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County Council approves more vacation days for staff

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Dufferin County Council has approved an increase in the number of vacation days for county staff as they look to fill high-level job positions.

During their meeting on Feb. 8, Dufferin County Council received a report from Rohan Thompson, director of people and equity, regarding the compensation of non-union county staff members, including the number of yearly vacation days. The report was previously presented to the general government services committee on Jan. 25.

?This proposal is very much in line with what some of the research and trends are across a variety of sectors. Employers, in order to be competitive in their recruitment and retention efforts, are looking to enhance benefits, make sure they have competitive time off, and looking at remote and hybrid work options as well as competitive wages,? said Thompson.

The report to Council proposed having entry-level staff begin with 20 days of vacation, and increasing the number of vacation days by 5 for more years of service. Staff with three to seven years experience were recommended to have 25 days of vacation, those with 8 to 13 years would receive 30 days and staff with 14 years and over of time with the County of Dufferin would get 35 days of vacation.

According to the report, the City of Mississauga offers new hires 20 days of vacation entitlement while municipalities such as the City of Brampton, County of Wellington, City of Bradford and City of Waterloo offer 15 days.

The report also proposed lowering the number of vacation days available to carry over at the end of each year in half; from 10 to five.

Thompson said the decrease in the number of carry-over days is intended to encourage staff to take their vacation time as well as reduce the amount of liability that sits on the County books.

Dufferin County Councillors were split on the matter with some supporting the proposed increase in vacation days as is while others questioned amending the proposal.

?We've been hearing for month from Rohan that we're having some issues when it comes to recruitment and retention and it seems that is due to the fact we're lagging behind our municipal competitors,? said Coun. Wade Mills. ?If this package is going to help us recruit and retain better people then quite frankly, I think we'd be doing a disservice to the rest of our staff and to the community that we serve if we don't implement this to try to recruit the very best people. At the end of the day, I don't want to be taking second or third choices, we have some high-level positions that are vacant and need to be filled.?

?As a County Council we continuously advocate for living wage for people, we advocate for increases to OW rates and ODSP rates; we try to bring people up as opposed to trying to leave people being. As much as this may leave a bit of a taste in some people's mouth maybe we need to be in a place where we can point and say we're putting our money where our mouth is,? said Warden Darren White.

Councillors against the increase in the number of vacation days were concerned specifically with the fact that for an entry-level position, the number of vacation days offered would be doubling what is currently in place.

?I cannot see starting folks at four weeks holidays from day one,? said Coun. Janet Horner. ?I think it starts putting us far away from

the other folks that work in our community, from our own municipalities. It starts throwing things out of balance really quickly.?

?I am supportive of everything in the report with the exception of the number of days. Had it been offered, like it has been suggested, starting at 15 day and moving up from there, I would be very supportive of it,? said Coun. Lisa Post.

During the meeting Coun. James McLean questioned if there was data to show Dufferin County's struggles with staff recruitment and retention while Coun. Phillip Rentsch asked how the experience will factor into the number of vacation days a new hire receives.

?We aren't collecting or holding data,? said Thompson. ?Through narratives amongst managers we are struggling through competition to get our first choice at times and we're finding staff who are applying to us have leverage in regard to how much they're negotiating their packaged whether it be wages or vacation time off,? said Thompson.

?Our current practice in regards to new employees, is the recognition of relevant work experience. If a staff person would come to us with relevant other municipal experience that would be recognized in their offer,? he added.

Council settled on reducing the number of vacation days allotted to each length of service level by five days, meaning entry-level positions will receive 15 days of holiday while senior staff with 25 years or over experience will have 35 days.

The report and motion were approved by a majority vote, with nine councillors voting in favour of amending the proposed number of vacation days and four voting against.