

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 3

Halifax Regional Council
March 22, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 3, 2022

SUBJECT: Six Month Update on the Fire Inspection Program Audit

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

September 28, 2021, Regional Council motion (15.2.3):

MOVED by Councillor Deagle Gammon, seconded by Councillor Morse

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Request a staff report from Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Services outlining an action plan to address the recommendations within the September 13, 2021 Management of Fire Inspection Program Audit Report, and that this report be complete within 60 days and;
2. Request a staff report providing Regional Council a six month update on actions addressing the recommendations within the September 13, 2021 Management of Fire Inspection Program Audit Report.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Administrative Order 2018 -006 – OP 10:

- (1) Pursuant to Section 14 of the Fire Safety Act, the Fire Chief is appointed as a Local Assistant to the Fire Marshal within the Municipality.
- (2) Within the Municipality, the Fire Chief may,
 - (a) establish a system of fire-safety inspections of land and premises situate within its jurisdiction, as required by the regulations, to provide for compliance with the Fire Safety Act, the regulations, and the Fire Code;
 - (b) approve other local assistants to the Fire Marshal and appoint municipal fire inspectors and investigators to carry out fire safety inspections and fire cause determination; and
 - (c) appoint a Division Chief of Fire Prevention to execute the responsibilities of Halifax Regional

Fire & Emergency related to fire safety inspections, fire cause determination, public education, and Fire Code enforcement.

BACKGROUND

The Management of the Fire Inspection Program Audit – September 2021 (the Audit) was a performance audit of the management of the fire inspection program. The stated objectives of the audit were to:

- assess whether Halifax Fire has processes to ensure appropriate oversight of the fire inspection program; and
- determine whether Halifax Fire is appropriately managing its legislated fire inspection processes.

The Audit period was April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2021 and included interviews with management and staff, a review of internal policies and procedures, observation of activities and operations, data analysis, and examination of documents on a sample basis.

The cumulation of this audit found that HRFE is not meeting its legislated fire inspection obligations and determined the Fire Inspection Program needs significant improvement. In addition, the Audit noted that there was poor communication between HRFE and Planning and Development. The Audit provided 14 recommendations; all of which HRFE management has accepted.

DISCUSSION

The Action Plan included with this report includes status updates on the previously identified plans to meet the 14 recommended goals from the Audit.

HRFE staff are working on implementing all 14 of the Audit's recommendations. There are two main areas of focus: addressing the technology and data concerns as well as implementing a structure change that will include new specialist positions and an increase in staff to increase the amount of inspections the division can complete each year. Staff from IT, Human Resources and Planning & Development have all been providing assistance and collaborating with HRFE to ensure success.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Six-Month Update on the Fire Inspection Program Audit

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Jennifer Mark, Policy & Business Coordinator. 902.219.2747

Fire Inspection Program Audit Recommendations

Six Month Update

Prepared by:

Matt Covey
Jennifer Mark
Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency
January 27, 2022

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1

“Halifax Fire should develop and implement detailed plans, with timelines, to meet fire inspection obligations.” (Reference: p.4)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 1:

1. By way of an updated Mandate Letter and “My Action Plan” (HRM’s tool for Performance Planning), clear direction on fire inspection obligations will be given to the Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief and Division Chief of Community Risk Reduction.

Status: COMPLETE

2. Continue with organizational structure change, including a proposal for new positions designed to address Fire Prevention’s need to meet legislative requirements as well as need to address concerns around planning application and infrastructure development.

Status: IN PROGRESS.

Implementation of a new organizational structure change continues. A proposal for four new specialist positions and eight additional fire inspectors has been approved starting in the 2022/23 fiscal year. Currently, HRFE is recruiting for the eight new fire inspector positions. Recruitment for the FTE positions with specialist knowledge will commence after the salaries and job classifications have been finalized, which require collaboration and negotiations with the IAFF Union.

3. Collaborate with Planning and Development (P&D) to separate and delegate labour related to building code and fire code.

Status: COMPLETE

4. Restart *Fire Safety Maintenance Inspections* (FSMI) program with timelines for implementation

Status: COMPLETE.

Recommendation 2

“Halifax Fire should document and prioritize risks to the Fire Prevention Division’s operations and take steps to mitigate as appropriate.” (Reference: pp. 5 - 6)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 2:

1. Use HRFE's Operational Risk Registry to document and prioritize risks to operations and building risks.

Status: COMPLETE

HRFE's Operational Risk Registry is updated to identify risks and possible mitigation strategies for each item. This document has been shared with Legal Services.

- a. Work with Planning & Development to understand abilities in data collection and reports to assist in determining risk locations and management

Status: IN PROGRESS

HRFE has shared with Planning & Development the Auditor's Recommendations and Action Plan. HRFE and Planning & Development staff have discussed limitations of the current status quo. Changes to the data reporting are in progress to ensure the higher risk properties are being properly identified.

- b. Communicate risks to Regional Council if there are insufficient resources to mitigate risks as appropriate.

Status: COMPLETE

HRFE has no risks that would warrant communication to Regional Council at this time, however risks are being tracked including adherence to legislation and will be communicated during regular business planning and budget presentations.

- c. Review all relevant action steps associated with the audit recommendations and prioritize based on risk.

Status: IN PROGRESS

At this time, HRFE has prioritized work based both on risk as well as ability to complete tasks based on requirements.

Recommendation 3

"Halifax Fire should develop and implement a system of fire inspections, including how often buildings should be inspected. Scheduling and monitoring processes should also be developed and implemented to ensure fire inspections are completed as planned." (Reference: pp. 6 - 7)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 3

1. Determine, document, and record a 'starting point' date for inspections.

Status: IN PROGRESS

HRFE and IT are working together to improve the data in the records management system to include a start date based on a satisfactory inspection. Additional work will be required to ensure this includes the inspection date where the initial occupancy was granted.

2. Work with internal resources and IT to develop a system that will identify buildings that are due for inspection.

Status: AT RISK

HRFE is unsure if this work will be able to be completed within the 18-month timeframe. HRFE staff discussed potential options with a third-party vendor which is currently working on other IT solutions for HRFE. The vendor indicated a project of this size would require more time and resources. Staff will work with IT to identify potential solutions.

3. Work with internal resources and IT to develop a system that will identify the status of all inspection case files.

Status: IN PROGRESS

A third-party vendor and internal partners are working with HRFE to develop a dashboard that identifies the status of all inspection case files. This dashboard report is approximately 80% complete.

4. Revisit policy that outlines frequency of fire inspections.

Status: IN PROGRESS

More details provided under Recommendation 9. The inspection frequencies will be evaluated as part of the policy review process.

Recommendation 4

"Halifax Fire should establish a regular update process to ensure it has a current and accurate inventory of inspectable buildings." (Reference: p. 8)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 4

1. Work with Corporate GIS group to explore and implement best practices for managing building information.

Status: IN PROGRESS

The Corporate GIS group has signed a statement of work with a third party that should produce a solution for this issue. The solution will be piloted to see if staff can access the data and correct it in the field in real time. The solution leverages existing off the shelf tools and if successful could be deployed to other business units. This solution will also produce a way for other users to view and “flag” errors in the data so it can be reviewed by subject matter experts to investigate and correct as needed.

2. Work with Corporate GIS group as well as other internal and external resources to develop and implement a process to ensure accurate inventory of inspectable buildings.

Status: NOT YET STARTED

This work is dependent on the results of the project currently underway with Corporate GIS and a third-party vendor as described above.

Recommendation 5

“Halifax Fire should work with People, Communications and Information Technology; and Planning and Development to determine how to transfer property data from HRM's new Permitting, Planning, Licensing, Compliance solution to update HRFE's system.” (Reference: p. 8)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 5

1. Continue to work with P&D and IT to complete the data flow and reporting processes between FDM, GIS and P&D's new Permitting, Planning, Licensing, Compliance solution.

Status: IN PROGRESS

ICT is leading a special work group that includes all necessary stakeholders (ICT, HRFE, P&D) to improve the data flow and reporting process between LMS (permit software), GIS (data warehouse), and FDM (fire inspection software). The building inventory data that is required to support the fire inspection program is being prioritized. It is expected this endeavour will take several stages to complete, and the outcome will result in a transformational improvement to the building details dataset. Once complete, this data can be made available to firefighters responding to emergencies to improve public and firefighter safety.

Recommendation 6

“Halifax Fire should issue orders-to-comply, where appropriate, and maintain key correspondence related to fire inspections, for an appropriate retention period.” (Reference: p. 10)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 6

1. Determine if HRFE’s computer system can be modified to show extension due dates, and if not, determine other process to achieve this recommendation.

Status: IN PROGRESS

This is dependent on work identified in Recommendation 3.1. If successful, alterations to the computer system will improve tracking of Order to Comply dates, including extensions.

2. Create and distribute daily reports to identify case status including any approved extensions.

Status: IN PROGRESS

Dashboard reports are being produced by a third-party vendor and internal partners that will identify all current case files including the status of the file and due dates for each inspector. These reports are close to completion.

Recommendation 7

“When follow up of limited-scope inspections must be escalated to fire inspection staff, Halifax Fire should determine and communicate follow-up timelines and monitor completion dates.” (Reference: pp. 11 - 12)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 7

1. Create policy with timelines and completion dates for limited scope inspections.

Status: IN PROGRESS

This will be part of the work plan for recommendation nine.

2. Determine if HRFE’s FDM system can be enhanced to identify pending report referrals, and if not, determine other process to achieve this recommendation.

Status: COMPLETE

The corporate customer service system (HANSEN), which is used extensively by HRFE, is being used to satisfy this issue. All work packages in this system include tracking, accountability, and established service standards. While this concern has been resolved through this workflow change, a secondary solution is still being considered within the inspection software (FDM).

Recommendation 8

“HRFE should develop and implement a quality assurance process to monitor that fire inspections are properly completed and documented. This should include developing guidance to promote consistency across inspection staff, which should help facilitate the quality assurance process.” (Reference p. 13)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 8

1. Develop process documentation for staff to outline the requirement for complete inspection reports.

Status: IN PROGRESS

One of the new FTEs which HRFE will recruit (once job description and salary is finalized) will be responsible for outlining (and improving upon) all relevant staff activities. Once the activities have been documented there will be a standard to which auditing can be applied to.

2. Develop, document, and track a regular quality assurance process to sample a percentage of completed inspection reports.

Status: IN PROGRESS

A third-party vendor in conjunction with internal partners is creating a report that selects a random sample of inspections to be audited. In addition, changes to the FDM software are being proposed to allow for tracking and assignment of all cases selected for audit.

Recommendation 9

“HRFE should update its fire inspection policies and procedures and establish a regular review process to maintain them going forward.” (Reference p. 13)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 9

1. Create a subcommittee to do a thorough review of our current policies and operational guidelines and update as appropriate.

Status: IN PROGRESS

Fire Prevention and Policy staff have started this work and are reviewing other similar policies for best practices.

2. Revisit frequencies of inspections.

Status: IN PROGRESS

This work is part of the review of other department's policies for best practices.

Recommendation 10

"HRFE should establish expectations for fire inspection staff productivity and provide staff with guidance on how to prioritize inspections and other duties." (Reference p. 14)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 10

1. Set targets and service standards for fire inspection staff on all work packages assigned.

Status: IN PROGRESS

Most customer service request work tasks have service standards associated with them. The standards related to inspections will be established as part of the policy revision process.

2. Provide reports and/or processes for staff to identify priority and time available for each task assigned to them.

Status: AT RISK

This work is at risk of not being completed in the 18-month timeframe due to a lack of resources. The work by a third-party vendor and internal partners on inspection work is expected by end of this fiscal year, however there will not be time to include the other work staff are responsible to complete (CSR's, Permits, etc.). Once the inspection standards are operational, HRFE will work towards adding the other work packages.

3. Modify FDM to identify and assign inspections.

Status: IN PROGRESS

Alterations to the FDM (inspection) system combined with a dashboard report is being looked at to support this requirement.

Recommendation 11

“HRFE should develop concrete plans, with timelines, for fire inspection staff to receive sufficient training in a timely manner.” (Reference p. 15)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 11

1. Request resources for a new FTE to develop an internal training program and continuous training modules.

Status: COMPLETE

This FTE has been approved for hiring in the new fiscal year (after April 1 2022).

2. The new FTE will oversee and instruct the training program.

Status: IN PROGRESS

HRFE is developing an NFPA fire inspection course intended for fire prevention division staff. This work will be implemented and enhanced by the new FTE, once hired.

Recommendation 12

“HRFE should develop performance indicators for the Fire Prevention Division, establish targets, and regularly monitor against them.” (Reference pp. 16-17)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 12

1. Create realistically obtainable KPIs using a structured reporting system.

Status: IN PROGRESS

Key performance indicators are being developed within a series of dashboard reports being produced by a third-party vendor and internal partners. These reports are close to completion.

2. Generate monthly KPI reports.

Status: IN PROGRESS

The reports noted above can be generated monthly but also have the capability to be reviewed in real time.

3. Expand existing KPI on legislative compliance to reflect the individual occupancy types.

Status: IN PROGRESS

The third-party vendor and internal partners reports include a view specifically related to this requirement.

Recommendation 13

“HRFE should work with Planning and Development to address concerns regarding HRFE's involvement in planning applications.” (Reference pp. 17)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 13

1. Request resources for an FTE with knowledge in plans examination to work with Planning and Development to provide input on planning applications.

Status: COMPLETE

This FTE has been approved to be hired in the new fiscal year (after April 1, 2022), pending job description and salary approval.

2. FTE with knowledge in plans examination (if approved) to liaise with P&D staff and provide guidance and input on revisions to municipal engineering and planning standards.

Status: NOT YET STARTED

This will commence once the FTE is hired.

Recommendation 14

“HRFE should develop a complete list of dry hydrant needs and determine how it will prioritize capital funding for these.” (Reference p. 18)

Update on Action Plan for Recommendation 14

1. Prevention staff to work with Operations and Performance and Safety divisions to identify a complete list of dry hydrant needs.

Status: IN PROGRESS

A preliminary list has been developed by HRFE's Performance and Safety division to be validated by the Operations division. HRFE is continuing to seek accessible static water sources for installation of dry hydrants.

2. Determine how to prioritize capital funding for the maintenance and installation of dry hydrants.

Status: IN PROGRESS

This work continues each year. This year staff provided information to the Capital Funding Steering Committee during Capital Budget deliberations, indicating that this work is a priority for HRFE as part of our response to the Audit recommendations.