

Chair D. Deans' Verbal Report, OPSB Meeting March 22, 2021

Good afternoon everyone.

Hate Crimes in Ottawa

I would like to begin by taking a moment to discuss the rise in hate crimes that we have seen in our city.

Between 2019 and 2020, hate crimes in the City of Ottawa increased by over 50%, from 116 reported cases in 2019 to 182 reported cases in 2020.

The groups that have been most victimized include members from the Black, Jewish, East and South-East Asian, Muslim and LGBTQ2+ communities, and the largest increase in reported incidents has been among Asian-Canadians.

I count many Asian residents among my friends, neighbours, supporters and constituents. I value the many contributions that all Asian residents make to our community. All people deserve to be treated with the same respect and shown the same consideration, and no one should have to live in fear for their safety for being who they are.

Over the weekend our Mayor was the latest target for hate, when homophobic graffiti was written outside of his home.

There is never an excuse for such despicable acts, be they directed at racialized communities, the LGTBQ2 community, women or anyone else.

I trust that the Police will respond to hate crimes swiftly and with appropriate action.

As the Chair of the Police Services Board, I ask all of us to do better. I know we can do better. Call out all form of hatred when you see it.

Board Governance and Community

I'd like to take a moment to remind the public and everyone listening here today that our Board is governed by the Police Services Act.

Under the Act, we have a responsibility for providing adequate and effective policing in the City of Ottawa.

I also want to stress how important our partnerships with the community are.

The expression "nothing for us without us" has been gaining increased prominence as of late.

The idea is that policies or practices should not be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group who will be affected.

Our police service exists to serve this community.

It is therefore critical that we have the participation of our community and stakeholders in our service delivery discussions.

We may not always get things right but I can assure you, both the hearts and minds of the Board and the Service are in the right place – we are genuinely trying to improve community safety in the City of Ottawa.

Board Motions Update

With this in mind, I would like to share an update on the various motions that the Board carried last fall.

The Board remains steadfast in our commitment to providing quality civilian oversight of the Ottawa Police Service.

While systemic change does not happen overnight, we are taking concrete steps in areas within the Board's jurisdiction that aim to support positive change, such as the use of force policy review.

At the last meeting, I was provided with delegated authority to prepare a request for proposals that could be used by the Board to hire external assistance to help with the outstanding Board motions.

The Board has a number of work packages to complete and therefore will need to hire multiple consultants under separate procurement processes.

I will be presenting a scope of work plan at the next Policy and Governance meeting that will outline how we intend to move forward with the use of force policy review and the Board's Strategic Planning process. This involves a community consultation process through which community members will be able to share their ideas to inform the strategic priorities for the Board over the next three years.

I have also circulated with the Board and community members of the Community Equity Council leadership, a draft Terms of Reference for a community engagement process.

This is the first step in advancing work on the motion carried by the Board in November related to community mediation. Once the Terms of Reference are finalized, we will begin a procurement process to recruit a consultant to support this work as quickly as possible.

We have chosen to describe this as a community engagement process because we want to embark on a process of exploring and establishing new ways that members of the community can engage with the Board in a constructive, two-way dialogue.

We have heard the frustration about the lack of dialogue at Board meetings, and the limited opportunities for members of the public to engage with the Board.

Our hope is that this community engagement process will be an important step in building greater trust, understanding and respect between community members and the Board.

We want to find new avenues for more meaningful dialogue so members of the community, and in particular those who have had a strained relationship with the police, feel comfortable to approach the Board and feel like they will be heard by the Board.

Media Coverage of the Board and Suspensions of OPS Members

I would also like to address some of the recent media coverage about the Board.

Much has been made lately about the Board's failure to terminate the employment of, or suspend officers without pay who have committed egregious acts. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the seriousness with which the Board takes the issues related to workplace sexual violence and harassment. The Service and/or the Board together have taken steps to address workplace sexual violence and harassment, including hiring an independent third-party advisor to enhance and support our ongoing work through an in-depth assessment of workplace culture, practices, policies and procedures as they related to workplace harassment and discrimination.

However, changes to provincial legislation are required in order to give us the tools we need to hold accountable those who are found guilty of workplace sexual violence and harassment. Ottawa City Council and the Board have formally requested the Ontario government to give police chiefs or police service boards the ability to fire with cause or suspend the pay of officers who have been charged or convicted of serious crimes.

I want to once again call on the Provincial Government to make this important change.

Communications Related to Officer Suspensions

I would also like to take this opportunity to address the recent change made at the Ottawa Police Service regarding communications about the suspension of officers.

It was unfortunate that the Board was not notified about this change in advance.

When I discussed this topic with Chief Sloly, he agreed that communications could have been handled better.

Subsequently, he has taken steps to address this issue, such as placing a report on today's agenda outlining the details and implications of this change. In my conversation with Chief Sloly, he indicated that he believes this change strengthens the internal processes regarding suspension.

As Chair of the Board, I believe it is important for the Board to understand the nature and the number of suspensions at the Service in the interest of transparency, openness and accountability.

For this reason, I will be asking the Chief to provide a quarterly update on the nature and number of suspensions as part of the quarterly Workforce Management Report.

I have asked Chief Sloly to address the process change in his verbal update.

I have also asked Chief Sloly to comment on the issue of dynamic entries in his verbal update.

Going forward, I believe that we need to focus on enhancing transparency and strengthening communication between the Board, the Service and the public.

International Women's Day

Finally, I would like to acknowledge International Women's Day, which was celebrated on March 8.

On March 17, the City of Ottawa officially released its first Women and Gender Equity Strategy, which is meant to support equitable access to resources and services and the removal of systemic barriers that women and gender diverse people face in Ottawa.

The Ottawa Police Services Board has taken on an immense amount of work aimed at improving the diversity of our Service. But there is more that needs to be done.

The rising number of hate crimes in the City of Ottawa, and the shooting of eight women, including six Asian-American women, in Atlanta last week highlights once again the ways that racism and misogyny can intersect and fuel acts of violence against women.

Going forward, it is imperative that we continue to promote and incorporate gender equity considerations using an intersectional lens into all the work that the Service and the Board does.