

Chief's verbal transcripts for June 22, 2020

Merci beaucoup, bonsoir à tous.

I will admit, that although my regular reports are quite long, this one's going to be a bit longer; there's been a lot that's transpired since the last Board meeting.

First, I want to start my report by welcoming the newest Board member, Bev Johnson. You have arrived at a very difficult time in the history of the Service and the country, welcome to the deep end of the pool. That said, your career as a doctor, and your lived experience as a businesswomen will be a great source of insight and inspiration for the Board and the Service on several critical and relevant files.

Next, I want to acknowledge the previous depositions made and I want to commit myself, my command team and the police service to deeply considering, discussing and learning from the information prospectus shared by the delegates. The time, effort and courage it must have taken these individuals must be recognized. The deputations will help inform and influence, and in some cases inspire the changes that we will be making in the Ottawa Police Service.

Since my last update to the Board a month ago, there have been a series of tragedies that have occurred in Canada, North America and around the world. Some of these involved members of the black communities, along with members of our Indigenous and Aboriginal communities. I have deep personal and professional sadness for any loss of life, in any circumstance; or any inequity or injustice in any circumstance. And for all who suffered directly or indirectly in such tragedies and injustices.

Over the same time period we have seen two peaceful marches in Ottawa, where people from all backgrounds and all parts of the city came together to speak, to listen, to learn and commit to a more safe, just and inclusive city. This included hundreds of OPS members, and their families, who were either directly participating in the marches, or directly serving to protect all those who were participating in the marches.

They, we, came together in safety and solidarity, in an effort to usher in needed changes in policing as well as in all aspects of our democratic society. Organization and institutions are made up of imperfect humans, no matter how well intended, designed or implemented; systems created by humans are also, by design, imperfect, and will therefore have unintended systemic impacts.

If you discover a rotten apple, you have to heal it or get rid of it. You then have to check the overall health of the tree that produced it. From the deepest roots, which is the organization's culture, to the highest branches, its oversight bodies, chiefs, command officers and senior management. Too often we focus on the rotten apple, or the few bad apples, and forget about the tree that produced it.

Since the day that I was sworn in as chief, I have made public statements about the growing love and pride that I have for City of Ottawa, the OPS and its members. My love and pride grows despite the number of events that have exposed individual corruption, criminality and misconduct, as well as systemic-level issues that we continue to face in this organization. I believe I can fully express my love and pride for this organization and the city, while still acknowledging and addressing weaknesses and problems.

Acknowledging and addressing weaknesses and problems is not a condemnation of all individuals, neither is acknowledging a systemic issue a condemnation of the entire organization, the City or this society.

There are systemic issues in all Canadian institutions; policing and the justice system, healthcare, education, our financial system, and even in the media itself. We have made progress in reforming these systems and institutions, which is why I believe that Canada has the best police officers, has the best justice system, and is the best country in the world.

But reforms have not been enough. Individuals, institutions and society as a whole need to do more, and grow more to meet the current and future challenges.

Let me speak more specifically about policing: and I remind folks that I have spoken about these things on TED talks, Op/Eds, media interviews, public forums and board meetings. More importantly, I spent the last 25 years of my life implementing these ideas in policing, despite sometimes heavy resistance, quite often a lack of resources, and in some cases few resources.

From an HR standpoint, we are still not representative of the demographics of the communities we serve. From an operations standpoint, we are still too reactive and enforcement focused. From a financial standpoint, we need to curb the cost of policing. From a cultural standpoint, we have to abandon the idea of a thin blue line that separates us from the community and instead embrace a thin blue thread culture that sees police interwoven with all of the threads in the fabric of society.

We need to create a stronger national social safety net where no one falls between the cracks, an inclusive quilt where every thread is visible and distinct, and contributes to our national identity, and indeed our national security.

We are dealing with multiple generational existential crises right now; systemic institutional societal racism, workplace sexual violence and harassment, climate change, global warming, the COVID 19 pandemic – and its spinoff economical effects that are producing a massive global economic crisis.

We seem to have forgotten about the opioid crisis, and there has been a recent spike in the ongoing epidemic of fatal drug overdoses across Canada and right here in the Nation's Capital. We can use these crises to implement needed changes within our institutions and across society.

We need police in society. We need humane police. We need good police. We need good and healthy people in all of our communities. We need safe communities. The best way to stop a bullet, or a pandemic, is with good health, education, jobs, affordable housing.

A good way to stop a bullet is also with courageous, compassionate and caring cops, working in, and with, and for community. We must change the operating model of policing, from being simply the entry point into the criminal justice system, to being a point of referral to a wide variety of integrated non-criminal streams, many of which are far better positioned to solve both the symptoms and the underlying issues of crime in our communities.

We must align police services, more closely with other human services, and human services institutions; social services, education, public health, and of course the not-for-profit sector.

You are hearing people say it's time for change. Many of those people are right here within the Ottawa Police Service. Our frontline officers, senior NCOs, senior officers and command officers want the same thing: Change for good, needed change.

I've heard these similar tragedies over the course of my three decades with policing, and I'm in the last half decade of my policing career at the rank of chief and I'm determined to implement substantive long-needed changes, right here in the Nation's Capital. That is why I applied to be the OPS's chief and I believe that is why the Ottawa Police Services Board hired me, and that's why I'm staying right here to get the job done.

I am not alone in this work. I'm surrounded by a critical mass of other change-enabling leaders inside the OPS and within all the city's many diverse communities. All of these leaders know that this is not the time for incremental change, this is not the time for resisting change, this is a time for systemic change, and not just in policing but across the justice system and across the human services institutions – indeed across all of civil society.

No matter how hard we work, and certainly here in Ottawa our commitment is to work as hard as we possibly can to make improvements. But no matter how hard we work, bias, prejudice, hate and violence are all parts of the human condition and will therefore be present in all human made families, communities, organizations and institutions. That is why this work will always be challenging and must be focused on continual effort and improvement.

The goal cannot be for perfection and/or the complete eradication of these human failings as this is impossible to achieve. Instead the goal must be for continuously reducing the frequency and the intensity of all such incidents of ignorance, intolerance, indifference, and/or intentional hurt, as well as to continuously improve our ability to review, address, recover and be restored from such incidents when they occur.

This change is something that we all need to be invested in: we can agree to disagree on the nature or pace or direction of the change, but we must all agree that change is needed so we can be better and do better for each other.

The change need not be transformative or overly complicated. It is as simple as accepting the need to change or learning from others about the types of changes that are needed, and then taking ownership of those solutions. The simplest and most critical thing that we need to do is to make a true personal commitment, an organizational commitment, to treat each other with dignity, respect and humanity.

Defunding/Disbanding Police

Since the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, it's created a whole raft of social media posts and hashtags. While these are not inconsequential expressions of genuine frustration, they are not sufficient to actually produce the changes in policing or society, to address the decades, and in fact centuries-old issues, of individual systemic or institutional discrimination; specifically anti-black racism or anti-Indigenous racism.

Defunding or disbanding any institution is a complex issue. It requires careful analysis, even more careful planning, implementation and evaluation.

In Canada, police services exist because of legislation from all three levels of government. Federal statutes, provincial *Police Service Act*, and municipal acts and funding. It would take years of careful planning and implementing to create any sort of alternative and capable 24/7, 365 service delivery option other than the police, fire and ambulance.

Not that it's impossible, but the level of effort would be significant and the commitment to that change would have to be generational.

Cutting costs for policing usually results in a few things; when we talk about deep cuts we are talking about cutting training which will actually stop the reform process that is already underway. Cutting technology investments would be counterproductive and would eliminate our ability to even consider the application of body-worn cameras. Nevermind the impact it might have had during the COVID 19 pandemic, when a significant percentage of our workforce had to work from home, using advancements in technology that this Board wisely picked a number of years ago to allow more of our members to have access to laptops and smartphones.

Police are the intake model for, and an integral part of, the larger justice system. One of the fundamental responsibilities of the federal government is to protect the nation from external and internal threats of harm. The national, provincial, regional and municipal police agencies are also a core element of our national security capability here in Canada. It addresses specifically issues of domestic and international terror operations, multinational transnational criminal organizations and the investigations into them, cyber crime that can be committed literally anywhere in the world on local residents, critical infrastructure protection which is quite prolific here in the Nation's Capital, as well as responding to natural and human disasters, including floods and tornadoes that have occurred here on a regular basis in Ottawa.

The police, therefore, cannot simply be defunded or disbanded without massive impacts to the entire justice system, our national security systems, and our ability to be resilient against mother nature.

The police are only part of the social fabric and the social contract in any democracy. Even if we could wave a magic wand and fix every police service and every member, or quite frankly even disband policing, you would still have to reform the entire justice system along with all other public and private institutions, because they are part of a wider range of societal inequalities and injustices that impact and enable racism or any form of individual group of systemic discrimination.

For a variety of legitimate and less legitimate reasons, we have seen the defunding and disbanding of other institutions in the past. For example, in the 1950s and 60s, we saw what happened to the psychiatric hospitals and mental institutions, without commensurate plans to make investments and prepare communities for the outflow of these patients. Without sustainable financial investments, into institutions like policing, the community, and not-for-profit organizations, this resulted quite frankly in a disaster. This defunding and complete erosion of this healthcare part of the social safety net resulted in currently what we are facing, in some jurisdictions, as much as 70 to 90% of the police work – dealing with people in mental health and/or addictions crises on a 24/7 365 days basis. This example of defunding or disbanding of institutions was ill-conceived, poorly implemented, badly funded, and have led to many of the problems we now see today in policing.

I liked the deputants who talked about re-imagining, reconceiving of policing; I truly believe in this. Police unfortunately focus first and most on reactive law enforcement versus proactive prevention and interventions. This operating model is the most costly in terms of finances and social costs. Sometimes those social costs include the loss of life; the tragic loss of life. They are the least effective way of providing public safety, community safety, and well-being.

We have learned from past failures, like the war on drugs, and we have recent examples of more effective health-focused approaches, like the approach to our national opioid crisis, and indeed our ongoing approach to the COVID 19 pandemic.

We can re-imagine and realign policing. Policing under the new legislation in the *Police Service Act* of Ontario that requires every municipal government to design and implement and evaluate a community safety and well-being plan that brings together the police, education, health, social services, the not-for-profit sector, representatives of our demographic communities locally, to implement an integrated service delivery model that better-serves the human needs from birth to death. That seeks first to do no harm, that operates under a public health education model, and mainly to free criminal space. We have to break down those silos between our different institutions, between police, courts and corrections, between the justice system and social services, health and education.

We have a new *Police Service Act* in Ontario that legally requires us to do these things; we have excellent civil servants like Tony Dimonte, who's leading the work here in the Nation's Capital. This is a game-changing opportunity to make true investments for true change.

We need to reform and reinvest; the majority of people in the justice system are there not for crimes, but for mental health and addictions. We don't have a policing and justice system, in fact, we have a public health and addictions problem. If we did this right, we could save hundreds of millions of dollars in every province. We could save hundreds of millions of dollars across this country – misspent dollars in the justice system that could be reinvested in some way across the human services systems and into the not-for-profit sector.

But we first need to do the work, the planning, implementing and evaluating and sustaining before we can move to that level.

Scotland has one of the best and most well-developed such systems – well documented, well researched. I have a quote from Megan O'Neil who's an expert in community policing at the University of Dundee.

“Police forces need to take a more integrated approach into how they serve their communities. In most European countries, policing isn't viewed primarily from a top-down and law enforcement perspective, but rather as part of the bigger solution to social problems. It's not, 'There's a problem, send the police,' it's 'There's a problem, let's work together to find the right solution and services.' Policing is seen as a small part of a bigger set of actors in terms of addressing social issues; advocates shouldn't underestimate the cost. What is missing from the current discussions is that we can't just take money from policing and put it somewhere else. The whole system needs to be very well resourced. This kind of work is expensive and there's an argument that savings will come later but it will have to be an upfront cost. The key message is: fund public services.”

Changes underway at OPS

Advancing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): Our recruiting and hiring efforts in the OPS, and my credit to CAO Jeff Letourneau and his amazing team, since the start of the year 2020, we have received 1,636 applications, which includes: a 46% uptick in female applicants, as many as 63 applications from members of our Indigenous community, and another 558 applicants who self-identified as black, middle-eastern, LGBTQ2, and other minority communities. We have done an overhaul of our coach officer program, including a full audit of the program, new selection and training criteria for our coach officers, as well as the requirement for each of our coach officers to meet with me before they are assigned a recruit. We are doing this so we can reinforce our values and our priorities.

Member wellness: We have made a significant investment in our members well-being and health, which is a priority for the Board. This includes our ongoing work around Workplace Sexual Violence and Harassment. This week we will be expanding our efforts in that area with our internal advisory group and our external advisory group. I want to compliment and thank Acting Deputy Chief Joan McKenna and her core team who have been working hard with the Board in this very important joint initiative. We have secured the support of our collective bargaining agencies, and we are now attempting to secure the support of many of our external partners.

Fatigue Management Strategy: This joint process between the OPS, the OPA and the SOA, is moving on to phase two now. This is an area again that can address many of the issues of racism, over policing, the ability of officers to de-escalate and to perform at a higher level during crisis situations.

Modernization: The modernization of the OPS is another priority by the Board. We continue to advance our reorganization of the OPS.

Respect, Values and Inclusion Directorate (RVI): We are building out the RVI, while preparing for the next phase of work that will be announced at the next Board meeting.

We are in the process of the hiring and onboarding of a new chief financial officer, a new chief information officer, and an equity, diversity and inclusion specialist.

I want to advise the Board that we have significantly increased the level of external applications from members across this country, and community members who want to join the Ottawa Police Service, to be a part of the mission of change and to bring their skills and passions to bear on policing in this city.

Last but not least, the Board's priority of investing in neighbourhood policing specifically; in May 2020, we kept our promise, with credit to Deputy Chief Steve Bell, we deployed another Neighbourhood Resource Team (NRT) – this one in the Byward Market/Lowertown. On June 5, 2020, a member of the public alerted one of our new NRT officers to an incident where a man was seen brandishing a firearm on Rideau Street. The NRT officer and other frontline officers responded immediately to the incident, apprehended the suspect, and seized a fully loaded crime gun. In the same week, another member of the NRT attended a call for a man with severe mental health issues outside of one of our downtown shelters. The following letter was sent to me about this incident:

“This man is known to be extremely volatile and violent and is banned from shelters. He was covered with his own feces. Cst. Irving approached the shelter and asked if they could make an exception long enough to allow the man to have a shower; the shelter agreed. The whole time your officers stayed close, allowing the staff to do their jobs but ensuring they were safe. Your

officers could have easily turned a blind eye, requested transport for him, or told him to move on, but they didn't, instead they took action to allow him to gain back some level of dignity. I watched your Officers show extreme patience and compassion towards this man and unfortunately there was no one around to watch their actions or whip out their phones to video it. I want you to know that your officers actions today were human and inspiring. They probably don't even realize the impact they had on this gentleman or on myself, who just happened to stumble across their act of compassion and kindness."