with increased responsibilities and new operational requirements for the early learning and child care sector. These include adapting to additional or changing administrative requirements, addressing staffing shortages, responding to an unprecedented increase in the demand for affordable child care spaces, ensuring equitable allocation of spaces, and adjusting to a publicly funded model.

The growing recognition of child care as a public priority has also raised public expectations for rapid improvements, placing pressure on local systems to deliver results while adapting to these new structures. The demand for affordable child care has increased significantly and exceeds available capacity, with limited Provincial CWELCC-funded growth anticipated in the coming years.

Children's Services operates within the constraints of Provincial guidelines and funding allocations, which govern many aspects of how the system functions and the pace of change with the system being implemented in phases. These constraints impact local decision-making, opportunities for change, and the ability to meet public and sector expectations.

As Children's Services navigates planning and managing this rapidly evolving system, the Provincial base funding for program delivery was reduced by 37 per cent ([Memo to Council: Provincial Guidelines and Funding Allocation Update - February 2024](#)). While a one-time reserve contribution has lessened the immediate impacts for 2025, staffing levels will be reduced, limiting the capacity to implement Provincial direction to address local priorities effectively.

Simultaneously, Children's Services is rolling out a new service delivery model designed to provide a more streamlined and responsive approach to supporting families and service providers while helping to mitigate the reduction in staff capacity.

With this context in mind, Children's Services set out to develop a balanced and evidence-based Service System Plan that identifies and addresses unique local

challenges and opportunities, aligns with Provincial priorities, and remains adaptable to potential emerging issues and priorities.

Service System Plan Development Process

Children's Services coordinated the development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (SSP) 2025-2029. The Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group (SPAG) played an active role in shaping the SSP by providing ongoing feedback and input. Children's Services also worked collaboratively with the Indigenous Early Years Circle and the Table Francophone to ensure active engagement and consultation in the planning and development of the SSP.

Four main sources of evidence informed the development of the SSP:

- *Environmental scanning and review of literature* – To identify best practices and alignment with other jurisdictions and City priorities.
- *Progress review of the 2019-2023 CCEY Service System Plan* – To identify lessons learned, successes and challenges, as well as previously identified actions that should either continue or be adapted.
- *Local demographic and socio-economic data and licensed child care and EarlyON service data* – To increase understanding of community demographics and identify service gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- *Engagement with families, community organizations, and early learning and child care leaders and providers* – To identify opportunities, challenges, and areas for action directly informed by those working in the sector or impacted by programs and services. See the Consultation section of this report for more information and details about the engagement strategy and outcomes.

Children's Services approached the development of the SSP with a strong focus on equity and inclusion, ensuring that the needs of all families and communities were considered. By applying an equity lens, staff worked to identify and address systemic barriers that affect access to services for diverse populations.

Data analysis and engagement strategies were intentionally designed to prioritize inclusion, enabling a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and strengths within different communities. This equity-focused approach ensured that the voices and experiences of those who are often underrepresented or face systemic barriers were

not only heard, but actively shaped the direction of the SSP. High level findings from the engagement and data analysis include:

- Black or racialized children are the fastest growing group in the population of children 0 to 12 years old.
- Indigenous and Francophone families face unique challenges in accessing child care that respects their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Children with special needs and children approved for a fee subsidy face additional challenges to find, access and maintain child care services.
- Families living in low-income and those from racialized backgrounds report greater challenges in finding information about child care options and navigating the application process, often due to limited technology access and language barriers.
- Racialized and Indigenous families are more likely to access support from local organizations when seeking child care.

Evidence gathered through the planning process was analyzed and discussed with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the Indigenous Early Years Circle and the Table Francophone to collaboratively develop a shared vision, five-year strategy statement, guiding principles, and strategic priorities that address the community's needs. Actions were subsequently identified in collaboration with these advisory groups, as well as community and City partners.

Service System Plan Framework

The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (SSP) 2025-2029 will act as a road map for the next five years to guide the future of early learning and child care programs in Ottawa. The SSP framework introduces long-term vision, a five-year strategy statement, guiding principles, and eight strategic priorities (with outcomes), and 55 concrete actions (Document 1) to simplify access for children and families, reduce barriers and systemic inequities, come together for meaningful reconciliation, and strengthen the early learning and child care sector.

The SSP aligns with the five provincial priorities (Access, Affordability, Inclusion, Quality, and Data and Reporting)² and introduces local priorities to guide system improvements for the benefits of children and families.

² Ministry of Education. Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework, 2023.

The SSP framework elements are informed by the findings from the engagement and data review and were developed in collaboration with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the Indigenous Early Years Circle and the Table Francophone between October 2023 and November 2024. This collaborative approach ensures that the actions reflect the priorities expressed by families and community partners, paving the way for meaningful improvements in the next five years.

Equity and inclusion principles are represented in every aspect of the SSP framework. Three of the eight strategic priorities are dedicated to addressing the needs of children and families facing inequities in the early learning and child care (ELCC) system:

1. Reduce systemic inequities and barriers to access and inclusion
 - Promote equitable access and inclusion of all children and families by actively identifying and removing systemic inequities and barriers in ELCC.
2. Enhance the ELCC system to better meet the needs of children with special needs and their families
 - Prioritize and address systemic inequities to better meet the needs of children with special needs and their families by supporting access to tailored, inclusive, and supportive services.
3. Nurture Indigenous wellness and community wellbeing through ELCC programs
 - A commitment to nurture Indigenous wellness and community wellbeing by integrating holistic and diverse culturally-informed supports within Indigenous-led ELCC programs that honor and uphold Indigenous knowledge and traditions.

In addition, the SSP identifies both sector-wide and distinct actions to address the unique needs children and families under three program streams: Mainstream, Indigenous-led stream, and French-language stream.

The SSP sets a clear path for meaningful transformation within Ottawa's early learning and child care system to meet the diverse needs of children families. Designed with flexibility, the plan can evolve alongside the changing needs of families and shifts in Provincial priorities. This adaptability ensures the system will remain responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities, maintaining its long-term relevance and impact.

Staff are satisfied that the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 addresses the 14 matters of provincial interest listed in section 49 of the *Child Care and*

Early Years Act, 2014 and is consistent with policy statements issued by the Minister of Education under Subsection 55 (2) of the Act.

In November 2024, all members of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Advisory Group endorsed the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Framework. The Indigenous Early Years Circle endorsed the actions of the Indigenous-led stream of the Plan in December 2024, while the Table Francophone endorsed the actions of the French-language stream in November 2024.

Alignment with Municipal Strategies

The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 is aligned with several municipal strategies, including:

- **City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026.**³ Alignment with strategic objective “Simplify access to social services to support those in need, including housing, employment and child-care services” under strategic priority 1) A city that has affordable housing and is more livable for all.
- **City of Ottawa Community Safety and Well-Being Plan 2021-2031.**⁴ Alignment with priority “Integrated and simpler systems.”
- **City of Ottawa Reconciliation Plan.**⁵ Alignment with Action 10) “Integrated System planning led by local Indigenous child care and child and family service providers. This includes planning to address needs, gaps and opportunities for new or enhanced culturally responsive and Indigenous-led programs and services for Indigenous children and families in Ottawa.”
- **City of Ottawa’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2023-2028.**⁶ Alignment with Recommendation 22) Increase culturally appropriate and responsive supports in the workplace for Indigenous, Black and other racialized children
 - Action 22.1 Coordinate training on anti-racism and inclusive practices in the child care and early years sector

³ City of Ottawa (2023). [City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#).

⁴ City of Ottawa (2021). [Ottawa’s Community Safety and Well-Being Plan 2021-2031](#).

⁵ City of Ottawa (2018). [Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

⁶ City of Ottawa (2023). [City of Ottawa’s Anti-racism Strategy 2023-2028](#).

- Action 22.2 Support recruitment of Indigenous, Black and other racialized staff to reflect the children and families accessing child care and early years programs.

Next Steps

Next steps for the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 include:

1. **Implementation of Actions:** Over the next five years, Children's Services will develop annual implementation plans and coordinate the implementation of the actions outlined in the Service System Plan, in collaboration with sector partners.
2. **Ongoing Engagement and Partnerships:** Engagement with families and sector partners will remain central to service system planning, fostering a responsive and inclusive approach to meet community needs.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Children's Services will establish mechanisms to track progress, measure outcomes, and adjust strategies as needed. Regular updates will be shared with the System Planning Advisory Group, Indigenous Early Years Circle, and the Table Francophone for feedback and guidance.
4. **Advancing Equity and Inclusion:** Children's Services will continue to prioritize populations facing barriers, ensuring all children and families have equitable access to high-quality early learning and child care services.

2. Funding Policy Statements

In 2019 ([ACS2019-CSS-GEN-0011](#)) and 2022 ([ACS2022-CSS-GEN-0013](#)), Council approved Funding Policy Statements and delegated authority to the Director of Children's Services to manage and administer the budget and allocate funding according to the Funding Policy Statements provided such allocations were in accordance with provincial guidelines, the strategic priorities in the Child Care and Early Years service System Plan 2019-2023 and were within approved budgets.

Children's Services adjusted the Funding Policy Statements to reflect recent provincial changes and funding guidelines and to achieve the priorities of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029.

Children's Services is seeking Council approval for the updated Funding Policy Statements for 2025-2029 (Document 2) and delegated authority to the Director, Children's Services, to manage and administer the budget as detailed in this report and

allocate funding according to the Funding Policy Statements for 2025-2029 provided such allocations are in accordance with Provincial guidelines, the strategic priorities in the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029, and are within approved budgets.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the report. The Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 will be funded within the Provincial funding allocation and the existing operating budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to the implementation of the report recommendations.

CONSULTATION

Children's Services engaged with over 2,100 members of the community to inform the development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (SSP), including families and caregivers, licensed child care and EarlyON service providers, community partners, organizations serving diverse families and City of Ottawa staff.

The multiple engagement activities were organized over a one-year period (October 2023 to October 2024) and findings informed the various elements of the SSP framework, namely the vision, strategy statement, guiding principles, strategic priorities (with outcomes) and actions.

Children's Services prioritized and integrated the unique voices and experiences of equity-seeking groups by using inclusive engagement strategies and targeted outreach. Recognizing the importance of these groups' perspectives, the planning process included consultations, focus groups, and surveys designed to amplify their voices and address systemic barriers. Feedback from these engagements was carefully analyzed and incorporated into the Service System Plan, ensuring that it reflected the diverse needs and experiences of the community. This approach demonstrated a commitment to creating a Service System Plan that promotes equity, inclusivity, and accessibility for all families.

Who was engaged:

- Families of diverse backgrounds: Indigenous, Francophone, living in low-income, newcomer, Black and other racialized populations, 2SLGBTQQIA+, lone-parent or caregiver families, and families with children with disabilities and with special needs
- Licensed child care providers and educators (home and centre-based child care)
- Managers of licensed child care organizations (home and centre-based child care)
- Providers, educators and managers for EarlyON Child and Family Centres
- Indigenous-led organizations
- French-language organizations
- English and French-language school boards
- Organizations providing services for children with special needs
- Community service organizations and networks that support families (e.g. newcomer and immigration support agencies, community health and resource centres, Ottawa Children & Youth Initiative Steering Committee)
- City of Ottawa Departments (Community and Social Services; Recreation, Cultural and Facility Services; Ottawa Public Health; Ottawa Public Library; Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development)
- Mayor and Members of Ottawa City Council were provided with a Toolkit to support and encourage ward specific community engagement.

How they were engaged:

- An online family survey completed by 1,518 parents and caregivers. This survey was available in English, French, Somali, Spanish, Arabic, and Simplified Chinese.
- An online provider survey completed by 152 licensed child care and EarlyON service providers. This survey was available in English and French.
- 14 family focus groups with 83 parents and caregivers, focusing on hard to reach and/or underserved diverse families.
- 15 focus groups and facilitated discussions with 200 licensed child care and EarlyON service providers.

- Eight key informant interviews with community partners and City of Ottawa staff in various departments.
- Five internal focus groups with 96 City of Ottawa Children's Services staff.
- Five action external planning sessions with 108 diverse community, early learning and child care sector partners and City partners.

The engagement findings highlighted the emerging family and service provider issues and needs, as well as the unique experiences and perspectives of what is working well, where improvements are needed, and what families and service providers want to see in a strong and responsive early learning and child care system.

Advisory Groups

Children's Services engaged with early learning and child care partners on a regular basis during the development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan, through the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group. The Advisory Group includes representation from child care service providers, preschool/nursery schools, early years providers, and school boards. There is also representation from French-language and Indigenous-led services providers and those who provide services to children with special needs. The mandate of the Advisory Group is to provide advice and guidance on the planning, transformation, and management of the early learning and child care system in Ottawa.

Children's Services also worked collaboratively with the Indigenous Early Years Circle and the Table Francophone to ensure active engagement and consultation in the planning and development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan.

In November 2024, 100% of members of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Advisory Group endorsed the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Framework. The Indigenous Early Years Circle endorsed the actions of the Indigenous-led stream of the Service System Plan in December 2024 and the Table Francophone did the same for the actions of the French-language stream in November 2024.

Children's Services will continue to engage with families and service providers during the life of the Service System Plan.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Creating a child care environment that is inclusive helps to give all children the best possible start in life. Inclusive early learning and child care programs provide opportunities for all children to meaningfully participate in and benefit from these programs. The principle of inclusion goes beyond the notion of physical integration and fully incorporates basic values of supporting the unique needs of children and celebrating diversity.

To ensure that all children have equitable access to programs, facilities and services, all programs that arise as a result of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan will abide by the requirements of the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation*, 191/11 (IASR) of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, (AODA). This initiative is additionally included in the 2025-2029 City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan (COMAP), and it supports the City's ongoing commitment to creating a City that is inclusive to all.

Planning for the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 considered the needs of children with special needs and their families. During the engagement phase, special consideration was taken to reach out to families of children with special needs and service providers that support children with special needs to understand their unique perspectives and experiences.

Addressing the needs of families and children with special needs was one of the top priorities identified through the engagement phase. High level issues were identified as follows:

- Children and families have increasing needs, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic
- There are unique challenges and barriers for children with special needs to secure and maintain licensed child care
- There are insufficient resources to support children with special needs
- EarlyON centres are experiencing similar challenges
- There are gaps in socio-demographic and service data on children with special needs

The Service System Plan includes a dedicated strategic priority to enhance the early learning and child care system to better meet the needs of children with special needs (Strategic Priority #4).

In September 2024, Children's Services held a half-day Strategic Action Planning session aimed at discussing a future desired state and identifying actions to address the complex needs of families and children with special needs. The outcomes and feedback from the session played a critical role in shaping six actions that focus on meeting the unique needs of families with children with special needs (see Document 1).

Children's Services will continue to engage with families and service providers throughout the implementation of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS

This report seeks delegated authority for the Director, Children's Services to manage and administer the budget as detailed in this report and allocate funding according to the Funding Policy Statements for 2025-2029 (Document 2) provided such allocations are in accordance with provincial guidelines, the strategic priorities in the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029, and are within approved budgets.

Delegated authority to implement the report recommendations will be exercised, as set out under the Delegation of Authority By-law No. 2024-265, under the following existing authorities: Schedule D: Community and Social Services Department – Section 10 Children's Services. This exercise of delegated authority shall be reported to the appropriate Standing Committee at least once in the calendar year.

INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Indigenous Policy Considerations

Children's Services collaborated closely with the Indigenous Early Years Circle throughout the development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029. This partnership ensured that Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and priorities were respected and integrated into the planning process. Feedback from the Circle was actively sought, carefully considered, and woven throughout the Service System Plan, resulting in a framework that reflects the needs and aspirations of the Indigenous community. This collaboration highlighted a commitment to meaningful engagement and the inclusion of Indigenous voices in supporting and improving Indigenous-led early learning and child care services in Ottawa.

The Service System Plan includes an Indigenous-specific strategic priority (Strategic Priority #6): “Nurture Indigenous wellness and community wellbeing through early learning and child care.” The Service System Plan also introduces 16 Indigenous-specific actions (Indigenous-led stream) that were co-developed with and endorsed by the Indigenous Early Years Circle (Document 1) to respond to the unique needs of the Indigenous community.

Indigenous-specific actions include (but are not limited to):

- increasing access to Indigenous-led child care
- addressing the unique needs of the Indigenous workforce
- developing culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous families and those with special needs
- applying an Indigenous lens to simplify application processes
- reducing barriers to cultural practices in Indigenous-led settings
- addressing the additional costs associated with delivering Indigenous-led child care.

Children’s Services is committed to ongoing engagement and reporting throughout the duration of the Service System Plan to ensure that Indigenous perspectives remain central to its implementation and that services stay responsive to the changing needs of Indigenous children and families. This approach underscores a long-term commitment to reconciliation and meaningful partnership with the Indigenous community.

Gender and Equity Implications

Children’s Services approached the development of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 with a strong focus on equity, ensuring that the needs of all families and communities were considered. By applying an equity lens, staff worked to identify and address systemic barriers that affect access to services for diverse populations.

Data analysis and engagement strategies were intentionally designed to prioritize inclusion, enabling a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and strengths within different communities. This equity-focused approach ensured that the voices and experiences of those who are often underrepresented or face systemic barriers were not only heard but actively shaped the direction of the Plan.

While equity is embedded throughout the Service System Plan framework, one priority (Priority #3) aims to promote equitable access and inclusion of all children and families by actively identifying and removing systemic inequities and barriers in early learning and child care (Document 1).

The actions that support Priority #3 aim to

- simplify and enhance access to child care services by reviewing and improving the application and waitlist system (CCRAW),
- developing prioritization criteria for equitable access, and
- aligning efforts with anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies. These include strengthening partnerships with community organizations serving Black, racialized, low-income, and newcomer communities to address barriers, co-develop solutions, and foster representation.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The approval of the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 supports the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priorities: **A city that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all**. More specifically, the Service System Plan supports Strategic Objective #6: **Simplify access to social services to support those in need, including housing, employment and child-care services**. The Service System Plan aims to reduce barriers to services to support those in need, including women, Indigenous, Black, racialized residents, gender-diverse persons and newcomers, to achieve better outcomes for clients.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 – Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029

Document 2 – Funding Policy Statements

DISPOSITION

Following Council approval, Children's Services will submit the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 to the Ministry Education.

Children's Services, Community and Social Services Department, will implement the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2025-2029 as outlined in this report and the Service System Plan.

Children's Services will provide a mid-plan progress update to City Council in 2027.