



Committee Minutes

Mental Health and Addictions Task Force

May 17, 2022 – 1:00 PM

The Mental Health and Addictions Task Force met on the above date through electronic means with the following members participating:

Present: Councillors Carleton, Hutchinson, O'Leary, Burley, Mackey, Keaveney and Clumpus; Phil Dodd, Clark MacFarlane, Naomi Vodden, Dr. Arra and Sandra McLay-Winters

Regrets: Warden Hicks

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Heather Morrison, Clerk; Rob Hatten, Communications Manager and Tara Warder, Deputy Clerk/Legislative Coordinator

Dr. Zayed was also in attendance from the Grey Bruce Health Unit.

Call to Order

Chair O'Leary called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations.

Delegations

Brenda Lawson, Agent, Public Prosecution Service of Canada

Brenda Lawson addressed the Task Force. She noted that she is an agent for the Public Prosecution Service of Canada (PPSC), which is responsible for prosecuting drug offences.

As a result of the opioid crisis and recognition of the need for different approaches for people with substance abuse disorders, PPSC has come out with new mandates. She proceeded to explain the different practices that are in place with respect to drug prosecutions.

Typically, when an individual is released on bail, conditions may be imposed that the person not be in possession of any drugs, or paraphernalia, etc. Any of those conditions can trigger a breach. To avoid triggering a breach, PPSC is under a mandate to avoid asking for those conditions to decrease the likelihood of breaches occurring and incarcerating people for short periods of time. This can increase the likelihood of an overdose when released. There is a realization that substance abuse is a health matter. A similar approach is taken with conditions of probation and conditional sentence orders.

She spoke to the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act which protects a person who is having an overdose, as well as people who are present during an overdose. People know that if they call for emergency services, they won't be charged for simple possession or breach of condition. It was noted however, that those who are in possession for the purposes of trafficking face the probability of being charged for this purpose.

Further guidelines surrounding simple possession of a narcotic were noted. An accused is often given a first appearance date with the possibility of charges being withdrawn. Police still lay the charges, however prosecutors don't typically proceed unless there is a serious manifestation of the charge where the public has been put at risk.

Ms. Lawson then addressed the matter of young offenders. With regard to bail, it is not a typical case where a young offender is held for bail or detained.

Questions were addressed. Is it typical for a judge to give an accused the option between attending a treatment centre or going to jail? It was noted that those discussions would usually occur before sentencing between prosecutors and defence counsel. It was further noted that there is no way to bypass others waiting for treatment. There is difficulty in getting into treatment from jail. There are some treatment centres that take people from jail, but not many.

Are the sentences appropriate for people who are trafficking drugs? Ms. Lawson noted that the penalties can be harsh for trafficking.

Matt Shute – YMCA Community and Employment Services

Matt Shute addressed the Task Force. He spoke to homelessness and social determinants of health.

Temporary shelter is beneficial in the short term for people who experience a crisis and need an immediate safe place to go before starting towards a more permanent housing solution.

He noted the process related to shelter access.

Many emergency shelter programs were initially designed for people who are only homeless for a short period of time. He noted that there are others who are chronically homeless.

Mr. Shute spoke to the services provided, including arranging temporary shelter stays, assisting clients in developing longer term housing goals, understanding the context of a client's situation and traumas and to coordinate services with the client and monitor their ongoing effectiveness.

He then outlined the year-over-year increase in need for shelter. It was noted that this has increased during the pandemic and even more so coming out of it.

He then overviewed opportunities for system and service improvements. It was noted that with the increasing need for nightly shelter stays, YMCA staff are spending the majority of their time in that area and it's more difficult to reach out to people who need supports to help retain their permanent housing. He then spoke to the potential challenges of the SOS mobile team. It is composed of four staff, however the increased need demands more staff.

Mr. Shute then noted that diversion from temporary housing is about helping people navigate a safe alternative to shelter that is appropriate to their circumstances. He spoke to safe and appropriate diversion.

Questions from the Task Force were addressed regarding whether enough temporary beds exist as the need grows. It was noted that it takes creativity and revisiting established guidelines and processes to meet the dramatic need.

Further questions were addressed on the need for local residents versus those who come to Grey County who feel it may be easier to access shelter. There are people coming to Grey because of access to shelter, however, Mr. Shute noted that it is not fully responsible for the increase.

In the case where people are between shelter stays and more permanent housing, attempts are made to connect people with their natural supports, such as family, while they wait for subsidized or supportive housing.

Josh Gibson spoke to the waiting list. Housing staff will be speaking to the coordination of services at a future meeting.

It was noted that the number of people living in encampments has increased, as well as an increased number of individuals who are sleeping rough or have declined stays in a shelter. Effort is made to establish rapport in these cases. As the prevalence of this increases, it would be valuable to communicate to local municipal bylaw enforcement on who to call and how to handle those situations. The approach should be consistent, and it is important to try to understand people's situation.

Dr. Zayed spoke to the importance of finding housing in order to be successful in treatment.

Mr. Shute noted that for afterhours assistance, people can connect to Safe n Sound or 211. The police also assist in this regard. The homelessness response system is moving towards having a dedicated 211 team field all of those calls for consistency across Bruce, Grey and Simcoe counties. This will be funded by the municipal partners.

Chair O'Leary passed the Chair to Vice Chair Mackey and left the meeting at this time.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Next Meeting Dates

June 7, 2022 and June 21, 2022.

On motion by Councillors Burley and Clumpus, the meeting adjourned at 2:22 pm.

Brian O'Leary, Chair