

COVID-19 IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCES

**Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Committee
June 23, 2020**

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COVID-19 IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Our people are our most important asset and we have proven to be a City of exceptionally skilled, resilient and dedicated staff during these unprecedented times. In support of our employees, all decisions have embodied our key values as an organization of Respect, Accountability and Dedication. Our focus is steadfast with respect to ensuring that the health and well-being of our employees and citizens is our top priority.

The City of Vaughan's overarching mission is "Citizens First Through Service Excellence". As a result, all efforts and decision-making align with the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence strategic priorities, including:

- **Community (aligned with Citizen Experience):** Ensure City's services are safely delivered, with an emphasis on critical/core services during this emergency, with use of technology where possible:
 - Continue to protect community demands/needs within the short, medium and long term;
 - Implement alternate ways to deliver services effectively.
- **Financial Sustainability (aligned with Operational Performance):** Understanding our financial situation in order to ensure financial sustainability in the future:
 - Assess staffing impacts and ensure a balanced approach to staffing and fiscal responsibilities.
- **Our People (aligned with Staff Engagement):** Consider the impacts that our decisions will make on employee engagement and ability to deliver critical/core services:
 - Where possible, every attempt should be made to keep employees whole from a pay perspective.
 - Understand employee's Collective Agreement and legislative rights.
 - Negotiate with Unions to facilitate necessary staffing actions in an amicable manner to the extent possible.
 - Consider redeployment, where possible.
 - Review Municipal comparators.
 - Consider service levels and impacts and costs of layoffs as well as return to 'regular business' to ensure delivery of strategic goals.

Human Resources and Staffing Actions to Date

Throughout the City's response to COVID-19, we have made critical and at times difficult decisions. As COVID-19 became a reality for Ontario and the City of Vaughan, we expeditiously closed the City's community centres and libraries and then subsequently closed all our facilities to the public.

Staff were sent home and those that could work from home productively, have continued to do so with the help of technology and business process modifications. For staff that were unable to work from home as they performed critical services within the field, we ensured they were protected and minimized their exposure to the threat of COVID-19. For some staff, where a work from home option was not possible and where they were not providing critical services, we were able to redeploy a number of staff to provide parks education services until June 4th; and for others we had to proceed with layoffs.

The following highlights the human resources and staffing impacts and related initiatives in response to COVID-19 and provides a summary of these actions and decisions.

1. Communications:

Throughout the pandemic, the organization has supported staff with important messaging, policy direction and informative Q's & A's and bulletins to assist with a variety of human resources issues and questions. Even prior to Provincial and Municipal declarations of emergency, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO) provided Q&As and policy guidance and had already established an Alternative Work Arrangement policy and procedures. Information sessions were also held for Senior Leadership Team members to educate them on Q&A's and provide policy guidance. Information has been provided with respect to:

- Working from home guidelines;
- Managing remote workers;
- Proper ergonomic set-up;
- School closures and addressing child care issues;
- Managing employee absences and pay including illness, self-isolation and leaves;
- Recruitment;
- Bill 186 leaves under the Employment Standards Act;
- Redeployment;
- Work site visits;
- Health, Safety, Wellness;
- Mental Health.

These critical communications were developed based on best practices, legal guidance, government orders and advice of public health experts. In addition, we have ensured

alignment with collective agreements and policy and following the key principles and values outlined in our Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.

Safety and Health and Emergency Preparedness week was held May 3 to 9, 2020 with a goal of focusing on the importance of preventing injury and illness in the workplace, at home and in the community. OCHRO developed three communications to all staff, with the following focus areas:

- Emergency preparedness
- Mental health
- Physical health

Each communication included links to useful resources, tools and training for employees. The mental health communication was provided via the HR wellness newsletter. It included the City of Vaughan recreation resource links to mindful meditation and yoga as well as free e-learning on mental health awareness from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety (CCOHS).

The physical health communication included information on Musculoskeletal (MSK) injuries and prevention as well as office ergonomics. A webinar was also made available for up to 100 employees working from home on how to make their home office more ergonomically sound and included an opportunity to have a Q&A with a certified ergonomist.

In addition, to continue to keep staff informed, OCHRO launched a bi-weekly newsletter entitled "Making Connections". This newsletter has a focus on employee health and wellness and provides helpful tips on working remotely, managing and mental health and provides links to useful tools and resources.

2. Labour Relations:

A CUPE COVID Committee was created and meets on a regular weekly basis. In addition, regular meetings with VPFPA are taking place twice per week.

This continues our positive relationships to manage issues in a cooperative manner such as layoff and redeployment and to ensure business continuity during the declared emergency.

3. Alternative Work Arrangements:

As provincial directives were issued encouraging people to work from home, where operationally feasible, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer and the Office of the Chief Information Officer worked tirelessly to enable the deployment of alternative work arrangements.

On March 14, 2020, employees were directed to work from home where operationally feasible. Approximately 50% of the City's employees are able to effectively work from home.

Staff have been able to embrace virtual technologies (MS suite, teams, skype, zoom etc.), while continuing to conduct regular department-wide and portfolio meetings and 1:1 meetings with staff and their supervisors.

Leaders and staff have been providing positive feedback that they feel they are more productive and effective (less disruptions) while working at home. In addition, an alternative work arrangement approach helps to address growing space issues; contributes to reducing gridlock and traffic jams; and reduces our carbon footprint.

To support work from home, OCHRO provided AWA policy training to many leaders and work from home tip sheets for staff and leaders.

Although there has been an overall positive and resilient response to working from home, there are still some challenges as there is a definite culture shift as we learn to manage remote teams, empower staff from afar and look to outcomes and outputs rather than physical presence as a sign of productivity. In response, the OCHRO is developing additional supporting materials to provide additional guidance and support staff and leaders to be effective while working remotely.

Where staff duties cannot be performed from home and staff must attend the workplace to deliver essential/critical services, essential employees continue to attend the workplace with appropriate safety measures in place. These include staff who are delivering essential/critical services (firefighters, water services, inspections, etc.).

4. Lay-off of Non-essential staff that cannot Work From Home:

With the closure of facilities and the reduced income generated, actions were taken to ensure financial sustainability in the future, including considering what expenditures can be immediately stopped or deferred and staffing reductions, as appropriate.

While every reasonable attempt was made to keep staff employed and whole from a pay perspective, temporary layoffs resulted for 1168 non-essential staff that were unable to work from home (including School Crossing Guards, Recreation Services staff, and Vaughan Public Library staff), were made in concert with CUPE on April 6, 2020. In addition, a further 31 staff layoffs were made on June 4, 2020 as a result of organizational changes in the Recreation Services department to reflect a new business model in response to COVID-19.

5. Redeployment into critical roles for staff not fully productive:

As part of the next phase in assessing longer-term staffing impacts, the OCHRO developed a framework to ensure consistency in how redeployment opportunities were assessed and operationalized.

Departments assessed their workforce and service delivery needs and identified staff that could effectively and productively work from home as well as staff that must continue to attend the workplace to deliver critical/essential services to maintain legislative compliance and deliver critical services to ensure service delivery (VFRS, water services, inspections, etc).

As part of this initial review, some employees were redeployed within their department, and others were identified for redeployment in other parts of the City in order to ensure the delivery of critical/essential services to our citizens.

To ensure essential/critical City services continue to be delivered effectively while endeavoring to keep staff whole wherever possible, we have worked cooperatively with CUPE and offered redeployment opportunities to approximately 57 employees. A large portion of these employees were offered the opportunity to work under By-law & Compliance and Licensing and Permits Services as Parks Education Team members (PETs in parks) until June 4, 2020. In this role, they represented the BCLPS department and City at assigned parks, answered citizen questions, and in an effort to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in our community, educated residents on the importance of social distancing, and they notified by-law if they observed infractions.

6. Recruitment and Hiring Restrictions:

In an effort to mitigate revenue losses and COVID-19 related costs, recruitment restrictions were put in place to ensure a prudent and fiscally responsible approach. These include:

- Only business critical recruitment and hiring taking place.
- Any recruitment must be approved by the Deputy City Manager.
- No hiring of summer students and limited hiring of summer seasonal staff.
- Ending contracts where operationally feasible.
- Allow for attrition and do not fill vacated positions, where feasible.

7. Encourage Vacations:

Rest and rejuvenation are important to all staff and taking allotted vacation time is highly encouraged especially during this stressful time. Many staff are working even harder than normal and have not had a chance to take much needed time-off and utilize their vacation credits.

The Acting City Manager has communicated to all staff to encourage staff take their much-deserved vacation.

8. Reintegration Plan:

A sub-group of the COVID-19 Operational Taskforce was created to fully assess reopening/restart plans for the city's facilities and its staff. A comprehensive approach is being taken to ensure a safe return to the workplace for all staff.

The OCHRO staff have conducted multiple on-site visits and walk-throughs to assist departments with changes to work areas and pathways to ensure physical distancing and appropriate health and safety measures. OCHRO has worked with Legal, Facilities Management and Occupational Health and Safety.

The plan has been developed and is supported collectively by members of the Emergency Management Team, in consultation with the documentation from public health agencies and safe work associations. This guide is in conjunction with the City's Health and Safety program and Health & Safety Directive for Worksite Visits During COVID-19.

The plan will provide clear guidance on the requirements for the maximum number of staff permitted in a work location, guidance on scheduling, PPE, cleaning and disinfecting, physical distancing practices and response to positive or suspect cases. In addition, the organization is developing communications and training plans (orientation guides) for leaders and staff.

A detailed Business Reintegration Plan is being finalized and will be provided in a separate future report to the Ready, Resilient, Resourceful Committee.

9. WorkSite Visits During COVID

As many of our city facilities continue to be closed, we have taken and continue to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. To assist all staff during the COVID-19 emergency, the Office of Chief Human Resources Department has developed a Health and Safety directive specifically focused on COVID-19.

The directive impacts all staff working in all settings where contact or potential contact with the general public, homeowners, contractors and other City of Vaughan staff may occur. The focus of the directive is to institute controls for staff to stay clear of potential hazards through pre-screening, social distancing, hygiene and enhanced sanitation of high-touch areas such as vehicles.

We are constantly reviewing our practices to ensure our measures are appropriate for the safety of our employees and the community and will modify this directive accordingly.

We conducted virtual learning sessions on this directive for all people leaders. These sessions provided an opportunity to address all questions leaders had with respect to the implementation of this directive into their operations.

We also assisted a number of our operational teams with performing health and safety risk assessments where they were uncertain about COVID-19 control plans within the work activities in their program area. These assessments ensured we have incorporated the necessary controls within our employee's work activities.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STAFF – HOW ARE STAFF FEELING?

Obtaining staff input into their understanding, perceptions and feelings about the City's response to COVID-19 is very important as we continue to navigate our ongoing response and implementation of mitigations and controls. As part of the Lessons Learned initiative, an on-line all-staff survey regarding COVID-19 was developed and sent to all staff on May 1, 2020. The survey was open until May 15, 2020 and resulted in a wealth of information and inputs.

The survey was completed by 705 employees, which is approximately 50% of full-time workforce. Overall the results were very positive. The following provides an overview of what we heard through the survey:

COVID-19 Response:

- 95% are familiar with the City's pandemic response efforts
- 82% are familiar with the City's emergency response plan
- 72% feel confident in the execution of the emergency response plan

Senior Leadership:

- 79% feel confident in our Senior Leadership Team
- 81% agreed our senior leaders displayed adaptability

Working Remotely:

- 87% said they've had the ability to carry on with department deliverables
- 76% agree the organization managed the transition to remote work well

Communication:

- 80% agreed the City has communicated to the public well during the pandemic

Attachment 4

- 76% feel the quality of internal communications during COVID-19 has been either very good or good
- 87% agreed their immediate managers communicate regularly
- 84% agreed they have access to the information needed to do their job well

Employee Resources:

- 69% agreed the City offers enough resources to adequately address mental health and wellness during the pandemic
- 67.5% said the biggest advantage of working from home was saving time on travel

This feedback from staff will assist in our continued response and management to the COVID-19 emergency. Ensuring employee engagement and a workforce that is protected from harm is fundamental to our values at the City of Vaughan.