



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: 2021-07-21

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 17th 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 affect 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 June 24, 2021 PSB monthly meeting, the Niagara Region was in Step One of the three-step “Roadmap to Reopen” plan established by the provincial government. Step One of the plan focused on resuming outdoor activities with smaller crowds and limited retail store operations. However, on June 30, 2021, the Ontario government moved the province into Step Two of the plan citing improvement in key public health and health care indicators as well as the province wide vaccination rate surpassing the targets outlined in the province’s Roadmap to Reopen plan. Step Two allowed for indoor gatherings of up to 5 people, outdoor organized events of up to 25 people, and outdoor dining with up to 6 people per table. Additionally, at this time, Niagara Region’s Acting Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Mustafa Hirji, lifted the Section 22 Order that limited outdoor dining to household members only.

On July 16, 2021, with the continuing improvement in key public health and health care indicators, including surpassing requisite vaccination rates, the government moved the province into Step Three of the Roadmap to Reopen plan. Step Three allows for up to 100 people for outdoor gatherings, 25 people for indoor gatherings, no limits on the number of people per table at a restaurant or bar and allows for the indoor opening of fitness facilities with up to 50% capacity.

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).

The Service, in keeping with Step Three provincial restrictions and in consultation with the NRPS Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator, re-opened its fitness facilities on July 16, 2021. The opening of the fitness facilities was done with proper sanitation practices put in place of which includes a reduced capacity limit of 50%.

As it pertains to remote work assignments, all senior leadership members of the Service returned to the workplace on July 5, 2021. As for all other members of the Service who are currently working remotely, they will be returning to the workplace effective Monday, July 26, 2021. This due to the decreasing COVID-19 case counts, and the increasing number of fully immunized people.

At this time, all other existing safety measures in the workplace will remain in place. This includes physical distancing requirements, daily use of the member self-screening tool, proper sanitizing of work stations, and the appropriate use of PPE, including the wearing of surgical masks within all police facilities.

As previously reported for the June 24, 2021 PSB monthly meeting, the Service to date had 30 members test positive for COVID-19. Fortunately, the Service has had no additional members test positive for COVID-19 as of the date of this report. The 30 members testing positive is in addition to 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 back in March and April of this year.

Life within the Niagara Region while moving closer to “normal”, is still being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Provincial and Public Health officials continue to urge all Ontarians to get vaccinated as soon as they can, and to receive their second dose as soon as they are eligible to ensure maximum protection against COVID-19. Provincial and Public Health authorities also continue to stress physical distancing, frequent handwashing, respiratory etiquette, and the wearing of face coverings or masks when physical distancing cannot be achieved. 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 NRPS 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 occurring in the community.

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

The NRPS to date has issued 188 Provincial Offence Notices for failing to comply with Orders. Additionally, the Service has issued 287 Quarantine Act charges to date when called to international border points in Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie. These charges pertain to violations of the Federal Quarantine Act by citizens entering Canada from the United States and not being compliant with the Act. Further, the Service has received a total of 2973 COVID-19 specific calls for service related to Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, Reopening Ontario Act, and Quarantine 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 130 Service wide email messages as it pertains to COVID-19 and will continue to do so as the situation evolves.

While it is encouraging to see that vaccine rates are rising and new cases of the virus are declining in Niagara, the new variants of concern remain active in our community and we must continue to be vigilant by wearing all appropriate PPE and complying with Public Health recommendations.

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