



# Corporate Report

NO: R198

COUNCIL DATE: October 6, 2008

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **October 3, 2008**  
FROM: **Chief Librarian** FILE:  
SUBJECT: **Learning for Life Strategy: Mayor's Task Force on Literacy and Early  
Childhood Development**

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## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Endorse the Learning for Life Strategy as prepared by the Mayor's Task Force on Literacy and Early Childhood Development, which is included separately in the Regular Council package containing this report; and
3. Approve the distribution of the Learning for Life Strategy by way of the City's website and to interested stakeholders.

## INTENT

The Mayor's Task Force on Literacy and Early Childhood Development was established in December 2006 to identify key concerns with respect to literacy and early childhood development in the context of the City of Surrey and advise Council on how the City could assist in addressing these important issues in Surrey. This report is intended to provide information to Council on the work that has been undertaken by the Task Force and to obtain Council endorsement of the final strategy as prepared by the Task Force.

## BACKGROUND

At the December 5, 2006 Council meeting, the Task Force on Literacy and Early Childhood Development was approved with the areas of literacy and early childhood development as its focus. The Task Force is chaired by Councillor Higginbotham and includes the Mayor and Councillor Martin as other Council representatives. It also includes representatives from the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, the Planning and Development Department (Social Planning), Surrey Public Library, Surrey School District, and the Provincial Office of Early Childhood Education, Learning and Care.

The Task Force agreed on the following goals for its work:

- To learn about the range of local services and understand the issues related to learning and early childhood in Surrey;
- To help create a “Child and Youth Friendly City”;
- To work with community groups to identify gaps in literacy services and find ways to address them and to take a leadership role in the creation of a Community Learning Plan;
- To report to City Council on the various “literacies” that make Surrey a healthy community, to identify the issues, services and gaps in service; and
- To make recommendations to City Council on how the City of Surrey can contribute to improving lifelong learning in Surrey.

Literacy is addressed to varying degrees in other key City plans and strategies, including the Plan for Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents, the Crime Reduction Strategy, and the Sustainability Charter. The report that has been prepared by the Task Force provides an expanded view of the issues and opportunities related to literacy in Surrey and includes specific recommendations for action by the City and others.

The Task Force initiated the strategy development process, with the assistance of Literacy Now. This community-based, inclusive process brought together literacy stakeholders from across the community to plan for improving literacy services to learners of all ages. Literacy Now is one of the initiatives of the Provincial Government’s 2010 Legacies Now program. The City also committed funds to allow research to be completed to inform the work of the Task Force.

The Task Force received presentations from several agencies involved with literacy, education, crime prevention and health. In addition, the Chair of the Task Force and the Chief Librarian attended a two-day Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum, organized by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada in mid-April 2008. It brought together people committed to improving literacy from ten locations across Canada through audiovisual technology to hear speakers as well as to listen to local presenters and participate in group discussions.

## **DISCUSSION**

Literacy is the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential. In today’s complex and ever-changing world, it is more than the ability to read basic information. Learning begins at birth and continues throughout a person’s life.

Early childhood is the most critical time in a person’s life – it determines our future health, ability to learn, social competence, communication skills and behaviour. The brain begins to develop before birth and the experience of our early years strongly influence our brain’s continued development. Parents and caregivers have an enormous impact on their children’s development in early childhood – many determinants are set even before children enter school and begin the formal pathway of learning.

Formal learning continues in the elementary and secondary school system and for many individuals continues on through post-secondary institutions, often with a focus on learning a skill that will enable one to find employment. Essential skills learned by the time one leaves

high school provide the basis for learning specific skills related to one's chosen occupation. Adult learning focuses on job skills, skills that allow one to function effectively in society and ensure one's health and security and skills that allow a person to develop their creativity. The ability to use computers is critical to success in today's society – literacy skills are core to using computers and the Internet.

There is a positive correlation between citizens who are involved in lifelong learning and those involved in their community. Achieving one's potential as a citizen means becoming involved in community life, from participating in clubs and volunteer opportunities to being aware of civic issues and participating in them.

Based on its research, the presentations that it received from a variety of organizations, information that was received through attendance at the above-reference conference and member expertise, the Task Force has compiled a final report/strategy titled the "Learning for Life Strategy".

The Strategy focuses on literacy ('learning for life') in the following six areas:

- General Recommendations
- Early Learning
- Learning – Middle Years and Teens
- Adult and Workplace Learning
- Social Engagement: Community and Interpersonal Learning
- Personal Development and Lifelong Learning

The strategy documents the challenges and impacts in each of these areas as identified through the research component of the study and lists recommendations in each area to address the challenges and the opportunities. The recommendations are focussed on ensuring strong literacy skills for Surrey's citizens. The City and others are already addressing some of these recommendations.

### **Next Steps:**

Those recommendations upon which no action is yet being taken will be prioritized and an implementation plan developed and an appropriate Department and/or agency identified to take action on each recommendation in a systematic manner.

Surrey Public Library will be the overseer of the Strategy for the City and will provide further reports to Council on the implementation of the Strategy on at least an annual basis.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Mayor's Task Force on Literacy and Early Childhood Development has developed a strategy for addressing issues related to literacy and early childhood within the City. Many of the recommendations relate to enhancing programs and services that are provided to residents by the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department and/or Surrey Public Library. It also recommends that the City and others take on a stronger advocacy role in several areas with the other orders of government.

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that Council:

- Endorse the Learning for Life Strategy as prepared by the Mayor's Task Force on Literacy and Early Childhood Development, which is included separately in the Regular Council package containing this report; and
- Approve the distribution of the Learning for Life Strategy by way of the City's website and to interested stakeholders.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beth Barlow". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "w".

Beth Barlow  
Chief Librarian

Learning for Life Strategy (included in Regular Council agenda package separately)

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