

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

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DATE: September 28, 2020

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Rae-Ann Emery, Director of Human Resources

SUBJECT: Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

ATTACHMENT(S): City of Prince George Corporate COVID-19 Safety Plan

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated September 28, 2020, from the Director of Human Resources, titled "Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic."

PURPOSE:

At the August 31, 2020, Council meeting, a resolution was passed directing Administration to bring a report "regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to keep City staff safe to date, and plans for the future including consideration of a work-from-home scenario".

BACKGROUND:

In March 2020, the Coronavirus was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. On March 16th, BC's Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, issued an order limiting public gatherings to fifty (50) people, and on March 18th the provincial government declared a public health emergency.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the City has followed the direction of provincial public health authorities and its response has been guided by the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and WorkSafe BC. Throughout the pandemic, ensuring the health and safety of our employees while continuing to provide critical municipal services has been one of the City's primary concerns. The City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was immediately activated to provide a coordinated approach to the myriad of issues that arose during the initial phase of the pandemic.

On March 16th, in response to Dr. Henry's order limiting public gatherings to fifty (50) people, the City immediately closed its recreational facilities to public use including: the Prince George Aquatics Centre; Four Seasons Leisure Pool; CN Centre; Rolling Mix Arena; the Elkscentre; the Kin Centres; and the Prince George Conference & Civic Centre.

Staff returning from vacation outside of Canada were required to observe the mandatory fourteen (14)-day quarantine period prior to returning to work.

Since the start of the pandemic, public health has emphasized how critical it is for individuals who are feeling unwell or are exhibiting any symptoms associated with COVID-19 to stay home and not attend work. Early on, the City recognized that there are provisions within its CUPE and IAFF collective agreements that might prevent employees from making responsible decisions about their health and the collective well-being of their co-workers, and took immediate steps to remove those barriers. Typically, employees are not entitled to utilize vacation or overtime accruals for short-term, intermittent sick leave absences but, for the duration of the pandemic, they may choose to use these forms of accruals should they exhaust their personal sick leave accruals. Additionally, there is a maximum usage of three (3) days of personal sick leave for family illness purposes and the City has waived this cap to allow employees to utilize sick or other accruals to care for ill family members for as long as is necessary.

The City has provided training for unionized and exempt supervisory staff to ensure that all leaders understand the expectations regarding attendance at work, accrual usage available to employees, and return-to-work protocols.

Extensive engineering and administrative controls have been implemented throughout City worksites to protect employees, including the following:

- Plexiglass barriers and retractable belt stanchions have been installed at service counters and other areas where employees interact directly with the public in order to ensure employees are not within the respiratory droplet zone and are able to observe the two (2) meters' physical distancing guideline;
- Physical distancing stickers have been placed on the floor in the lobby of City Hall and other City facilities to ensure patrons observe appropriate protocols;
- Signage has been posted in all City facilities to advise staff and patrons to not enter the building if they are exhibiting signs of illness;
- Posters detailing proper hand-washing protocols have been posted in washrooms and other work spaces;
- Maximum occupancy limits for common spaces such as meeting rooms, lunchrooms, change rooms and washroom facilities have been calculated and posted, and physical distancing signage has been placed throughout all workplaces;
- Hand sanitizer has been provided at the entrances to buildings, throughout City workplaces and in all fleet vehicles and equipment;
- Enhanced cleaning protocols have been established to ensure repeated sanitizing of high-touch surfaces, common areas and equipment;
- Disinfectant mist spraying of all indoor work locations and fleet vehicles is conducted on a weekly basis;
- Protective gloves and cleaning solution have been distributed to all work places and meeting rooms and employees are required to clean meeting areas and fleet vehicles before and after use;
- Some narrow hallways and meeting rooms that don't allow for proper physical distancing have been designated as one-way;
- Employees who typically travel together in vehicles are required to limit occupancy to two (2) people per vehicle, with the passenger sitting in the back of the vehicle on the opposite side of the driver and wearing a full protective face shield or face mask. Travel is to be limited to a

maximum of fifteen (15) minutes per trip and full fresh-air ventilation is required as opposed to recirculated air;

- Staff in confined work areas have been relocated to allow for physical distancing. Where relocation hasn't been possible, start times, break times and task planning have been altered or plexiglass barriers (such as those installed in Council Chambers) have been installed between work spaces;
- Where possible, meeting with the public has been minimized. During tax payment season, the City initiated a pay-online awareness campaign in an attempt to minimize in-person payments at City Hall;
- Virtual meetings have replaced many face-to-face meetings;
- First aid attendants are working according to modified protocols as outlined by WorkSafe BC;
- Individual workplaces have been responsible for undertaking various forms of task modification to reduce the risk of exposure; and
- Staff are required to maintain the names and contact information for individuals who visit City worksites for longer than fifteen (15) minutes in order to assist public health authorities with contact tracing in the event of a COVID-19 exposure.

The attached Corporate COVID-19 Safety Plan provides more details concerning the many measures that have been implemented to protect staff and the public who access our services.

The City has communicated with employees consistently throughout the pandemic in multiple mediums including emails, information bulletins and newsletters, toolbox meetings, Joint Occupational Safety Committees and Labour Management Committees. The City has developed a comprehensive COVID-19 page on its internal website (CWW) which includes a lengthy Frequently Asked Questions section, numerous external resources available to employees and their families, and guidance concerning attendance at work and return to work protocols for employees who have been ill. Additionally, the City has developed and distributed its Corporate COVID-19 Safety Plan to all employees; and facilities that have recently reopened (including the Prince George Aquatics Centre, Masich Place and the Kin Centres) have developed individual facility Safety Plans for employees and patrons.

While these measures have been successful in reducing potential exposure to the Coronavirus and helping employees feel comfortable continuing to attend work, the pandemic is continually evolving and our response needs to be equally nimble. The fall season represents a new landscape in three significant ways: for the first time since the beginning of the public health emergency, schools are back in session; we are on the verge of the typical cold and flu season; and the potential for a second wave of the virus is high. In order to effectively manage the potential impact these factors could have on employee absenteeism and the City's ability to continue its operations, Administration is preparing to implement an "Interim Flexible Work From Home Program" under the following guidelines:

- Not all jobs at the City lend themselves to working from home. This is a reality of the scope of services that a municipality provides and for this reason, not everyone will be eligible to work from home;
- Working from home arrangements will be determined by each individual department and will be part-time in nature;
- Working-alone protocols and ergonomic guidelines must be followed; and

- Employees must follow records management rules to safeguard paper and electronic City records.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The COVID-19 global pandemic is an unprecedented event and has necessitated rapid changes in the workplace. Innovation, extensive resources, and an unwavering commitment to workplace health and safety has enabled the City to continue to provide critical municipal services to its residents while minimizing the risk of exposure to its employees.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Rae-Ann Emery, Director, Human Resources

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

Meeting date: October 5, 2020