



Corporate Report

NO.: R193

COUNCIL DATE: September 8, 2003

REGULAR

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: September 5, 2003

FROM: **Fire Chief**

FILE: 0290-01

SUBJECT: **Union of British Columbia Competition for Best Practices / Award of Merit**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

The 2003 Local Government Excellence Awards requested submissions from local governments concerning innovative new programs or substantial improvements to existing programs. Surrey Fire Service submitted their paper “Reducing Uncertainty for Predicting Annual Staffing Costs” under the category of Best Practices. This paper introduces the methodology developed by the Fire Service of Surrey to forecast cost implications of maintaining a minimum level of staffing. The model can accept new staffing parameters and apply them to historical data, allowing managers to identify the changes to staffing techniques that are likely to have the greatest impact on future staffing levels.

DISCUSSION

In 2001 the Fire Services Review recommended that the Fire Service employ and maintain four person staffing on all pumpers within the City of Surrey. These new standards have improved fire safety in our community, yet at the same time, adoption of these standards have increased operating demands, and required the Management Team to look for ways to maintain this goal within existing budget parameters. In this age of economic uncertainty and heightened concern to respond duly to unforeseen risk, direct adoption of new regulations without calculating short and long-term impact on budget is

irresponsible. Implementation of accountability acts to ensure the right measures are executed at the right time.

The staffing model developed statistically forecasts the potential range of cost impacts based upon the historical experience of sick and injury (WCB) usage within the Fire Service. Utilization of a staffing model statistically forecasts the potential range of cost impacts to reduce the risk of budget overruns.

The effective staffing parameters identified by modeling were translated into personnel management techniques, which have been applied stringently and dynamically to ensure cost remains within allocated budget. The risk of exceeding the allocated budget still exists if sick usage exceeds previous averages or the techniques identified are not carefully adhered to or applied.

Based on the forecast provided by the model in 2001, Surrey Fire Service decided to proceed with implementing the techniques identified in this model for the year 2002. The budget, based on previous years' actual requirements, was \$426,000. At the end of 2002, only \$116,961 had been used. This saving of \$309,039 can be largely attributed to improved personnel management techniques learned from the model. Small adjustments make a big difference, because staffing costs comprise the majority of fire departments' operational budgets. In 2003 and beyond, Surrey Fire Service forecasts even greater tracking and responsiveness to change in staffing conditions, maintaining or improving the cost savings gained in 2002.

CONCLUSION

All organizations that use shift workers to maintain a minimum level of staffing could benefit from the use of this model. In real life, attempts to improve efficiency can be expensive, time consuming, and require considerable change management skills to implement successfully. Prior use of this model can ensure that the investment made in the change will pay off.

We believe that the techniques learned are truly a best practice and it would seem that the judges of the UBCM Excellence Awards have agreed. We respectfully request that Council designate an appointee to receive the Award of Merit which will be presented on Wednesday, September 24, 2003, during the afternoon business section of the 2003 UBCM Convention in Vancouver.

Len Garis
Fire Chief