



# PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## DIDSBURY TOWN COUNCIL RELEASES FIRE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

DIDSBURY – Didsbury Town Council and Administration are releasing the recommendations of a recent assessment conducted regarding the management of the Didsbury Fire Department.

In early June 2018, Caliber Planning was contracted to conduct an assessment of the Didsbury Fire Department (DFD), in response to letters of concern submitted by 16 department members. Caliber Planning, located in Calgary, provides emergency management solutions and protection services to industry and public sector clients throughout Canada and the Northern United States.

At the July 24, 2018 Regular Council Meeting, after much discussion and input from Council, the following motion was made: "... that Council accepts the recommendations of the June 25, 2018 Fire Department Management Assessment Report rendered by Caliber Planning Inc. and directs Administration to publish and act on those recommendations with the utmost haste and report back to Council with regular progress reports." This motion was carried unanimously.

The following comes directly from the Fire Department Management Assessment Report from Caliber Planning:

SITUATION	RECOMMENDATION
Didsbury Fire Department (DFD) Chief often responds alone in Unit 310 to alarms to conduct size up. There is a safety issue with responding alone and this may not be the best practice in the community.	Develop DFD Running Orders for all incidents based on industry best practices, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) recommendations. Discuss with dispatch centre for alignment with mutual aid partners and present to Council for adoption.
Fire Hall not being properly utilized nor maintained by DFD personnel.	Develop Code of Conduct for Fire Hall users for all to sign. Consider installing access controls (fob/ swipe card) to identify who is using facility at what times and CCTV to monitor activity in and around Fire Hall. Develop maintenance and cleaning schedule for DFD personnel to accompany weekly training.
DFD not aligned with Town of Didsbury Administration	Develop cascading goals from Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to Protective Services Manager to Fire Chief to Deputy Chiefs. Follow up with progress at regularly scheduled meetings. Conduct "Town Hall" type meeting with CAO, Protective Services Manager and Fire Chief to roll out goals and expectations of all Town employees to DFD members.

SITUATION	RECOMMENDATION
Fire Chief and Protective Services Manager "try" to hold weekly meetings but are often bumped due to workloads.	Schedule regular one-on-one meetings based on a reasonable interval to ensure attendance. Have a set agenda with accountability for both parties regarding action items that arise.
DFD lacking Standard Operating Procedures, Job Descriptions, Running Orders and Code of Conduct	Task Fire Chief with developing same as soon as possible. Have him consult other similar sized departments to ensure industry best practices and applicability. Set realistic but aggressive timeline for completion and monitor progress in one-on-one meetings. Educate all members and have them sign when complete.
DFD Chief lacks human resource management experience and conflict resolution skills	Develop core competencies checklist for the Chief position and work with Fire Chief to assess areas for improvement and a plan to address shortfalls. Put Chief on 12-month review period where progress is monitored
Deputy Chiefs have lost confidence in Chief and seem to be undermining his authority.	Conduct meeting with Protective Services Manager, Chief and Deputies. Reinforce Town confidence in Chief and determine a go forward plan if Deputies are interested in staying.
Officer core have "concerns with" Chief's ability to manage an emergency scene	Reinforce Town commitment to Chief with officers stressing his current credentials and the go-forward plan. Be prepared to replace officer core that may resign.
Half of current roster of firefighters expressed displeasure with current Chief. One has resigned and more may follow.	Prepare for recruitment drive in preparation of any mass exodus.

Town of Didsbury Administration is currently working with the Fire Chief to develop a plan of action to accomplish the recommendations from the report. CAO Harold Northcott says the first order of business is to ensure proper documentation is in place for the department's operation.

"Running orders, Standard Operating Procedures, a Code of Conduct and job descriptions ... all other Town of Didsbury departments have these," said Northcott. "It is critical that these documents be in place for the Didsbury Fire Department to ensure efficient, safe and clear operating standards for all fire members."

Didsbury Town Council and Administration continue to be committed to resolving issues within the department. At their same July 24, 2018 meeting, following much discussion and input, Town Council also passed the following motion unanimously: "that Council directs Administration to employ the services of an independent party to conduct a complete Safety Audit of the Didsbury Fire Department and return a report outlining the results of that Safety Audit to Council no later than October 1, 2018."

"Town of Didsbury Council has been made aware of the situation from early on," said Mayor Rhonda Hunter. "Our priority and focus has always been and continues to be the continued safety and protection of our residents through the vital service our fire department provides, the continued safety and protection of our firefighters, and the well-being of the environment that all of our firefighters work in, inside and outside of the Fire Hall. We have always been confident in knowing and conveying to our residents that our Fire Department members were and continue to be ready to provide fire and medical service to emergencies in Didsbury and

area, and when necessary, with the assistance of mutual aid. Having passed motions that deal with all of these priorities that address firefighter concerns, Council has given their unanimous support to the action plan and consultant's assessment that identifies a positive move-forward strategy for the Didsbury Fire Department and its members."

Mountain View County continues to provide their support to resolving this matter.

"Mountain View County supports the Town of Didsbury and the District Fire Department as they deal with the issues identified in the Fire Department Management Report commissioned by the Town of Didsbury," said Reeve Bruce Beattie. "Through agreements with municipal partners, the County is committed to providing our residents with fire services that follow industry best practices and that are operated in the safest manner possible."

To date, five resignations have been received by members of the Didsbury Fire Department. Council and Administration continue to assure the public that our local Fire Department is able to handle emergency situations that arise in our area. Mutual Aid agreements have been in effect with other neighboring municipalities for many years that would provide for additional resources and personnel in the event that a situation is larger than the Didsbury department can handle.

**For more information regarding this media release:**

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