

Chief's Verbal Report
Ottawa Police Services Board
May 29th, 2017

Good evening,

I have several items I would like to update the Board on this evening.

Order of Merit

I would like to start by congratulating both Deputy Chief Jill Skinner and Staff Sergeant Paul Burnett on being invested into the Order of Merit of the Police Forces. They were presented with this honour by His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, on Thursday last week. The award recognizes the exceptional work both of these members contribute to the Ottawa Police Service, along with their dedication to policing itself. It is well deserved. Congratulations Jill and Paul!

Opioids

Like cities and communities across Canada, we continue to see a rise in overdoses related to fentanyl and opioids. The drugs are appearing in our police investigations and their impact is also seen in our emergency rooms. Since we changed our reporting and response protocols related to drug overdoses earlier this year our frontline officers are responding to an average of 20 overdose calls a month, for all calls for overdoses. Not all of these calls can be attributed to opioids. Analysis of any samples seized takes time to determine what may have been ingested. Data tracking is a major concern across the province and just last week the province announced that it created a new tool that allows residents the ability to see where the drug is hitting hardest in Ontario.

We also continue to work with our partners in the health field to better understand the trends we are seeing. While we are playing an enforcement role, all partners agree that education and prevention is the best approach to dealing with this crisis. We know there is more work to do. That's why, earlier this month, our Senior Leadership Team decided to move forward with the purchase and distribution of naloxone for our frontline members. Officers already have personal protective equipment, but naloxone will provide more protection for our members, and ensure that this life-saving drug is more readily available for citizens in need.

You will see that item outlined in our Q1 financial report. We are now in the midst of purchasing naloxone and building a training package for officers. We hope to see the roll out of the training soon.

I also want to recognize the excellent work being done by our Drug Unit. They remain committed to investigating drug activity across the city. Our Drug Unit has seen a 400% increase in drug-related charges laid over the same period of time in 2016. Just last Thursday warrants were executed that resulted in the seizure of over 460 grams of what is suspected to be fentanyl powder. We will continue to pursue enforcement while working with our partners to emphasize the education and prevention strategies necessary to deal with this issue.

Officers respond to woman in distress

Earlier this month, Constables Katherine Ste. Marie, Stephanie McConnell and Cory Chipman responded to a report of a woman threatening self-harm. When officers arrived on the scene, the woman was in a confined space and had razor blades in her hands, indicating she wished to end her life. A CEW was deployed and the woman was safely rescued and brought to hospital.

Guilty verdict in triple homicide

I also want to thank our members for the excellent police work they did that resulted in a guilty verdict against the man responsible for the 2007 homicides of Alban Garon, his wife Raymonde, and their friend Marie-Claire Beniskos. This is an excellent example of some exceptional police work that resulted in the incarceration of a dangerous offender. Those officers involved in the case never let it go, and exemplified the teamwork required to see a guilty verdict. As well, in the same week, we saw a guilty verdict in the homicide of Michael Wassill in 2013. This is another example of our commitment to victims of crime and how hard work gets results.

Move Over for emergency vehicles

Our Traffic Services officers conducted a “Move Over” blitz on the Monday of the Victoria Day weekend, giving out tickets to people who either failed to move over for an emergency vehicle, or passed too quickly and closely to a stopped vehicle at the side of the road with its emergency lights on. Nine drivers were issued the \$490 tickets. The “Move Over” law requires that any driver clear the lane to allow an emergency vehicle to pass through. But what many drivers don’t realize is that the law also requires that drivers who are able to move over to the left on a highway into another lane, do so when there’s an emergency vehicle stopped on the side of the road. That gives the stopped emergency vehicle an entire lane of space as you pass. If you are unable move over to another lane, you are required to greatly reduce your speed and pass with caution. Officers will be conducting enforcement blitzes in the coming months to help educate the public on these road safety standards

Bikes for Kids event

Sixty happy children were given brand new bicycles thanks to an anonymous donor in late April. Our Service, in partnership with Safer Roads Ottawa and Ottawa Public Health, helped to give out the bikes to area kids, along with helmets and road safety lessons. I want to thank Sergeant Adam Coakley who organized the event at the McNabb Community Arena.

Police Week May 14-20

This year's Police Week was launched with a charity barbecue at City Hall and extended into the week with basketball games, face-painting, positive engagement opportunities, and interactive OPS displays. About 1,500 people attended events city-wide. I would like to extend a big thank you to the coordinators in the Community Development section, the organizers in Community Safety Services, and our OPS Volunteers, for a job well done. A special thank you goes out to our community partners and the Police Venturers, who pitched in on every single occasion. This year's theme was "*Working Together for Safer Communities*," and it was great to see so many of our members, from civilian to sworn, out to support all the events. Your presence made a big difference and helped to reinforce the importance and value of our great community partnerships.

Difficult calls

This month our officers responded to two calls I think are worth highlighting because they show that some calls end tragically despite our best efforts.

Coordinated effort in response to child drowning

On May 21, our communications centre received a call about a small child who had fallen into a backyard pool and was unresponsive. The comms centre coordinated with our frontline officers, who were first on scene and took over doing CPR from a neighbour. The quick thinking of everyone on the team -- from the communications centre to our frontline officers -- helped to ensure this child had the best chance to survive. These are the hardest types of calls to respond to, but comm centre staff, officers and paramedics kept calm. Their efforts helped to regain a pulse on the child, but tragically, he passed on last week. I want to thank all those officers who responded that day. They worked hard to save that child and comfort the family on scene, and I am proud of them.

Missing person

I also want to thank the officers and volunteers for their tireless efforts to find Nelliya Karbisheva last week in Stittsville. The search lasted for several days and while it was not a positive outcome, the executive and I want to acknowledge the effort and sacrifice that went into this extensive operation. So much goes into these operations, including searching sometimes difficult areas, maintaining communications, supporting the family, and following up on leads. We ask our officers to do this while also ensuring that regular operations are responded to.

Suspensions

I want to take a moment to address some of the public comments made by Matt Skof recently about the process for suspensions. Last week I sent the Board a memo outlining the process, but I want to highlight some of the key points here. The Ottawa Police Service currently has 69 matters that are being investigated under the *Police Services Act* or the *Criminal Code* by our service, the SIU or the OIPRD or outside police services. Those investigations involve 94 members. The vast majority of investigations do not result in suspension. Of that number there are currently five OPS sworn members under suspension and one civilian member on administrative leave. Most of these suspensions predate this calendar year.

Under Section 89 (1) of the *Police Services Act*, the Chief has the authority to suspend a sworn member with pay. It is the practice of the OPS to review the specifics of each investigation and determine the appropriate course of action.

I take this responsibility seriously and I am fully aware of the need to be consistent and transparent. Unfortunately, due to privacy issues, legislative restrictions and to protect the integrity of investigations, I am often not in a position to openly speak about the rationale used for each of my decisions. It is a difficult process and these decisions are not made lightly.

There are several considerations used when deciding if suspension is appropriate, including:

- Availability facts and information;
- Nature or seriousness of the offence;
- Is there a concern for public safety;
- Are there issues related to access to workplace, data or equipment liability on the officer or the service;
- Public accountability;
- Employment history; and

- Integrity of the investigation.

Privacy rules limit me in what I can say in this forum. When we get in camera, Board members will have more ability to ask questions about specific cases.

What I can say here is that every case presents its own scenarios and facts but we work hard to ensure the considerations are applied fairly in all discipline matters to the best of our ability. Every case is reviewed individually. We always work to avoid prejudgment of the individual that the allegations have been made against.

Though he focuses on Senior officers, Mr. Skof's comments appear to follow a logic that any sworn member under investigation is or should be under suspension. On the first point, the numbers show that not to be true and that suspensions are applied in a very small amount of cases. On the second point it would simply be unfair for me as Chief to use an allegation as the primary basis of suspension. It would also be unfair to name members, regardless of rank, who are simply under investigation. His characterization that there is favoritism based on rank is as flawed and untrue as it is divisive. He is well aware of the number of investigations and the circumstances of those files.

Thank you.