



Response to Questions to Audit Committee from the Beaver Lake Fire Committee

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On June 20, 2017, the Beaver Lake Fire Committee wrote to the Audit Committee regarding the Value-For-Money Audit Report for Fire Services and requested that the Audit Committee pose a number of questions to the authors of the report. Attachment 1 to this report provides responses from the Auditor General's Office to those questions.

The attached responses are limited to a discussion of relevant audit procedures that were performed for the above-noted audit which covered the period from January 1, 2013 to April 30, 2017. As a result, they may not respond fully to the questions posed by the Beaver Lake Fire Committee. If the Committee requires additional information, we recommend that it write directly to the Chief of Fire and Paramedic Services who is responsible for addressing community specific needs for fire services.

Attachment 1 – Responses for the Beaver Lake Fire Committee

Questions	Audit Procedures	Comments
Are volunteer firefighters offered the necessary training – if so, how often compared to full-time firefighters?	Our audit included a review of training programs offered to volunteer firefighters to assess the adequacy of training available and provided relative to relevant risks.	We concluded that the training programs offered to volunteer firefighters were sufficient to meet the present requirements of By-law 2014-84 and relevant legislation.
Are volunteer firefighters being sent to fire calls – if so, are they given calls in their area in a timely fashion, or are calls going to the full-time firefighters first?	Our audit included a review of fire response protocols and fire response times to assess the adequacy of operational risk management.	We did not identify any fire response protocols that would allow calls to be delayed or to be directed to stations with full-time firefighters rather than assigned to stations that are closest to a fire. While response rates vary from one station to the next, we noted that response rates of some volunteers were a concern. Average response rates for volunteers to incidents in the immediate response area in 2016 were 34% and for incidents in the district were 35%. Accordingly, we recommended changes to responses protocols and the establishment of call response targets for volunteer firefighters.
Why has there been such a long-standing deficiency in the number of volunteer firefighters?	Our audit included a review of staffing levels to assess the adequacy of fire response capabilities relative to relevant risks.	We are aware that the GSFS has experienced difficulties recruiting volunteer firefighters in some rural and remote communities due to changing demographics. An audit recommendation was not provided as a recruitment initiative for volunteer firefighters was in progress at the time of reporting. The success of this initiative would be dependent upon the availability of qualified individuals that were willing to apply for these positions in these rural and remote communities.
What is the plan to increase the number of volunteers?	Our audit included a review of staffing levels to assess the adequacy of fire response capabilities relative to relevant risks.	We recommended that reasonable, attainable service level targets be established for responding to fire calls, formalizing them within the Establishing and Regulating Fire Services By-law, communicating them to the public and reporting annually to Council on them. To achieve this, specific targets will need to be established for urban, suburban, rural and remote communities such as Beaver Lake. To attain these targets, the GSFS may also need to review its requirements for volunteer firefighters as well as the frequency of recruitment initiatives.
Where was the money that was budgeted for volunteer staffing spent?	Our audit included a review of revenues and expenses to identify and assess major variances between budget and actual in 2013 to 2016 inclusive.	While no major controllable variances were identified within our audit, an opportunity to improve controls over overtime costs was identified in our report. It should be noted that department heads are held accountable for meeting overall budget levels rather than targets for specific budget line items. The Chief of Fire and Paramedic Services also has a high level of discretion in determining how the GSFS responds to community needs and the requirements of relevant legislation.