



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

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Attachments: 1. Overtime Analysis & Modeling

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TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: July 21, 2025

Report No. FIRE-25-006

TO: Council

FROM: Matt Furlot, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Trial of Temporary Firefighters to Reduce Overtime

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council approve a six-month trial to hire two temporary full-time firefighters in August 2025, for the purpose of measuring the impact on overtime costs and departmental wellness; and that staff report back to Council with the results of the trial, including an evaluation of operational effectiveness, wellness outcomes, and financial impact, as described in the staff report FIRE-25-006.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report recommends a six-month trial of hiring two temporary full-time firefighters to reduce unsustainable overtime costs and evaluate the operational benefits of this approach. In addition to comparing regular staffing costs versus overtime, the trial will also monitor wellness, shift coverage, and apparatus availability as secondary indicators. The trial provides a low-risk, time-limited opportunity to assess the viability of augmenting core staffing in a cost-effective manner.

BACKGROUND:

As outlined in the staff presentation related to levels of service provided earlier in this of Council (on July 21, 2025), Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services (EFRS) is facing growing operational demands due to rising call volumes, overlapping incidents, and regulatory requirements. In response to these pressures, the department is currently staffing a minimum

of six suppression firefighters per shift, with four assigned to the Engine and two to the Ladder/Rescue apparatus. This approach supports interior operations, mutual aid commitments, and compliance with the department's declared Full-Service level.

At present, this staffing level is being maintained largely through the use of overtime. This has enabled EFRS to meet deployment and safety requirements, but it is not financially or operationally sustainable over the long term.

Although current sick usage is only slightly above average and most absences are short in duration, the ongoing need to backfill both planned and unplanned vacancies has significantly increased overtime costs. The 2025 budget allocated \$237,000 for overtime, but projections now estimate that actual spending may reach \$450,000 to \$500,000 by year-end.

Should Council endorse the proposed minimum staffing target of six suppression firefighters per shift through the preceding report, this report proposes a temporary staffing trial as one potential strategy to maintain that level in a more sustainable and cost-effective way. The trial is intended to reduce reliance on overtime, support firefighter wellness, and improve long-term service reliability.

ANALYSIS:

Current Suppression Staffing

The Fire Department distributes its suppression personnel across four platoons. As of July 2025, staffing levels are as follows:

Shift	Staff Assigned	Notes
A	8*	Includes 1 FTE on maternity leave
B	7	
C	8	Includes 1 new FTE added in 2025 budget
D	7	

** Although A-Shift is assigned 8 staff on paper, it is currently operating with 7 due to one member being on maternity leave.*

Platoons are scheduled to maintain six firefighters per shift, but absences and leave frequently require overtime to fill the gap.

Impact of Full-Time Equivalent Addition (2025 Budget)

The addition of one full-time firefighter in the 2025 Budget, assigned to C-Shift, has already demonstrated positive results. In June 2025, that shift recorded zero overtime hours, showing that increased staffing directly supports minimum staffing levels without relying on overtime.

Proposed Temporary Staffing Trial

To build on this success and address continued staffing pressure, staff are proposing a temporary trial. This would involve hiring two additional temporary full-time firefighters in August 2025.

EFRS currently has one temporary full-time firefighter covering a maternity leave, which is expected to conclude in January 2026. At that time, the returning firefighter would rejoin the regular complement, and the existing temporary position would be repurposed to continue supporting the trial. This would bring the department to a total of three temporary full-time firefighters from January

onward, providing sufficient staffing to consistently maintain six firefighters on duty per shift without relying on overtime.

Overtime Modeling & Trial Goals

The following table summarizes staffing models developed to evaluate how different personnel levels impact overtime costs. Each model incorporates actual data on average leave, training, and coverage loss, and estimates the number of personnel required to consistently staff six suppression firefighters per shift.

Model	# of Firefighters	Estimated Annual Overtime Cost	Summary
1	28	\$477,504	Staffing level prior to the 2025 Budget. Significant shortfall in coverage, resulting in nearly \$500K in overtime annually.
2	29	\$357,912	Reflects the addition of 1 FTE in the 2025 Budget. Reduces annual overtime by \$120K but still results in a substantial coverage gap.
3	32	\$864	Fully addresses the staffing gap. Effectively eliminates overtime related to minimum staffing requirements.

As of July 2025, EFRS operates under Model 2. The proposed trial would move the department closer to Model 3, and by January 2026, with three temporary firefighters in place, EFRS is expected to maintain six-person staffing with minimal to no overtime.

Preliminary forecasts show that total staffing costs during the trial-including both temporary salaries and remaining overtime-would remain at or below current spending levels, even with the addition of regular wages (See Attachment 1: Overtime Analysis & Modeling).

This proposed strategy would allow the Township to:

- Maintain safe and consistent emergency response coverage
- Reduce overtime costs without increasing overall staffing expenditures
- Support firefighter wellness and manage fatigue-related risk

Operational and Wellness Impacts

Recent months have highlighted the strain that overtime is placing on staff. In June, two incidents occurred where staffing dropped below six, and available overtime could not fill the vacancy. As a result, the Ladder/Rescue truck was browned out, reducing response capacity and increasing operational risk.

The Esquimalt Firefighters Association has expressed concern over the long-term sustainability of relying on overtime. They have indicated support for the proposed staffing trial, understanding the positions remain temporary.

Evaluation Criteria

While the trial’s primary goal is to compare the cost of overtime versus regular staffing, staff will also monitor:

- Apparatus availability, including brown-outs and missed responses
- Fill rates for vacant shifts
- Wellness indicators, such as excess hours per pay period

Monthly reporting will support real-time monitoring and continuous evaluation throughout the trial.

Post-Trial Scenarios and Next Steps

A six-month trial is recommended to assess the operational and financial impacts of temporary full-time staffing. Based on initial modeling and previous FTE outcomes, a significant reduction in overtime is anticipated.

Following the trial, staff will return to Council with a report summarizing results and presenting options for next steps. These may include:

- Reducing the discretionary overtime budget to reflect actual use
- Transitioning temporary firefighters to permanent roles in a future budget
- Extending the trial for a broader dataset
- Concluding the trial and reverting to overtime-only backfilling

Each option will be supported by financial analysis and an operational risk assessment to ensure alignment with Township priorities.

Risk Management

This proposal presents minimal organizational risk. The temporary nature of the trial provides full flexibility. Positions may be concluded at any time based on operational needs, performance of the trial, or changes in staffing availability. There are no long-term financial or employment obligations associated with this approach.

OPTIONS:

1. That Council approve a six-month trial to hire two temporary full-time firefighters in August 2025, for the purpose of measuring the impact on overtime costs and departmental wellness; and that staff report back to Council with the results of the trial, including an evaluation of operational effectiveness, wellness outcomes, and financial impact. **(Recommended)**

This option initiates a cautious, low-risk approach to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of staffing positions with regular FTEs instead of overtime. It allows the Township to collect real-time data without making long-term commitments. If the trial demonstrates reduced overtime costs and improved staffing reliability, further recommendations may include transitioning to permanent FTEs, reducing the overtime budget, or extending the trial to collect more data.

2. That Council direct staff to continue meeting minimum staffing requirements using overtime and revisit the issue of core staffing levels as part of the 2026 budget process.

This option maintains the status quo, relying on overtime to fill vacancies. While no new staffing costs are introduced, current trends suggest overtime spending will continue to rise, with potential impacts on firefighter wellness, operational reliability, and service continuity.

3. That Council refer the matter back to staff for further analysis and request additional options or scenarios related to temporary or permanent staffing models.

This option defers decision-making to allow for further review. It may delay implementation of a cost-saving opportunity but allows Council to consider additional alternatives before committing to a staffing trial.

COUNCIL PRIORITY:

Good Governance and Organizational Excellence

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The premise of the recommendation is to offset current overtime costs with temporary full-time staffing. The trial is not expected to exceed current spending levels and will provide data to validate the long-term cost-effectiveness of this model.

COMMUNICATIONS/ENGAGEMENT:

No public engagement is required for this operational trial.

TIMELINES & NEXT STEPS:

1. **August 2025** - Begin six-month trial with two temporary full-time firefighters
2. **Monthly** - Track cost, staffing reliability, and wellness data
3. **January 2026** - Return of one firefighter from leave (bringing trial to three additional FTEs)
4. **February 2026** - Return to Council with trial results and recommendations

REPORT REVIEWED BY:

1. Ian Irvine, Director of Finance, Reviewed
2. Deb Hopkins, Director of Corporate Services, Reviewed
3. Vicki Ganon, Director of Human Resources, Reviewed
4. Dan Horan, Chief Administrative Officer, Concurrence

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:

1. Overtime Analysis & Modeling