

Administration & Finance Division

To: Mayor & Council

From: Aaron Petrin, Human Resources Manager

Date: April 20, 2017

Subject: Volunteer Firefighter Employment Policy

Summary

This policy proposal is regarding the employment relationship between the Fort Frances Fire Rescue Service and its volunteer firefighters. Its scope would be primarily related to the compensation, benefits and career progression of volunteer firefighters employed by the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Town's Administration is proposing that the pay rates of volunteers be 'red-circled' effective January 1, 2017, and until wage parity has been achieved between the current rate for qualified volunteers and the entry-level rate of 5th Class Firefighter.

We also propose that the Town implements a performance-based wage progression within the current pay structure of volunteer firefighters; and that future cost-of-living increases for volunteer firefighters be linked to those of the Management/Non-Union employee group.

Background

The Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 ("the Act") defines firefighter as being a fire chief and any other person employed in, or appointed to, a fire department and assigned to undertake fire protection services, and includes a volunteer firefighter.

The Corporation of the Town of Fort Frances ("the Town") operates a composite Fire and Rescue Service ("the Service") which employs both full-time ("career") and volunteer firefighters ("volunteers"). Along with applicable sections of the Employment Standards Act, 2000, the employment of career firefighters is governed by a collective agreement, in accordance with the Act, and the employment of volunteers would be governed by this policy.

Historically, the volunteer wage rate ("rate") was linked to the effective rates of career firefighters, and there were four classes, or steps, in the career progression of a full-time firefighter. With a Fifth Class to the ranks, over time, this has created an inequity between the volunteer rate and that of the entry-level career firefighter.

The probationary volunteer rate was equal to 70% of the 4th Class rate, and upon becoming qualified as a firefighter, the volunteer rate increased immediately to the 4th Class rate of pay. Although volunteers serve in a part-time capacity, the rates for both volunteers and career firefighters assume a 42-hour workweek. This is equal to 2184 hours per year.

The Service recruits career firefighters from its volunteer ranks to reward performance, dedication and active service. Our pay philosophy attempts to mirror this. However, management is of the position that an entry-level career firefighter should not earn a lower rate than that of the volunteer firefighters ranks, as they effectively supervise volunteers while on duty. This is currently the case and we foresee that this growing pay gap will continue to increase due to future cost-of-living adjustments, regardless of whether the terms of future collective agreements are negotiated or arbitrated.

The pay gap referred to above was magnified in 2016 due to a change in the salaries of career firefighters, as agreed to by both parties during collective bargaining. To correct this inequity, the Administration proposes that the volunteer rate be ‘red-circled’, or frozen, until it becomes equal to that of the 5th Class firefighter. The rate would remain red-circled until that time, at which point it would then be linked to annual cost-of-living increases received by the Management/Non-Union (“MNU”) group. The MNU Salary Administration Policy would exclude volunteers, whose employment would be governed by this policy.

5th Class Firefighter	60% of 1st Class Firefighter	Jan 2016 \$ 50,924 (\$23.32/hour)	Jan 2017 \$51,942 (\$23.78/hour)	Jan 2018 \$ 52,981 (\$24.26/hour)	Jan 2019 \$ 54,041 (\$24.74/hour)
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The above table was copied from the current collective agreement between the Corporation and the Fort Frances Professional Fire Fighters Association.

The following wage structure is being proposed to create a performance-based progression within the current pay range, and to correct a growing inequity between the volunteer rate of pay and that of a career firefighter.

Probationary Volunteers would be paid \$17.55 per hour until further notice. This is the entry-level class for volunteer positions. Once 70% of the 5th Class Firefighter rate has surpassed this amount, the rate would no longer be red-circled and all future rate increases would be linked to those of the MNU employee group.

Level 1 Volunteers would be paid \$20.06 per hour until further notice. This class of volunteer has successfully completed a minimum of one year of service and 100 hours of documented training during that time. Once 80% of the of the 5th Class Firefighter rate has surpassed the Level 1 rate, said rate would no longer be red-circled and all future rate increases would be linked to those of the MNU employee group.

Level 2 Volunteers would be paid \$22.56 per hour until further notice. This class of volunteer has successfully completed a minimum of one year of service as a Level 1 volunteer and 100 hours of documented training during that time. The volunteer must also be certified as per the NFPA 1001 Firefighter Level 1 standard. Once 90% of the 5th Class Firefighter rate has surpassed the Level 2 rate, said rate would no longer be red-circled and all future rate increases would be linked to those of the MNU employee group.

Level 3 Volunteers would be paid \$25.07 per hour until further notice. This class of volunteer has successfully completed a minimum of one year of service as a Level 3 Volunteer and 100 hours of documented training during that time. The volunteer must also be certified as per the NFPA 1001 Firefighter Level 2 standard. Once 100% of the 5th Class Firefighter rate has surpassed the Level 3 rate, said rate would no longer be red-circled and all future rate increases would be linked to those of the MNU employee group.

Note: The matter of insurance remains outstanding as Administration is reviewing its policy covering personal injury/illness insurance and comparing it to WSIB coverage for volunteers. Administration is also in the process of considering options regarding vehicle coverage for volunteers, as reliable access to a personal vehicle is an implied condition of employment for this employee group.

Recommendation

The Administration and Finance Executive Committee recommended that Council approves the Volunteer Firefighter Employment Policy as written, with outstanding matters to be tabled when more information has been provided.

Council approval of this report will agree to the recommendation of the Administration & Finance Executive Committee to approve the Volunteer Firefighter Employment Policy.
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