

Councillor calls on further supports for families living with autism

By Brock Weir

Autism Spectrum Disorder now affects one in every 94 children and Councillor Sandra Humfryes is calling on the Province to do more to support families impacted by the disorder.

Council is expected to weigh in on Councillor Humfryes' motion next month, which calls on the Province of Ontario to, among other requests, ensure oversight by professionals and parents based on development progress criteria and milestones and adopt new models of delivery.

First introduced to Council at the end of June, the Councillor's Notice of Motion coincided on the very day the Province reversed its decision to reinstate Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) therapy for those living with Autism after discontinuing it for children over the age of four.

Councillor Humfryes calls on the Province to put in place a Direct Funding Offering model where parents receive funding directly in order to purchase services rather than a Direct Service Offering system where kids receive services directly from trained staff at one of Ontario's nine regional service providers.

"I would like us to endorse this, it is quite serious," said Councillor Humfryes shortly after the Province reversed its decision. "This is the most common neurological disorder affecting one in every 94 children, as well as their friends and their community. It took our community up in arms [to see the decision reversed] and I am personally affected by it through very close friends that we provide parent relief for.

"If we support this, a message will be sent to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Minister of Health and Long Term Care, as well as Premier Kathleen Wynne."

Council deferred the Notice of Motion to last month's Council meeting at the request of Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said it would be a good idea to get the fine details on the Province's turnaround.

"There are a lot of good things," she said. "Then we can congratulate them for the good things and lobby them for whatever they haven't put in place."

As that information had not yet been brought forward by the time of the July Council meeting, the matter was deferred to September, at the request of Mayor Geoff Dawe, to get further information on what needs do need to be addressed. Although the Mayor said he questioned whether municipal staff would be the right people to bring those suggestions forward, the deferral to next month was carried none the less.

Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown also weighed in on the matter when he was in Aurora last month. The PCs took on the issue of IBI therapy as soon as the Province announced its plans earlier this year. Arguing that the decision meant the Province was sending the message that "Autism doesn't exist past the age of five", he said he was "disgusted" by the move but "proud" of their party's work advocating for the reversal.

"Every day at Queen's Park we brought up stories of children," said Mr. Brown. "At the beginning of our two-month campaign, the Liberals were saying it was wasted money and it wasn't needed, that IBI was a waste of time. Then two months later we held the Government in a complete reversal and they announced they were going to fund IBI for kids after five. It shows you the power of politics.

"The Liberals underestimated our determination, they underestimated the determination of (Dufferin-Caledon MPP) Sylvia Jones, who was our caucus point person on this. It shows you the power of politics. Now all those families are not going to be in the dark

without service and we are very proud we were able to get a win for those families on this.?