



NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE

Police Services Board Report

PUBLIC AGENDA

Subject: Niagara Regional Police Service – Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic
Report To: Chair and Members, Niagara Police Services Board
Report Date: 2021-04-20

Recommendation(s)

That the Niagara Police Services Board receive this report respecting the Niagara Regional Police Service (NRPS) and the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

Key Facts

- In the latter part of 2019 and into 2020, local, national, and international media outlets were reporting of a new identified virus commonly termed as COVID-19 spreading amongst the population in China. It was indicated that COVID-19 had a higher mortality rate than the flu and was quickly identified as a serious concern internationally by the World Health Organization.
- In January 2020, the first identified case of COVID-19 was detected in Canada, and in early March 2020, Canada recorded its first COVID-19 related death.
- On March 17, 2020, the Provincial Government declared a state of emergency and issued its first Emergency Orders pursuant to the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA) due to the impact of COVID-19.
- In anticipation of the March 17 EMCPA declaration by the Provincial Government, the Service had already activated a Pandemic Business Continuity Committee consisting of Service members. The Committee, which meets regularly or when necessary, updated the Services Pandemic Business Continuity Plan, which serves as a blue print for the Service's response to the ever evolving pandemic.
- On April 23, 2020, the Police Services Board (PSB) passed a motion endorsing the COVID-19 Information Sharing Protocol that provides the Service with clear direction on the Board's expectations with respect to ongoing communication. As the pandemic significantly continues to effect the Niagara community, the Service will regularly update the Board, by way of a PSB report, at its regularly scheduled Board meetings. The updates will pertain to the impact of COVID-19 upon the NRPS, and actions taken to mitigate risks.

Financial Considerations

- None

Analysis

The NRPS continues to manage and adapt to the ever-changing reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it is having on Service members and the community.

As last reported by way of PSB report for the March 25, 2021 PSB monthly meeting, the Niagara Region remained in the Red-Control classification as per the “COVID-19 Response Framework: Keeping Ontario Safe and Open”. However as of April 3, 2021, as mandated by Premier Ford, the Niagara Region, along with the rest of Ontario, transitioned into an “Emergency Brake Shutdown”. The Premier cited his decision to an alarming surge in case numbers and COVID-19 hospitalizations across the province. Under the Shutdown, inside gatherings are not permitted with those outside of your household and outdoor gatherings are limited to 5 people. Restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments return to take-out and drive-thru service only, and establishments such as hair salons and barber shops are prohibited from providing personal care services. Additionally, gyms and other indoor and outdoor sports and recreational fitness establishments are prohibited from opening to the public during the Shutdown.

In addition to the Emergency Brake Shutdown and citing the threat on the hospital system capacity and the increasing risks posed to the public by COVID-19 variants, the Ontario government declared a third provincial emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA). Thus, effective April 8, 2021, Premier Ford issued a Province-wide stay-at-home order in an effort to slow the third wave of COVID-19. This state of emergency and stay-at-home order was to be in place for 28 days.

On April 16, 2021, the Provincial Government made a further announcement to increase public compliance with the stay-at-home order of which included the extension of the order until at least May 20, 2021. Additionally, the Province indicated that they were granting authority to police officers throughout Ontario to conduct random vehicle and individual stops to assist in enforcing the stay-at-home order. However, this granting of additional police powers was quickly rescinded by the Province in light of concerns expressed by many stakeholders including the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

While the Service supports all measures necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our community, our enforcement efforts continue to focus on the 4 E’s – Engage (with the individual), Explain (why we are there), Educate (on the rules and regulations), and Enforce (as a last resort).

For clarity, at no point were NRPS members directed to conduct random vehicle and individual stops to assist in enforcing the stay-at-home order. In fact, members were directed that they would not be conducting random vehicle or individual stops as it pertains to the stay-at-home order.

As before, our initiatives will be both complaint driven or proactive, with the goal of gaining compliance. Those that refuse to comply will be charged accordingly.

The Service, in keeping with Provincial restrictions and in consultation with the NRPS Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator, closed all of its fitness facilities as of April 3, 2021.

As previously reported, 1, 2, and 3 District facilities remain open to the public for emergency access only. The front desks at 5, 6, and 8 Districts remain closed to members of the public. The Records Counter at Headquarters is open to the public Monday to Friday from 8 am to 4 pm by appointment only. The Collision Reporting Centres in St. Catharines and Welland remain closed, and the Collision Reporting Centre at Headquarters continues to operate Monday to Friday from 10 am to 6 pm and Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. These temporary measures remain in place to mitigate risks to Service personnel and members of the public. Additionally, remote work assignments by Service members continue for those members whose job functions meet the requirement for remote work.

As previously reported for the March 25, 2021 PSB monthly meeting, the Service to date had 19 members test positive for COVID-19. However, since the last meeting, the count has risen to 25 members that have tested positive for COVID-19. In each case, the Service has worked with Niagara Region Public Health to ensure contact tracing was undertaken as quickly as possible, and that further steps were taken in the workplace to mitigate the potential transmission of the virus, which included a deep cleaning of work areas following confirmed cases of COVID-19. This number is in addition to the 8 recruit members who previously tested positive for COVID-19 which was connected to the outbreak at the Ontario Police College (OPC) that affected well over 100 students and instructors. The outbreak at the OPC has since been resolved and students have since returned for on-site training effective April 12, 2021.

Life within the Niagara Region continues to be far from “normal” and until vaccines are widely available and the third wave is diminished, the Provincial and Public Health authorities continue to stress physical distancing, frequent hand-washing, respiratory etiquette, the wearing of face coverings or masks when physical distancing cannot be achieved, and remaining at home except for essential purposes such as attending a grocery store, pharmacy, accessing health care services, for outdoor exercise or for work that cannot be done remotely. The Service continues to encourage members to observe these same safety measures, both in the workplace, as well as in their personal lives when off-duty.

The Service's Pandemic Business Continuity Committee continues to meet regularly to evaluate and determine how to adapt to the continuously changing restrictions. The Service continues to be vigilant and methodical in its approach to ensure the safety of all Service members. The Service remains flexible and adaptable to changing

circumstances, based on a combination of government and public health direction and will continue to closely monitor what is taking place within the community.

The Service is also working closely with its Emergency Services Partners at Fire and EMS, local municipalities, the Region, Public Health, in participating in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to help guide the Service through these times.

The NRPS to date has issued 149 Provincial Offence Notices for failing to comply with Orders. Further, the Service has received a total of 2234 COVID-19 specific calls for service related to Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act or Reopening Ontario Act Orders.

The Service continues to maintain an adequate supply of PPE, including N95 and surgical masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and wipes. The supply chains for PPE continues to be monitored and assessed to ensure that the NRPS is well positioned for any future possibilities.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Service has been able to maintain adequate staffing levels and has not had to cancel any scheduled time off of members.

In terms of calls for service, the Service in the last month has been trending slightly above pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, there has been no significant deviation of calls for service in respect to any geographic area within the Region, or in relation to any particular vulnerable group, or any serious breaches of the peace related to the pandemic.

In an effort to safeguard and ensure that members have the most current and accurate information, Chief MacCulloch has sent out 112 Service wide email messages as it pertains to COVID-19 and will continue to do so as the situation evolves. Additionally, Chief MacCulloch continues to host virtual Town Hall meetings, when necessary, as another means to share information and provide an opportunity for the members to ask questions related to COVID-19.

We continue to see the impact of the 3rd wave of COVID-19 within our community. With rising case counts, and the increased prevalence of the new variants active within our community, there are legitimate concerns that our health system will become overwhelmed. Now is not the time to become complacent.

All members of the Service, sworn and civilian continue to do an outstanding job during this unprecedented challenge, and their ongoing dedication and professionalism as they continue to serve the community is recognized and appreciated.

Alternatives Reviewed

To not receive this report.

Relationship to Police Service/Board Strategic Priorities

To provide Service members with the necessary resources to adequately and effectively deliver the quality of policing that Niagara expects and enjoys. To recognize that the NRPS must be mindful of the health and psychological wellness needs of its members that are faced on a daily basis, especially now in the throes of a pandemic. And in light of COVID-19, taking necessary actions to mitigate risks to Service members and members of the public.

Relevant Policy Considerations

Not Applicable

Other Pertinent Reports

Not applicable.

This report was prepared by Dave Masotti, Inspector, Chief's Office and reviewed by Bryan MacCulloch, Chief of Police.



Submitted by:

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Chief of Police

Appendices – N/A