Minute No. 668
Report – Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks – June 29, 2022

Item No. 1 WFPS Staffing Sustainability and Response Plan

COUNCIL DECISION:

Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks and adopted the following:

1. That the Public Service be authorized to apply for third-party funding available for ongoing support of the WFPS Diversity Equity Fire Training program.

2. That the Public Service continues to seek additional funding from Shared Health to expand the EPIC program and ambulance operations.

3. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to provide a verbal report containing an update on the matter at September 6, 2022 meeting of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks.

4. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Rollins,

That the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks be adopted by consent.

Carried

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 13, 2022, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks and submitted the matter to Council.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On June 29, 2022, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service, with the following amendments:

- Add the following new recommendation:

  "3. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to provide a verbal report containing an update on the matter at September 6, 2022 meeting of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks."

- Renumber the remaining recommendation accordingly,

and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION:

On June 10, 2022, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks approved an extension of time of 30 days for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the matter.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION (continued):

On January 14, 2022, Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks passed the following motion:

WHEREAS Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service have long since sounded the alarm on the number of ambulances needed to respond to calls for service, and recently the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals have expressed similar staff shortage concerns within paramedicine;

AND WHEREAS Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service needs to be strong and resilient to support Winnipeg during a staffing shortage to manage trickle down effects from other system crises namely those taking place in Emergency rooms, Personal Care Homes and more intensive community care needs related to COVID-19;

AND WHEREAS Winnipeg extreme cold and dangerous temperature and increase in fires have complicated the availability of fire paramedic services;

AND WHEREAS to date the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service has successfully pivoted and innovated to ensure appropriate resourcing and triaging within budget and resources including strategic use of emergency paramedics in the community which has demonstrated results confirmed at all levels of the system;

AND WHEREAS there have been announcements in other parts of the healthcare system to address staffing shortages, add capacity to health care and increase seats within training programs to support health, seniors care yet paramedicine and other allied health professions have not received such attention;

AND WHEREAS December COVID medical-related leave numbers resulted in absences of upwards of 5.2% of the WFPS workforce and this is a work-time loss trajectory that requires a more direct management response.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back within 150 days to the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks with a plan that includes:

1. Exploring options internally and with Share Health to formulate a strategy to quickly increase FTE staffing, to alleviate pressures created on the EMS system. Options include:

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks – June 29, 2022

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION (continued):

A. Expansion of emergency paramedics in the community (EPIC program) to appropriately service low priority, non-emergent calls.

B. Expansion of EPIC 9 (communications centre secondary call screening) on a 24/7 basis within the 911 call centre.

2. A plan to assume more control over entry-level training programs both in terms of appropriate staff resources, and more pro-active control over recruitment including:

A. Options and alternatives within Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Training Branch to add classes internally and / or with other partners within facilitated post-secondary programs that may augment capacity within training branch.

B. Discussions with Manitoba Fire Commissioner, Manitoba Emergency Service College (MESC) to ensure equity, diversity and inclusion strategies are utilized in the recruitment of students thereby addressing the needs of equitable health care and fires services delivery within Winnipeg.

C. Fully costed options and alternatives should include classroom requirements such as instructors and training equipment.

3. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things to fulfill the intent of the foregoing.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: WFPS Staffing Sustainability and Response Plan

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks – Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
R. Drohomereski R. Sneath	C. Schmidt	C. Kloepfer	M. Jack

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service (WFPS) strives to provide efficient, safe, high quality services that promote health, safety and wellbeing. Current resource demands, partially due to the continued demand of COVID-19 response, have placed incredible strain on the WFPS staff and the Department's ability to provide an effective and timely service. Since the January 14, 2022 Standing Policy Committee Motion – "Staffing Shortages with Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service and quick care COVID response plan", the WFPS has been exploring opportunities to increase FTE staffing, and/or make operational changes to improve efficiency. The WFPS continues to have ongoing discussion with Shared Health regarding increasing the baseline funding to add an additional FTE, but at this time no additional funding is being made available to the WFPS.

In absence of additional funding the WFPS will be working within current budgets to implement the following initiatives to more efficiently utilize current emergency resources:

- Place a Community Paramedic in the WFPS Communications Centre to provide Enhanced Low Acuity Triage (EPIC 9) 12/7;
- Implement response protocols for the Emergency Paramedics In the Community (EPIC) for low acuity 911 calls;
- Introduce a new alternative transport protocol for patients with low acuity medical concerns that do not require the services of an ambulance;
- Elimination of Ambulance Redirections from hospitals; and
- Enhanced destination protocols to ensure a more efficient and effective transfer of care.

In acknowledgement of the funding and financial pressures faced by Shared Health, the WFPS continues to collaborate with Shared Health on identifying initiatives that will create operational efficiency and capacity in both emergency ambulances and hospital flow.

The year-over-year increases in volumes is not only impacting the WFPS response capacity, but it is also having a significant impact on staff recruitment and retainment efforts. The continued success of the WFPS model will require a strategic human resource plan that focuses on sustainable recruitment, and partnership with educational institutes authorized to conduct both Firefighting and Paramedic training. The WFPS Training Academy has a long-standing relationship with the Manitoba Emergency Services College (MESC), operated by the Officer of the Fire Commissioner, to collaboratively conduct fire training. Over the past couple of months WFPS has continued to have discussions with MESC about opportunities for greater collaboration, and specifically focusing on recruitment goals of the WFPS by creating an action plan that encourages a more diverse pool of student applicants. One successful example of this is the WFPS Diversity Equity Fire Training (DEFT) program. This program is currently being run in collaboration with MESC, and will increase the pool of qualified candidates for the WFPS from underrepresented communities. Opportunities exist to expand this program by seeking third-party funding sources to assist in removing financial barriers that may prohibit individuals from applying.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Public Service be authorized to apply for third-party funding available for ongoing support of the WFPS Diversity Equity Fire Training program.

2. That the Public Service continues to seek additional funding from Shared Health to expand the EPIC program and ambulance operations.

3. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On January 14, 2022 the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and parks directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back within 150 days with a plan that includes:

1. Exploring options internally and with Shared Health to formulate a strategy to quickly increase FTE staffing, to alleviate pressures created on the EMS system. Options include:
    a. Expansion of Emergency Paramedics in the Community (EPIC program) to appropriately service low priority, non-emergent calls.
    b. Expansion of EPIC 9 (Communications Centre secondary call screening) on a 24/7 basis within the 911 call centre.

2. A plan to assume more control over entry-level training programs both in terms of appropriate staff resources, and more pro-active control over recruitment including:
    a. Options and alternatives within Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Training Branch to add classes internally and/ or with other partners within facilitated post-secondary programs that may augment capacity within the training branch;

b. Discussions with Manitoba Fire Commissioner, Manitoba Emergency Service College (MESC) to ensure equity, diversity and inclusion strategies are utilized in the recruitment of students thereby addressing the needs of equitable health care and fires services delivery within Winnipeg.
c. Fully costed options and alternatives should include classroom requirements such as instructors and training equipment

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Identifying third-party funding opportunities for applicants to the DEFT program will enhance the ability of the WFPS to conduct training programs, and also remove barriers for individuals that may not be able to apply to the program due to financial barriers. Enhancing this training program will not only provide the WFPS with a larger pool of applicants, it will encourage members of our community to develop the skills and expertise required to become a Firefighter.

The continued growth of this program will also assist the WFPS in having greater control over the recruitment of new employees.

The participation of the WFPS in Shared Health planning efforts for Community Paramedicine allows the WFPS to continue to advocate for the current programming in Winnipeg. Utilizing the experience from the successful Community Paramedic programs in Winnipeg will help to inform the Shared Health business case for additional Community Paramedic resources in Winnipeg and around the Province. This will not only improve patient outcomes and quality of life, but will also reduce demand on emergency services and reduce patient flow volumes in emergency rooms and throughout the health care system.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Community Paramedic Expansion:

Since 2011 the WFPS has staffed the Main Street Project with two Community Paramedics on a 24/7 basis with funding from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Shared Health. Due to redevelopment plans implemented by the Main Street Project a significant portion of services offered in the facility transitioned to their new location on Main Street. This transition of service resulted in an increased availability of staff to resource a second Community Paramedic to pilot the EPIC 9 program starting May 25, 2021. This pilot project has functioned remotely on a 24/7 basis and receives client referrals for chief complaints meeting specific low acuity triage criteria from the Provincially licensed WFPS 911 Communications Centre. For incidents that remained at low acuity after a secondary triage, 40% resulted in no scene response required by the WFPS services.

Continuous evaluation of this program has identified that a greater number of incidents could be screened through a secondary over-the-phone clinical assessment if the Community Paramedic was working alongside the WFPS Communications Operators. This transition would require an additional FTE and associated funding, as the Main Street Project Community Paramedics must remain as a two FTE staffing complement for safety reasons.

The WFPS is continuing discussions with Shared Health to advocate for additional funding to expand the Community Paramedic program within Winnipeg, and leverage the experience and expertise in Winnipeg to assist Shared Health in supporting the growth of Community Paramedicine outside the City.

Community Paramedic program expansion in Winnipeg will not only help provide for better patient outcomes, it will also support response capacity for emergency resources, and assist in alleviating some of the capacity issues within health facilities.

Despite the current lack of funding, the WFPS will transition a Community Paramedic to the Communications Centre to function on a 12/7 basis as EPIC 9. This will be completed within existing budget, and will create an opportunity to evaluate potential program enhancements by having the Community Paramedic directly in the Communications Centre.

The WFPS is still receiving temporary funding to increase the number of EPIC response units, and new work processes are being completed to enable EPIC to respond to 911 calls for low acuity medical concerns. This will free up ambulance and fire resources to be more available to respond to emergency situations.

In January 2022, WFPS initiated an internal recruitment for additional paramedics for the Community Paramedic (CP) training program. These members are currently completing the internal CP program, which consists of 10 modules, 60 hours of didactic, 20 hours of self-study and 48 hours of clinical rotation under the medical direction of the WFPS Medical Director.

The Service is also currently completing a detailed review of low priority Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) determinants and the associated patient outcome data to safely expand the MPDS determinants that will be subject to secondary 911 call screening by a Community Paramedic, and determine which calls would be appropriate for an EPIC only response.

In the coming months amendments to the current Low Acuity Triage and Transport protocol will provide paramedics alternative transport methods to ensure patients arrive safely at an Urgent Care Centre. These new protocols will focus on diverting more patients to lower acuity centres, and avoiding transport to the busy tertiary emergency departments. This will not only free up ambulances, but it will also avoid slower patient transfer of care times at the Emergency Departments. These protocols have been drafted and reviewed with the Medical Director.

Through a collaborative effort spanning many months the health system has now eliminated hospital redirections. This often resulted in ambulances traveling greater distances, and thereby increasing the overall utilization of ambulances. These small efficiencies make a significant difference for the patients, and health care facility staff that are accessing the services of the WFPS.

Entry Level Training and Recruitment Initiatives:

In the mid to late 1990s the WFPS transitioned to recruiting external candidates that were pre-qualified with specific certifications and designation; accredited Level 2 Firefighters, and Primary Care Paramedics. This was in part, an attempt to lower the cost of recruitment and training and partly to minimize the deployment time to operations.

Prior to this the WFPS recruited and trained all candidates. The applicant pool for these recruitment processes were typically citizens of Winnipeg. This recruiting process saw large numbers of applicants, in the range of 900-1200 diverse applicants per recruitment.

With the move to recruiting accredited Level 2 Firefighters, feeders became educational establishments from across Canada and the United States, with the most prominent being the Manitoba Emergency Services College (MESC) situated in Brandon, Manitoba.

Students attending MESC pay a tuition to the college, and engage in a 10-month program emerging with the IFSAC/ProBoard certified designation Firefighter Level 1 & 2 and Primary Care Paramedic (FFPCP).

While this increased the education and skill level of the Firefighters and gave them additional skills as PCPs, this move changed the face of the Department where it no longer reflected the diverse nature of the community it served. This was a result of unforeseen barriers that now present themselves to a greater number of potential applicants seeking Firefighter PCP training opportunities.

The WFPS has maintained a successful working relationship with MESC, with continuous collaboration on a number of programs offered to current employees including Fire Officer 1 & 2, Incident Safety Officer, Emergency Services Instructor, Technical Rescue, Auto Extrication, Hazardous Materials Technician, Water Rescue, and Wildland Firefighting. Over the past several months WFPS, Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) and MESC have had discussions to explore opportunities to remove barriers and improve diversity and inclusion within fire and paramedic services. MESC is in the final stages of a strategic plan to focus recruitment efforts to increase equity and diversity in services across the province.

WFPS currently has 18 students in an internal Diversity and Equity Firefighter Training (DEFT) program who have been training part-time at the WFPS Academy with the support of WFPS Training instructors and frontline firefighters who have volunteered to personally mentor the students.

Women, Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, and persons with disabilities are underrepresented within the Service and the DEFT program strives to address this deficiency and move the department demographics to reflect the diversity of our communities.

Mentoring the DEFT recruits to assist them in successfully completing their Firefighter Level 1 and 2 accredited training can help WFPS provide role models for all our citizens, break down barriers, forge connections, and build trust within the larger community.

A funding task group that includes representatives from WFPS, Community Services and Equity Diversity & Inclusion has been created to explore various provincial and federal funding possibilities for the next DEFT student cohort enrolled in a full-time training model, which would include student and program cost including an additional full-time Academy Training officer at a cost of approximately $120,000 per annum.

The WFPS has also completed some planning and evaluation work of the current training facilities, which was included in the 2018 Master Plan prepared by Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) and the WFPS 2020 Strategic Direction Detail report. It was reported that the current WFPS building and training grounds were found to be inadequate to meet the continuing and growing demands of both Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) training.

Additional funding is required to complete a full assessment of the training facilities that would support an options analysis and any future capital requests. The ongoing status quo of the current facilities will continue to impact the ability of the WFPS to recruit, train, and support educational requirements for employees. Any physical expansion of WFPS training facilities will be brought forward for consideration as part of future Department capital budgets.

The future success of the WFPS will rely on having a sustainable healthy workforce that has the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities to collaboratively work with inter-professional teams to provide clients access to the right combination of services, treatments and supports, when and where people need them. With the right combination of services, treatments, and supports, the individuals that we are responding to, even those with the most severe illnesses, can experience significant improvements in their symptoms and quality of life, thereby decreasing their reliance on emergency response services for support. Efforts need to be well coordinated, deliberate, consistent and sustainable in an environment that demands fiscal responsibility.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement Date: May 27, 2022

Project Name:

WFPS Staffing Sustainability and Response Plan

COMMENTS:

There is no financial impact associated with the recommendations of the report.

Any assessment of opportunity to apply for third party funding to support training and recruitment initiatives will be undertaken within existing staff resources. The intention of third party funding will be to partially or fully offset additional resource requirements to deliver enhanced training programs. An estimate of additional resource cost and likely third party funding will be included in subsequent requests to Committee to secure the additional resources.

Any increase in resourcing for Community Paramedicine expansion will also be requested from Committee once Shared Health funding has been confirmed.

John Hall FCMA, CGMA
Financial Controller
Fire Paramedic Service

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

N/A

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

Good Health and Well-being:
These initiatives will support the health and safety of those individuals accessing WFPS services by ensuring highly qualified individuals are available to respond and provide the assessments and treatments required. The Community Paramedic program focuses on proactively identifying and addressing health concerns that may affect the safety and well-being of citizens.

Social Equity:
Allowing the WFPS to have more control over entry level training programs ensures that a lens of social equity can be incorporated into the recruitment and development of new employees.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

N/A

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The information and recommendations presented in this report align with and advance the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy (2021-2031) as follows:
They embody the following Guiding Principles:

- We will uphold Human Rights, equity, and equality through the development of our training programs.
- We will honour Relationships and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through the care that is provided, and the education of our staff receive.
- We will Promote and Maintain the Welfare of All Residents though the clinical protocols that we have developed, and ensuring that the right resource is sent to care for the needs of the individuals seeking care.
- We will Develop Trust and Meaningful Partnerships to find solutions and drive change.

Goal 1 – Equity and a Culture of Caring are demonstrated through Strategy Implementation and System Change:

D. The City advocates for and pursues partnerships to implement the strategy.
E. The strategy and implementation plans are monitored, evaluated and updated on a regular basis to ensure progress is made.

Goal 3 – Equity is embedded in all City employment and income opportunities:

A. Hiring and training programs are implemented that focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, reconciliation with indigenous people, and poverty reduction.
B. Support is provided to community-led income and employment initiatives for low-income people through partnerships, grants, and in-kind use of City assets and facilities.

Goal 6 - All City services are Equitable, Inclusive and Accessible:

C. Increased collaboration with community partners improves access to safe and secure transportation by all residents.

Goal 8 – Equity in Community Safety is Increased through collaboration:

A. Community and equity-based approaches to safety are prioritized and resourced, particularly for First Nations, Metis Nation, Inuit, Black, Racialize and Religious minority groups and in areas of higher poverty.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Fire Paramedic Service
Division: Executive
Prepared by: Deputy Chief Russ Drohomereski, Deputy Chief Ryan Sneath
Date: May 27, 2022
File No: