

Request for Consideration		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda Item (Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office by Noon at least 5 working days prior to the meeting)	<input type="checkbox"/> Added Item (Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office by Noon at least one day prior to meeting)	<input type="checkbox"/> Request from the Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Motion
Council or Committee: Halifax Board of Police Commissioners:		
Date of Meeting: February 28, 2022		
Subject: Human Resources consultant to study the issues of understaffing and increased mental health claims within the HRP		
Motion for Council to Consider:		
<p>That the Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners direct the Chief Officer of the HRP to, in consultation with and with the approval of the Board of Police Commissioners, hire an independent Human Resources consultant to study the issues of understaffing, increased mental health claims, and increased long-term absences within the HRP. The objective of this study would be to present a report to the Board which would outline: (a) the contributing factors giving rise to these issues, and (b) recommendations for addressing these issues in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner in the short, medium, and long term. This report could then inform budget deliberations in future fiscal years.</p>		
1. Legislative Authority:		
<p>Section 52 of the <i>Police Act</i> reads (emphasis added): <u>On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair's delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board</u> under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.</p>		
<p>Under subsection 55(2), the Board is obligated to "ensure that the budget prepared pursuant to [subsection 55(1)] is consistent with those matters referred to in subsection 55(3)."</p>		
<p>The matters under subsection 55(3) are as follows (emphasis added):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a board shall<ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) determine, in consultation with the chief officer, priorities, objectives and goals respecting police services in the community;(b) ensure the chief officer establishes programs and strategies to implement the priorities, objectives and goals respecting police services;(c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;(d) <u>ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;</u>(e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers;		

- (f) recommend policies, administrative and organizational direction for the effective management of the police department;
- (g) review with the chief officer information provided by the chief officer respecting complaints and internal discipline;
- (h) ensure a strategic plan and business plan is in place; and
- (i) ensure the department is managed by the chief officer according to best practices and operates effectively and efficiently

2. Reason:

a. Background

In the 2021-25 Strategic Priorities Plan for the HRM, “evidence-based decision making” is cited as a value of the municipality.¹ Likewise, in “Phase-I Key Highlights & Refresh Report of the Strategic Plan,” “Evidence-based policing & research partnerships” are cited as being major features of the HRP’s 2015–2025 Strategic Plan.²

It follows that “evidence-based decision making” is a “community value.” The Board is required to ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectation. Additionally, in keeping with subsection 55(2), the Board is required to ensure that the budget prepared is consistent with community values, including evidence-based decision making.

b. Understaffing, mental health issues, and long-term absences

The issues of understaffing, increased mental health claims, and increased long-term absences are areas of increasing concern in many industries across the country, including corrections, EHS, policing, and health professions.

For example, in 2020, in response to issues regarding staff shortages and rising long-term absences, the Northwest Territories Department of Justice engaged consultants from HR Atlantic to study this issue.³ A survey was sent out to staff and one-on-one interviews were conducted. The subsequent report that was produced provided an evidence base from which to begin to address these issues.

My concern is that, in assessing the HRP budget proposal, the Board has a limited understanding of

- (a) the scope, extent, and contributing causes of these problems, and
- (b) the most effective means of addressing them.

Hiring additional staff may be a “short term” fix to some of the concerns raised, but if the main contributors to the problems are structural in nature (i.e., not purely attributable just to a lack of “person power” on the frontline), then we may end up back where we started a few years down the road with even higher rates of mental health claims and long-term absences. This is especially so considering that, per StatsCan 2019 data, at 208 officers per 100,000 population, the area serviced by HRP is already the second most heavily policed region in Canada behind Montreal—well ahead of the national average of 183 officers per 100,000 population.

In this case, it could be that more research needs to be conducted on the most effective programs currently used across Canada for the purpose of addressing workplace mental health concerns and long-term absences. This is precisely the sort of research a HR consultant could conduct.

¹ https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/budget-finance/2021%20StrategicPrioritiesPlan_Final_June3.pdf

² <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/190211bopc61.pdf>

³

https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.5829144?fbclid=IwAR3R2qNQ36BCAy0j9mJQq1WGRGQ_DQss4AyL3QIkM85h0eAK2NT4prd0nQq

With this research in hand, the Board would be much better positioned as part of its deliberation for the 23/24 budget to take meaningful steps to address these issues and promote the best outcomes for officers and the public alike.

Outcome Sought: Noted above

Commissioner Harry Critchley