

Report

Date December 12, 2023 File:
Subject Supplemental Net New Staffing Request - Human Resources Advisor

PURPOSE

To consider funding for a new Human Resources Advisor in the 2024 Operating Budget to enable the Human Resources and Health & Safety Department to increase its level of service to the Fire Department and maintain the level of service to the other departments of North Cowichan.

BACKGROUND

Certification of the North Cowichan Fire Department began in February 2023, followed by several months of bargaining to reach ratification of the first collective agreement for Paid on Call Firefighters in the province. Requirements within the new collective agreement will significantly increase the need for ongoing Human Resources (HR) support, focusing on the administration management for the life cycle of 100+ Fire Department staff, including recruitment, retention, recognition, labour relations, plus organizational training & development initiatives.

In addition to the increase in work to support the North Cowichan Fire Department, the organization has also experienced higher-than-usual recruitment needs due to several employee retirements, followed by internal job movement and external postings. This is compounded by a lack of qualified applicants in an increasingly competitive job market. Retention and succession strategies are critical for North Cowichan with close to 40% of our workforce within five years of possible retirement.

The Human Resources Advisor role is responsible for day-to-day HR support and is key to the entire organization's operations.

- Leading full-cycle recruitment
- Conducting job analyses and job evaluations
- Managing the new employee orientation program
- Providing advice and assistance to employees and/or managers to resolve employee and labour relations inquiries
- Conducting routine employee/labour relations investigations
- Managing routine grievances
- Supporting leaders through performance and/or absence management concerns
- Coaching and mentoring
- Internal communications
- Implementing special projects as required to support HR operations
 - Learning and development initiatives
 - Employee engagement
 - Retention, recognition, and succession planning strategies

DISCUSSION

Drivers for increased HR support

With the current level of staff available to do the work, there are no options available when additional demands are added to existing workloads. Examples of additional demands that impact the HR team's ability to provide timely and efficient service are:

- More demand on recruitment needs due to new managers to the organization needing increased support from HR and lack of qualified applicants requiring posting needing to be re-posted or extended with additional marketing;
- A higher than usual number of reclassification requests coming to HR for review due to economic constraints of staff and competitors receiving higher increases on bargained agreements;
- An expectation that HR staff are readily available to respond to emails, phone calls and drop-in inquiries in addition to their core work;
- Increased number of internal communications to support the many initiatives at North Cowichan such as the staff recognition program and the employee feedback and development system;
- A very engaged labour relations committee recommending a number of letters of understanding, process improvements, etc. which are managed through HR;
- Additional staff recognition events managed by HR; and,
- Increased requirements for review and organization of corporate training due to key societal expectations such as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training and First Nations training.

In addition, our current HR Advisor is new to the role. Although an exceptional addition to the team, they still require operational support from the Director, Human Resources and Health & Safety, reducing the Director's ability to work on more strategic organizational needs.

The additional demands for service result in longer response times to inquiries and a "triaging" of inquiries to other team members, resulting in some matters needing to be discussed by several team members before they can be resolved. Potential consequences of demands for service that exceed the available capacity for providing the service are:

- Delays in filling vacant positions, which create more excessive workloads within departments, adding strain on our existing staff and leading to dissatisfaction with the workplace;
- Delays in response time from the HR team add risk to missing embedded timelines within the collective agreement;
- Higher levels of frustration and dissatisfaction from departments with the HR team;
- Standard employment cycle initiatives are delayed, such as end-of-probation confirmation, staff recognition and long service awards; and,
- Burnout of the HR team.

Impact of supplemental resourcing

With the addition of an HR Advisor to the team, the two HR Advisors, as subject matter experts, would be able to manage the employee and labour relations concerns that come in and support the rest of the team with any questions they may have regarding questions or interpretation. The additional HR Advisor would also be a resource for the internal HR team as a subject matter expert. It will also provide appropriate coverage options between the two advisors, removing the need for the Director to be so heavily involved in the day-to-day operations. This will allow for a more strategic review of the human resources and health and safety department initiatives to better support senior leadership and the organization as a whole.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to include a Human Resources Advisor position within the 2024 Operating Budget.
2. (Alternate Option) THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to bring forward the request for a Human Resources Advisor position to a future budget process.

IMPLICATIONS

Without the addition of an HR Advisor in 2024 we will be unable to address and sustain acceptable response timelines on a number of key initiatives that the Human Resources and Health and Safety Department support. This will impact all departments, including North Cowichan's paid on-call fire service. The result will be increased complaints, grievances and other employee and labour relations issues, leading to internal retention and recruitment concerns, including higher turnover rates with a loss of talent and historical organizational knowledge.

The financial implications for the 2024 Operating Budget would be an increase of \$95,000, which includes benefits and is costed for eight months of the year as it is anticipated that the position would if approved, not be filled until Spring. The estimated annual cost would be approximately \$125,000, which includes benefits.

Delays in filling vacant positions will create more excessive workloads within departments, adding strain on our existing staff and leading to delays in services to the public.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to include a Human Resources Advisor position in the Human Resources and Health & Safety Department in the 2024 Operating Budget.

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