



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

## Item No. 2

Halifax Regional Council  
April 17, 2024

**TO:** Audit and Finance Standing Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** -ORIGINAL SIGNED-

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Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** April 11, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Management of Fire Inspection Program Audit Update

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### INFORMATION REPORT

#### ORIGIN

January 17, 2024 Audit and Finance Standing Committee:

MOVED by Councillor Russell, seconded by Councillor Lovelace

THAT the Audit and Finance Standing Committee direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a status update and action plan on the outstanding recommendations on the management of the fire inspection program and return to the Audit and Finance Standing Committee in three months.

#### BACKGROUND

The Auditor General released a report September 2021 titled "Management of the Fire Inspection Program Audit". The report identified 14 recommendations, which were accepted by Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency. A subsequent report was released January 2024 by the Auditor General titled "Follow-up Review – 2021-22 Audits" that identified 8 of the 14 recommendations were complete. A motion was put forward and passed for an update and action plan on the outstanding recommendations, which forms the basis for this report.

#### DISCUSSION

This section of the report will provide and update and action plan for the outstanding recommendations associated with the Auditor General's report:

**Recommendation 1** Halifax Fire should develop and implement detailed plans, with timelines, to meet fire inspection obligations.

The design of the organizational restructure is completed, and the positions have been funded and approved through the Organizational Change Assessment procedure. Two leadership positions related to the restructure were posted on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. The positions were the Manager of Fire Inspection Services and the Manager of Internal and Investigative Services. Once the leadership positions are hired, additional positions will be posted and filled. Some positions require negotiation with the Union, which are still ongoing. Once the negotiation process has concluded, those positions associated with the restructure will be filled.

**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.

Scheduling and monitoring of ongoing inspection work was completed using corporate business intelligence tools, which is now fully operational. The development of a system to prioritize outstanding building inspections by risk remains incomplete. The initial approach involved a cross jurisdictional scan of similar organizations. After reviewing the responses, it was determined no off-the-shelf solution was available and a new software solution would have to be developed.

The plan to meet this recommendation is to develop a software-based fire inspection tool that will support the prioritization and assignment of work by risk assessment and legislative responsibility to inspect. This is an Information Technology supported project which is funded by Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency. A vendor, ESRI, was selected and is now working on the design of the user interface and the risk assessment functionality. A mock up design was recently presented to HRFE and is currently being improved upon based on user feedback. Once we have received ESRI's cost estimate to implement a system based on HRFE's requirements the implementation timeline will be developed. The timeline will be contingent on funding and resource availability.

**Recommendation 8** Halifax Fire 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.

The technology-based aspects of the quality assurance process have been developed, which includes random case selection, work assignments, and tracking for completion.

The process documentation and audit criteria for inspection case files is being developed and will be put into practice starting April 2024. The work is being temporarily performed by current staff and will be transitioned to the quality improvement specialist position once hired. The quality improvement specialist will be responsible for refinement of the Division's procedures based on the findings of this program.

**Recommendation 9** Halifax Fire should update its fire inspection policies and procedures and establish a regular review process to maintain them going forward.

Some preliminary work has been completed including a jurisdictional scan, however this task will be refocused once the restructure has been implemented, which will involve the quality improvement specialist working with the section managers. Most of the current policies and procedures are significantly out of date and require a complete overhaul.

**Recommendation 11** Halifax Fire should develop concrete plans, with timelines, for fire inspection staff to receive sufficient training in a timely manner.

There are limited options in Nova Scotia for fire inspector training. The main provider FIANS (Fire Inspectors Association of Nova Scotia) offers a two-level training program that includes Nova Scotia Fire Code related modules. The training is delivered by conferences, which are held twice a year. Under this model it takes approximately seven years to reach Level 2 certification.

The alternative to FIANS is NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) 1031 Fire Inspector Level I & 2 training, which is typically held online by multiple service providers. While the NFPA training is beneficial and is used by HRFE, it does not cover subjects specific to the Nova Scotia Fire Code and it does not have a significant practical component.

The plan to satisfy this recommendation involves the hiring of a professional standards specialist position who will be responsible for developing training programs for all staff in the division. Having an internal resource for training will allow HRFE to develop and arrange training that is better aligned with our needs. This position is related to the restructure identified in Recommendation 1.

**Recommendation 12** Halifax Fire should develop performance indicators for the Fire Prevention Division, establish targets, and regularly monitor against them.

The Fire Prevention Division targets the legislated goal for fire inspections, which is presently 3,636 completed cases per year. A report was developed using Business Intelligence that tracks total cases, and cases by occupancies, which is reviewed regularly.

The plan to satisfy this recommendation involves the introduction of individual targets for staff. Performance targets must be carefully implemented as the wrong target can cause staff to focus on quantity over quality. For this reason, the initial performance indicators will focus on inspections and caseloads. These will be reviewed during quarterly meetings along with the quality assurance audit results provided in recommendation 8.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

There is not community engagement associated with this report.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Matt Covey, P.Eng., Division Chief Fire Prevention, 902.490.7145

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