Police chief unveils ‘Incentive Days’

Capano

New policy:

Special days off for employees will be regulated, and tracked in the city’s financial system.

By PAUL FEELY

New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER — Police Chief Carlo Capano plans to debut a new policy this week he says will provide greater oversight of the controversial practice formerly known as “Chief Days.”

Members of an aldermanic committee ordered police officials to work with city staff to draft a policy governing the granting of “Chief Days” after an internal audit released in October reported the practice resulted in more than a year’s worth of extra time off being given to city police officers since 2009. The audit report found the practice began in the early 1990s under former police chief Louie Craig and expanded “without authorization” by department officials, then accelerated under former police chief Nick Willard, now the U.S. marshal for New Hampshire. That expansion resulted in days off being granted for everything from not using sick time to attending a funeral of a fellow officer, as well as participating in the annual Footrace for the Fallen road race.

Capano hopes to have a new policy governing “Employee Incentive Days” go into effect on March 1.

On Sunday, Capano said he feels the new policy is a “great improvement over past practice.”

“The days are limited to four types and have restrictions on time frames, amounts and clearly defines each one that you can see how they are a benefit to the agency,” said Capano. “They are very different in that we now have a direct set of guidelines on how they will be managed and distributed. The previous way was at the discretion of the chief of police; that no longer exists.”

Capano said the new policy was crafted under the direction of the Aldermanic Committee on Human Resources and Insurance, working with city Human Resources Director Jane Gile and City Solicitor Emily Rice.

The audit released last fall found former police chief Craig instituted the policy in 1991 as a way to reward officers who acted “above and beyond the call of duty.”

“Since that time the program that originally gave out a few awards has grown to include many other categories of awards and reached a high point of 131 days awarded in fiscal year 2017,”

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According to a copy of the new policy, “Incentive Days” will be given out under four categories:

Recruitment Incentive Day: It may out,” said Capano. “The new system utilizes the awards committee voting process for Merit Day, and the other three days
the report states. “The expansion of the program appears to have been done without authorization, lacks any written policies and procedures and leave time is not tracked in the city’s financial system and not reported as a liability in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.”

The audit also reviewed one instance in which police officers were awarded a day off for working on a “snow day.”

On Feb. 12, 2017, former mayor Ted Gatsas declared a snow emergency and asked all non-essential personnel to stay home the next day during an “unusually large snowstorm.” According to the audit, 48 “snow days” were awarded to police employees who were considered essential and had to work, including personnel from all shifts working that day.

“This does not appear to be approved by the mayor’s declaration, city policy or union contract,” states the report. “Only nonessential employees are currently eligible for snow days. A declared snow day is a very rare occurrence, only happening twice in the last 18 years. The department should not be awarding time off unless specifically authorized by the Mayor and/or BMA.”

According to Capano, the new “Incentive Days” policy has a checks-and-balances system. When an officer is considered for an “Incentive Day,” that officer’s nomination is put to a vote by the police department’s Award Committee. There are very specific in nature and are not allowed to be distributed for any other reasons. I’m not sure that anything I say or do will put all fears to rest. Some people have their opinions and that is their right to have opinions, but it should be noted that under no circumstances can you cash these out, and the design of a time frame is to prevent stockpiling these type of days.”

Capano said the Manchester Police Patrolman’s Association has reviewed the policy and has no issues with it, and a copy has been sent to members of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen.

Capano said he believes the new policy will give incentives to use less sick time and reward efforts to recruit fully certified officers, ensuring his department won’t spend “months of salary on recruits that are in training.”

According to Capano, it takes approximately nine months from the time of hire until a rookie officer is on the street serving the community. A fully certified officer can be on the street in approximately three months.

“A new officer costs our agency approximately $34,244 during their 34 weeks of training,” said Capano. “A certified officer costs our agency approximately $14,100 and they are on the street after 12-14 weeks of training. The benefit to the city is tremendous.”

Capano said “Incentive Days” are managed within his department’s budget, and he has never asked for
Committee, and no longer granted at the sole discretion of the police chief.

“The changes have very strict guidelines on when these can be given out, a time frame to use them and the amount that can be given in a calendar year,” said Capano. “All days will be properly logged on roster and reported to our Business Service Officer, which will be reported to finance.”

hired with the Manchester Police Department.

While the former practice of “Chief Days” appeared to be handled without any oversight by anyone other than the police chief, Capano said the new policy has restrictions and guidelines.

“The previous system was allowed by the chief’s discretion and only the chief could hand those additional funds to cover the practice.