



STAFF REPORT

Department/Function: Council

Chair: Mayor

Meeting Date: March 16, 2020

Report No.: GGF-2020-26

Report Title: Self-isolation/Quarantine Sick bank

RECOMMENDATION:

That Staff Report No. GGF-2020-26 regarding the Self-isolation/Quarantine Sick bank be received;

And that a self-isolation sick bank be established for all permanent, and contract staff to cover the 14 day self-isolation/quarantine period;

And that each sick day credit granted equate to 75% of an employee's regular gross wages for that day;

And that any employee may draw upon such sick bank for self-isolation/quarantine if they are experiencing the symptoms of COVID-19 either before short term disability benefits take over, or for whatever reason if short term disability does not take over, if they have come in close contact with someone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or if they have travelled outside of Canada and departed Canada prior to March 17, 2020 and returned to Canada after March 3, 2020;

And that any employee may choose to top-up the 75% of an employee's regular gross wages to 100% by using available vacation owing to them or banked overtime;

And that staff develop the procedure for this sick bank in keeping with Township practices and fairness, adjusting minor details where necessary;

And that such sick bank will be available to any employee until Council directs otherwise.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND:

As the outbreak of COVID-19 continues to evolve globally, the Township must take a number of enhanced measures over the coming weeks to protect ourselves and our residents from the spread of COVID-19.

Self-isolation or quarantine for a period of 14 days is one such measure. This was a measure staff had been considering, particularly for those who may have been in contact with the virus. The need for this measure escalated, when the Public Health Agency of Canada stated their position (on March 14th), recommending that travelers avoid all non-essential travel outside of Canada and that travelers should self-isolate or quarantine for 14 days after their return from travel outside of Canada. This need further escalated on March 16 when the Prime Minister announced the closing of the Canadian border to non-residents and directed that all returning residents acknowledge the need to self-isolate.

There are three such groups that would qualify for self-isolation or quarantine:

- 1) Anyone who is experiencing the symptoms of COVID-19 either before short term disability benefits take over, or in the likely event that the individual cannot, or need not, access medical attention that may be required to initiate or qualify for short term disability benefits;
- 2) Those who have been in close contact (such as a family member, partner, friend) with someone who is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19;
- 3) Those who have travelled, out of the County by any means to any country, including the United States

Creating a self-isolation/quarantine sick bank for such individuals, gives the employee the ability to self-monitor, and self-isolate if deemed necessary, without it greatly affecting their overall finances and, critically, promotes precautionary practices that are necessary to limit or slow the spread of the disease to other staff so that the municipality remains in a position to provide critical services.

ANALYSIS:

Allowing staff that have been in close contact with someone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 to continue to come to work, puts the rest of our staff and residents at risk.

Further, based on the number of confirmed cases in Ontario to date, those who travelled, represent the vast majority of the cases, and therefore pose a greater risk.

While those who travelled prior to being advised of the March 14th travel advisory should qualify for the self-isolation/quarantine sick bank, those who choose to travel outside of Canada after this date should not. A memo to staff advising of the travel advisory outside of Canada will be distributed, so that staff are fully aware of the Township's position on this matter. Staff will be given the ability to use vacation, lieu-time or unpaid leave for the required self-isolation/quarantine period.

Staff is proposing that each sick day credit equate to 75% of an employee's regular gross wages for that day. A sick day credit of 75% would allow the employee who is self-isolating to receive the same benefit as an employee who is receiving benefits under our Short-term Disability (STD) plan.

Our benefit provider has advised that employees medically directed to self-isolate/quarantine will be able to apply for short term disability benefits.

Further, for OMERS, an employee on STD has a break in service and has the option to purchase this service to receive credited service for their absence. The employer remains responsible for their share of the OMERS contributions for those employees who purchase break in service periods.

Therefore, it is recommended that a 75% sick pay credit be established for self-isolation, that a break in service be reported to OMERS after the third day absent, and that the employee be granted the option to purchase the credited service within the allowable timeframe from OMERS.

Additionally, it is proposed that affected staff be able to top-up their gross earnings from the proposed 75% to 100% by utilizing vacation time owing to them or banked overtime.

FINANCIAL/BUDGET IMPACT:

There will be minimal financial impact for permanent and contract staff, as job rate wages are embedded in the annual budget. The 25% savings in wages does have the potential to be negated, if temporary staff is needed to sustain operations to the public.

CONCLUSION:

Creating a self-isolation sick bank for staff will be critical to managing the spread of COVID-19 over the coming weeks and protecting our staff, and our most vulnerable populations.

Prepared By:

Date: March 15, 2020

Lindsay Barron, CPA, CGA, HBCom.
Chief Administrative Officer

Recommended By:

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Chief Administrative Officer