



Governance Committee

Subject:	Fire Protection Service Levels Policy, C-704
Date:	October 15, 2024
Presenter:	Matt Boscarol, Executive Director
Department:	Community Services

REPORT SUMMARY

On January 16, 2024, the Governance Committee passed the following motions:

MOVED BY Councillor Wright that the Governance Committee direct Administration to review Council Policy C-704 Fire Protection Service Levels and bring potential amendments to Council for their consideration by the end of Q2 2024.

MOVED by Councillor Wright that the Governance Committee direct Administration to engage an external consultant to review and revise the 2022 draft Fire Services Master Plan, including future emergency service needs of the community in a 2024 Fire Service Master Plan, for presentation to Council in Q4 of 2024.

In response, Administration, with the assistance of Transitional Solutions, Inc. (TSI) completed a review and revision of Policy C-704. The review considered the existing service levels and model relative to a comprehensive community risk assessment, the County’s current and projected growth and national standards. The new proposed policy would guide the development of the 2024 Fire Service Master Plan.

Key changes to the policy include:

- Amendments to expected response times and distances, including the addition of Demand Zones;
- Amendments to minimum staffing required for specific levels of service;
- Clearer definitions of the service provided.

The proposed policy clearly outlines and defines the level of service expected and how it will be achieved and sets an annual review timeline to ensure it remains relevant and sufficient to meet the needs of the growing population.

ADMINISTRATION’S RECOMMENDATION

THAT Governance Committee receive the Fire Protection Service Level Policy, C-704, as information.

BACKGROUND

In January 2024, the Governance Committee directed Administration to (1) review Council Policy C-704 Fire Protection Service Levels, and (2) engage an external consultant to review and revise the 2022 draft Fire Services Master Plan, including future emergency service needs of the community. At that time the County did not have an approved Fire Master Plan. Following the Committee’s direction, in the second quarter of 2024, Administration contracted Transitional Solutions, Inc. (TSI) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the existing draft Master Plan and the service level policy, in the context of a community risk assessment, an analysis of current and future projected growth, and current national standards.

Fire Protection Service Levels Policy, C-704

The existing Policy C-704 was reviewed in 2020, but the policy parameters were set in 2012. It defined two different levels of service:

1. Elbow Valley, Springbank, Bearspaw, Balzac and Langdon Fire Stations: for an incident within 8 kilometers, vehicle rescue, shore-based water rescue, interior/offensive fire suppression, and exterior defensive firefighting activities are provided with at least four firefighters on scene within 10 minutes, 80% of the time.
2. Irricana and Madden Fire Stations: for an incident within 8 kilometers, vehicle rescue and exterior/defensive fire suppression activities are provided with at least four firefighters on scene within 18 minutes, 80% of the time.

For other areas not included in the above, incidents are responded to with four firefighters on scene in an indeterminate period of time, 90% of the time.

At that time, Council had determined that the most cost effective and appropriate way to deliver Fire Protection Services within the County is through the use of a composite Fire Service organizational structure, which is comprised of full-time, part-time and Paid-Per-Call (PPC) (volunteer) fire stations. In addition, the County supplements its response with reciprocal mutual and automatic aid agreements with neighbouring jurisdictions (Cochrane, Crossfield, Beiseker, Chestermere, Airdrie, City of Calgary).

Since these parameters were established in 2012, the County has grown significantly, with the analysis demonstrating that the policy no longer reflects the current dynamic of the stations, or the services provided.

DISCUSSION

Proposed LOS Policy C-704

The primary goal of the proposed policy is to:

- mitigate risks to community safety;
- improve customer service;
- more clearly define service levels;
- ensure services are resourced;
- deliver service to resident and investor expectations; and
- ensure continuous improvement of the fire service, aligned with County growth and development.

Proposed amendments consider:

- industry standards for population density and associated staffing, response times, and service level response rate (see Table 1).
- present and increasing urbanization in a number of communities (e.g., Langdon, Harmony, Balzac); and
- Aligning growth of residential, commercial, and sometimes light industrial areas with commensurate service requirements to higher demand zones outside of present response capabilities.

Demand Zones

Table 1: Municipal Demand Zones per NFPA 1720

Demand Zone	Demographics	Minimum Staff to Respond	Response Time (minutes)	Meets Objective (%)
Urban area	>1000 people/mi ² (2.6 km ²)	15	9	90
Suburban area	500-1000 people/mi ² (2.6 km ²)	10	10	80
Rural area	<500 people/mi ² (2.6 km ²)	6	14	80
Remote area	Travel distance ≥8 Mi (12.87 km)	4	Directly dependent on travel distance	90
Special risks	Determined by AHJ	Determined by AHJ Based on Risk	Determined by AHJ	90
Minimum staffing includes members responding from the AHJ's department and automatic aid				
Response time begins upon completion of the dispatch notification and ends at the time interval shown in the table.				

The current state capacity of Fire Services does not lend itself to an urban or suburban level of response. The proposed amendments to the policy do bring the County in line with current standards for rural demand zones, and if implemented would bring greater consistency to service levels across all areas of the County. Service levels are defined by the station type, given the County's hybrid service model (full-time, part-time, and paid per call (volunteer) stations).

The proposed amendments to Policy C-704 and their implications are summarized in Attachment A. Most significantly, the proposed service levels adjustments are as follows:

1. Elbow Valley, Springbank, Bearspaw, and Balzac (full-time/part-time) stations: for incidents within 10 kilometers of the station, units arrive at an incident within 14 minutes, with at least six personnel, 80 percent of the time.
2. Madden, Irricana, and Langdon (paid per call) stations: for incidents within 10 kilometers of the station, units arrive at an incident within 14 minutes with six personnel, 80 percent of the time, with response time dependent on staff muster to station and travel distance.
3. For incidents in remote demand zones (any incident further than 10 kilometers by road from the nearest fire station), units are to arrive at an incident with six personnel, 80 percent of the time, with response time dependent on travel distance.

The Demand Zone Map in Attachment B of the proposed policy define and display the 10 km area of present fire stations, as well as the response time for full-time stations and paid-per-call stations. The proposed service level is achievable with existing resources, with the exception of Elbow Valley, which would require two additional full-time staff. The proposed six-person crew would allow the County to provide a more reliable level of service, with the addition of a tender crew to provide water where a water source is unreliable or unavailable.

Implementation

The implementation of the policy would occur using the same composite model that currently exists, which includes full-time, part-time, and PPC fire stations and mutual/automatic aid agreements. With improvements to fire services data and more consistent service level monitoring, Administration may propose future amendments to the policy for Council's consideration.

Implications

The new Policy C-704 would ensure a more consistent level of service across the County, and better reflects the Fire Services current capacity. The policy more clearly defines the services provided and also ensures the County is prioritizing prevention as a core service.

Resource Implications

A potential financial implication would be related to the two full time positions that would be required in Elbow Valley to meet the six-person crew level of service. Any effects to budget would be presented to Council for consideration.

ALTERNATE DIRECTION

THAT Governance Committee refer the Fire Protection Service Level Policy C-704 to the Governance Committee's Policy Review Committee for further review.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Proposed Fire Protection Levels of Service Council Policy C-704

Attachment B: Existing Fire Protection Levels of Service Council Policy C-704

Attachment C: Table of Amendments & Implications