

Staff Report

Report To: Corporate Services Committee
Report From: Janet Ashfield, Manager of Human Resources
Meeting Date: October 9, 2025
Report Code: CR-25-118
Subject: Safety in Council Chambers

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CR-25-118 respecting Safety in Council Chambers, the Corporate Services Committee recommends that City Council receive the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- Risk Assessments have been completed.
- Controls related to risks have been identified.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: This report supports the delivery of Core Service. Health and Safety of staff is important to the wellbeing of staff when they are at work.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Previous Report/Authority:

N/A

Background:

On October 7, 2024, Council raised concerns related to the safety of staff with respect to the conduct of the public in Council Chambers. The City Manager advised that staff would meet internally and provide a report back to Council.

Human Resources staff have since met with staff to conduct a Risk Assessment and outline existing and new controls to address the identified risks.

Analysis:

A risk assessment is conducted by identifying all known risks associated with the circumstances, determining the likelihood and consequences of those risks and identifying existing controls and recommending additional controls where necessary.

The risk assessments were conducted by the Human Resources Specialist - Safety Equity and Wellness with input from staff of the Clerks and Facilities divisions. Once finalized, it was reviewed with those staff to determine whether it accurately captured the risks. The risks and recommended controls are now being shared with Council and Committee members.

The identified risks and controls include:

Risk	Controls in Place	Additional Controls
Physical Altercations or Threats	Training (de-escalation, mental health first aid), Policies (Workplace Violence, Harassment, and Sexual Harassment), more than 1 staff member on site, panic buttons, first aid training/emergency contact lists, working with police and on-call security, security and broadcasting cameras, lighting, populated area.	Ongoing training on emergency response, procedural discussion with Council, potential Teams messaging system implemented for all attendees.

Public Encounters/ Interruptions	Training (de-escalation, mental health first aid), Policies (Workplace Violence, Harassment, and Sexual Harassment), multiple members of staff present, security on-call and available if needed and called ahead if required.	Bollards or barriers being identified to discourage encroachment on staff-only areas. Posting reminders of suitable public conduct outside Chamber and posting on website to include information on public conduct. Procedural discussion with Council on calling audience to order, or brief recess where needed. Security on-call should regularly canvas area.
Large Crowds or Audience at Capacity	Fire department review & clearance (room is set up well under capacity limits), multiple exits, provided seating, overflow space with TV broadcast in Hall.	Encourage overflow in Hall space rather than outskirts of Chamber to avoid crowding. Active review and training on Emergency & Fire Evacuation procedures for all staff and members of Council ongoing for 2024/2025.
Emergency Evacuation	Multiple exits available (front and back of room), clear pathways for barrier free exit and entry in Chambers, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, access to police and on-call security staff.	Active review and training on Emergency & Fire Evacuation procedures for all staff and members of Council ongoing for 2024/2025.

Stress/Strain of Public Environment	EAP, training support for staff, Policies (Workplace Violence, Harassment, and Sexual Harassment), multiple employees on premise, supportive work environment, on-call security and policing support available.	Incident debriefing and continued reporting.
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A fire and evacuation drill was conducted at City Hall on September 24th during a Committee meeting and the results will form the basis of additional training requirements for Council and Committee members as well as staff.

Physical barriers will be implemented when the budget is approved for 2026.

Financial Implications:

There is cost to implementing physical barriers, which will be approximately \$1300 for the required materials.

Communication Strategy:

All new staff are advised about the risk assessments that are applicable to them in their role and the risk assessments will be shared with all staff who participate in meetings in Council Chambers. In addition, all Risk Assessments are provided to the relevant Joint Health and Safety Committees for review and comment. Training will be provided to Council and Committee members through Council and Committee orientation and when new members are appointed throughout the term of Council. A review of the risk assessment will be completed when there are any substantial changes within the Council and Committee meeting procedures as well as every three years to ensure that all risks remain relevant and to ensure that all controls are in effect and additional controls are added as appropriate.

Consultation:

Manager of Corporate Services

City Clerk

Attachments:

Risk Assessment – Council Chambers

Recommended by:

Janet Ashfield, Manager of Human Resources

Kate Allan, Director of Corporate Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Janet Ashfield, Manager of Human Resources at jashfield@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1214.