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Item No. 8
Halifax Regional Council
June 18, 2024

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 4, 2024

SUBJECT: 2023-24 French Language Services Strategy Annual Update Report

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

June 29, 2021 Halifax Regional Council motion: MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Russell THAT Halifax Regional Council: 1. Adopt the attached French-Language Services Strategy as set out in Attachment 1 of the staff report dated May 3, 2021; and 2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to carry out the actions contained in the French-Language Services Strategy as part of the annual budgeting process. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

"The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39, subsections 7A, 34(1) and 34(3) provide:
7A The purposes of the Municipality are to (a) provide good government; (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

...

34 (1) The Chief Administrative Officer is the head of the administrative branch of the government of the Municipality and is responsible to the Council for the proper administration of the affairs of the Municipality in accordance with the by-laws of the Municipality and the policies adopted by the Council.

...

34 (3) The Council shall provide direction on the administration, plans, policies and programs of the Municipality to the Chief Administrative Officer"

BACKGROUND

On June 29, 2021, Regional Council approved the French-Language Services Strategy (the Strategy) and directed the Chief Administrative Officer to carry out the actions contained in the Strategy as part of the annual budgeting process. The Strategy is structured around the five priorities of the municipality's [Diversity & Inclusion Framework](#): inclusive public service, inclusive work environment, equitable employment, meaningful partnerships, accessible information and communication. It contains 33 action items set according to community needs, internal resources and capacity as well as business planning directions identified in previous studies. The implementation of the Strategy follows a three-phase model (10 years in

total), with each phase laying the foundation for the next. 2023/24 was the third and last year of the phase one implementation of the Strategy. The progress achieved in the previous two years (2021/22 & 2022/23) of phase one were reported respectively in the [2021-22 French Language Services Strategy Annual Update](#) and the [2022-23 French Language Services Strategy Annual Update](#). This report provides a detailed update on the progress of the concluding year (2023/24) of the phase one implementation.

DISCUSSION

Of the 33 action items outlined in the Strategy, 18 are identified in the phase one implementation plan; 12 of them are recurring, whereas six have pre-set completion timelines.

By the end of the first year of the phase one implementation (2021/22):

- All 12 recurring action items had been incorporated into the daily work of the French Services division within the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO.
- Three of the six actions items with pre-set timelines had been completed.

By the end of the second year of the phase one implementation (2022/23):

- The 12 recurring action items continued to be part of the daily work of the French Services division.
- One additional action item with a pre-set timeline was completed and incorporated into the regular work of French Services.

By the end of the third year of the phase one implementation (2023/24):

- The 13 recurring action items continued to be part of the daily work of the French Services division.
- One additional action item with a pre-set timeline was completed.
- The only remaining action item is currently on track to be completed by the end of 2024 Spring.

Below is the detailed progress of the phase one action items advanced within the 2023/24 fiscal year:

Inclusive public service

- French services and programs

Between April 2023 to March 2024, with the funding obtained through the *Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on French-language Services*, French Services supported the translation from English to French of 8 communication items (4032 words¹) produced by the municipality. The translated documents covered a variety of service areas, such as recreation forms, communication materials related to Urban Forestry, Kana'ta Day, North American Indigenous Games, Hazards, Risks and Vulnerability Assessment, Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry, Citizenship Awards, among others. Implementing translation services has ensured accessible municipal information for the local Acadian and Francophone population, encouraging their participation in municipal affairs.

¹ Since the translation services rely solely on the external funding obtained through the *Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on French-language Services* and there was a delay in obtaining the funding for 2023-24 due to the lengthy renewal process of the agreement between the Province and the Federal government, there was a period in 2023-24 when funding was exhausted for translation services, which led to a decrease in the total number of communications items translated compared to the previous year (from around 20 000 words to around 4000 words). This number does not include translation work completed by business units with their respective budget, such as public service announcements and press releases.

- Internal resources and capacity

Between April 2023 and March 2024, with the funding obtained through the *Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on French-language Services*, French Services offered a total of 89 seats² to municipal employees to participate in part-time French classes provided by the Université Sainte-Anne in the 2023 Spring, Summer, Fall and 2024 Winter sessions. Participants were from all municipal business units as well as Halifax Public Libraries. The average completion rate was 82.3 per cent. According to the evaluations, the majority of participants stated that the skills learned were useful for their work and anticipated using them at work.

The three-hour corporate training module, *Parlez-vous français? – Understanding Acadian and Francophone Communities and French Services* was offered three times between April 2023 and March 2024. A total of 30 municipal employees participated in the training. The training module is intended to raise cultural awareness around the Acadian and Francophone communities among municipal employees and offer resources and tools for French services provision. The content of the workshop was updated with new resources and data in 2023-24.

- Corporate policies

French Services has been leading a working group (including staff members from the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO and Corporate Communications) to create a multilingual policy, which aims to support linguistically diverse residents in accessing municipal information and to help business units understand why, when and how to provide information in languages other than English (including the Mi'kmaq language and American sign language). The working group completed a jurisdictional scan and established a menu of best practices in 2021-22. An internal assessment was completed in 2022-23. The policy and supporting procedures were drafted and reviewed internally in 2023-24 and are expected to be rolled out in the spring of 2024.

Equitable employment

- *French-Language Services Human Resources Guidelines*

In both 2021-22 and 2022-23, French Services collected input from impacted Human Resources service areas (Client Services, Total Rewards, Labour Relations and Talent Acquisition) regarding the *French-Language Services Human Resources Guidelines* initially drafted by Human Resources in 2016. The drafted guidelines have been revised and updated. The new guidelines were rolled out to HR Business Partners and Talent Recruiters in 2023-24.

- Workforce building

During the period spanning April 2023 to March 2024, Talent Acquisitions (HR), in collaboration with French Services, engaged in a fruitful partnership with YMCA-NS Works to provide essential resources for Francophone and bilingual job seekers. The initiative included the delivery of an information session tailored to municipal job opportunities, alongside two workshops focusing on resume construction and interview techniques. The information session highlighted various avenues within the municipal job sector, offering attendees valuable insights into potential career paths and employment prospects. Moreover, the workshops on resume building and interview skills equipped participants with practical tools and strategies essential for navigating the competitive job market.

² Since the French language training relies solely on the external funding obtained through the *Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on French-language Services* and there was a delay in obtaining the funding for 2023-24 due to the lengthy renewal process of the agreement between the Province and the Federal government, there was a period in 2023-24 when funding was exhausted for French language training, which led to a decrease in the total number of seats offered compared to the previous year (from 101 seats to 89 seats).

It is noteworthy that approximately 35 individuals actively participated in these sessions, demonstrating a keen interest and commitment to enhancing their employability and career advancement opportunities. This collaborative effort underscores our commitment to fostering inclusivity and providing tailored support to diverse communities within our workforce. Moving forward, we aim to continue such initiatives, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for all job seekers, irrespective of linguistic backgrounds.

In January 2024, French Services worked with YMCA-French Services, Chambre de commerce francophone d'Halifax and Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse to host a bilingual summer job fair. Over 130 youth from high schools, colleges and universities attended the event. Talent Acquisition (HR), with the support of French Services, participated in the job fair to promote municipal summer job opportunities.

Meaningful partnerships

- Halifax Acadian and Francophone Partnership

French Services continued to support the work of the Halifax Acadian and Francophone Partnership. Since September 2021, the French Services Advisor (Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO) has served as the municipality's representative, co-chairing the Partnership and reporting quarterly to the CAO regarding the Partnership's work.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, five Partnership meetings took place, each of which were well attended with around 20 attendees per session. Councillor Pam Lovelace, Regional Council's liaison with the Acadian and Francophone community attended the meeting in May 2023 to hear the presentation on the *2022/23 French Services Strategy* update.

The Partnership meetings have been a major opportunity for members to share news from respective organizations, explore opportunities of partnerships and discuss key community issues. There are currently five subcommittees within the Partnership to focus on pressing community needs: communications, employment, community space, Francophonie Month celebration (ad hoc) and Welcoming new Francophones moving to Halifax. The French Services Advisor sits on all subcommittees except the Communications Subcommittee.

- Partnerships between the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Acadian and Francophone community

Between April 2023 and March 2024, municipal business units have established partnerships with the local Acadian and Francophone community to implement the following initiatives:

- **2023 Acadian Day celebration**
Civic Events, the Mayor's Office and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO worked with the local community organization Conseil communautaire du Grand-Havre to organize a flag raising and a concert at Grand Parade to celebrate the 2023 Acadian Day, which gathered a large number of attendees from all backgrounds and officials from all levels of government.
- **2024 Francophonie Month/International Francophonie Day celebration**
The Mayor's Office and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO worked with Conseil communautaire du Grand-Havre to organize an opening ceremony at the City Hall in recognition of the Francophonie Month in March 2024. The event featured the municipal proclamation reading, speeches from officials of all government levels as well as community stakeholders, and performances by local Francophone artists. Over 70 guests attended the opening ceremony.

- **Pilot project: French recreational program at Sackville Sports Stadium (Phase I & II)**

The Community Space subcommittee of the Halifax Acadian and Francophone Partnership worked with the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial school École du Grand Portage and the Sackville Sports Stadium to offer French recreational programs in spring 2022 as a pilot project. The partners worked closely to conduct community engagements, design and promote the program, and recruit the program leaders. Five French programs were offered at the stadium in spring 2022. All five programs were mostly full.

In 2023-24, this subcommittee continued to work with the Sackville Sports Stadium to advance the phase II of the pilot project. Two French Rec programs were offered at the stadium in spring and fall 2023. One week half day French camp was offered in summer 2023. The second phase of the pilot project showed a lower registration rate. According to the subcommittee, it would require some particular ways of collaboration working with the local Acadian and Francophone community to offer French recreation programs with better success. The French Services Advisor and members of the subcommittee met with the Community Recreation Coordinators and the Senior Managers within the Recreation Programming division to raise awareness around this and the successes and challenges with this pilot project.

- Representation on municipal boards, committees and commissions

French Services supported the promotion of communication materials related to the 2023 fall recruitment for municipal boards, committees and commissions to reduce barriers for French-speaking residents seeking to participate in municipal governance.

Accessible information and communication

- Website

Between April 2023 and March 2024, French Services maintained and updated the content on the French micro-site (<https://fr.halifax.ca/>) and conducted a review of the French content on the New in Halifax website (<https://newinhalifax.ca/fr/>). Suggestions for improvement have been shared with the Halifax Immigration Partnership managing the website.

French Services received and answered eight French inquiries regarding municipal services via the generic email french_francais@halifax.ca between April 2023 and March 2024.

- Bilingual public service announcements and news releases

All public service announcements (PSA) and news releases produced by the municipality, except for those issued by the Halifax Regional Police have continued to be issued in both English and French since 2018.

- Municipal information

Between April 2023 and March 2024, municipal business units provided municipal information to the Acadian and Francophone community through the following initiatives:

- Talent Acquisition (HR) offered one information session on municipal job opportunities to bilingual and Francophone job seekers. The session was delivered in English with French services support.
- Emergency Management Office (EMO) delivered a presentation on Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Assessment to members of Halifax Acadian and Francophone Partnership. The presentation was delivered in English with French services support.

- Community consultation

The Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (HRVA) Specialist from EMO worked with French Services to host a bilingual focus group discussion on the HRVA project to collect input from the local Acadian and Francophone community. Ten individuals registered and five participated in the discussion. Input was provided on improving access to emergency preparedness resources and bilingual alerting methods. Suggestions were provided to improve future group discussions for both virtual and in-person settings.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding pertaining to the implementation of the French-Language Services Strategy in 2023/24 came from a combination of external grants through the *Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on French-language Services* and the 2023/24 municipal operating budget, in particular the annual budget of Corporate Communications for the French translation of PSAs, news releases and municipal statements, as well as the operating budget of the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO for other initiatives related to the strategy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments.

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.

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