Drug Policy Document – Police Board 2006.JUL.19

Introduction

I am Inspector Scott Thompson, 2nd in command of District 3, the southeast part of Vancouver.

I am also the Vancouver Police Department’s Drug Policy Coordinator.

I was the VPD lead on the Supervised Injection Site project team; I drafted and implemented the policing and operational plans for the SIS.

I was also the VPD lead for NAOMI and a number of other challenging social and drug policy issues in the DTES from 2002 to 2004.

Purpose

I have two purposes today:

1. Is to publicly introduce the Vancouver Police Department’s drug policy document.

2. Is to solicit feedback from the Police Board’s review of this document as well as seek approval of the Board for this document to become the drug policy for the VPD.

Background

• From a national perspective, Vancouver has become the jurisdiction where drug policy issues and different approaches to substance abuse are implemented, evaluated and debated.

• It was also clear that the rest of Canada is looking at what happens here to determine what direction they should take.

• As the lead police agency responding to these issues on a day-to-day basis, the VPD decided it was necessary to develop a drug policy and a process to re-examine that policy on an ongoing basis.
• **It was important for the Vancouver Police Department to have:**

  1) A public position and one voice on drug policy.
  2) Provide an enforcement guide for our police officers on the street.
  3) Provide a policy position that other police services and other institutions across Canada can examine and look to for leadership and direction.

**Development Process**

• I brought a working group together in December, 2005.

• It consisted of two members of the VPD Executive; DCC Rich for Operations and DCC LePard for investigations.

• The four District commanders, Inspectors Steve Schnitzer, Bob Rolls, Kash Heed (formerly in charge of the Drug Section), Axel Hovbrender, John McKay of Beat Enforcement Team, Dave Nelmes of the Drug Section, retired Inspector Ken Frail and myself.

• A draft document eventually went to ten Patrol teams, eight from the four districts, and two teams from the (Beat Enforcement Team who work in the DTES) plus drug squad members for review and critique.

• The VPD executive reviewed and approved the document.

• It was then reviewed by the City of Vancouver drug policy coordinator Donald MacPherson, as well as the....

• Vancouver Coastal Health Authority with the assistance of Heather Hay and her team

• The final step is Police Board review and approval
Terminology

- The term “psychoactive substances” will be used versus the generic term of “drugs”.

- Use of this terminology is current and commonly used by other practitioners in the field.

- This terminology is used in the City of Vancouver report, *Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use*, as well as the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse report, *National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harm Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada*.

- For our purposes we define Psychoactive substances as all substances, legal and illegal, that cause behaviours that are harmful to the community at large.

Abuse

- The term “abuse” is purposefully used in this document.

- We considered past prevention campaigns, such as anti-smoking and anti-drunk driving, that were successful in changing societal attitudes and behaviours.

- From a larger community safety perspective, stigmatization of a negative behaviour may be viewed as a legitimate means of deterring people, particularly impressionable young people, from engaging in that behaviour.

- Therefore, in this context we deliberately used the term “abuse”.
Main Points

Public Safety Mission

- Our public safety mission in drug policy relates to reducing crime, fear of crime, street disorder, and protecting the vulnerable as well as a central value of policing which is to preserve and protect life.

- This is consistent with the VPD vision and mission.

- In the context of policing, members of the VPD are primarily concerned and occupied with the negative behaviours that arise from substance abuse and the impact on public safety and order.

- This is why the VPD has a public safety responsibility to address drug use and establish a drug policy.

Four Pillars

- The VPD believes that the “Four Pillars” should represent a balance and a continuum of practice across all the pillars with projects and initiatives being complementary.

- The VPD's position is that any Four Pillars initiative must be fundamentally lawful and ethical, must consider the interests of the whole community, and must strive to achieve a balance between societal and individual interests.

- The VPD will participate in Four Pillar initiatives that support the public safety mission of the VPD.

Prevention

- The VPD strongly believes that prevention is the most important pillar. Arguably, if the prevention pillar is successful there will be less need for the other pillars.
• Members of the VPD, across all ranks and organizational areas, expressed a great deal of passion in support of prevention and education. The overall theme of prevention should be to discourage substance abuse.

• The VPD is concerned that there is a relative lack of resources and effort being directed at age-appropriate prevention and education strategies on a large scale is of concern to the Department.

• Education in the public school system is imperative and the VPD is a partner in a program being developed in Vancouver schools.

• The prevention pillar supports the VPD’s public safety mission in that it will reduce the number of substance abusers as well as reduce the negative and damaging behaviours associated to substance abuse in our community.

**Enforcement**

• The VPD will continue to target street and middle level psychoactive substance (drug) traffickers as well as the production of psychoactive substances.

• Historically, the VPD adopted a very low level of enforcement directed at “narcotic in possession” (NIP) offences, as well as liquor offences.

• In response to community complaints, as well as a strategic commitment to reduce street disorder, the VPD is making enforcement against public psychoactive substance abuse and possession a priority.

• Laws against the possession-illegal use of psychoactive substances will be enforced in circumstances where the user(s) are engaged in behaviours that harm and/or interfere in the lawful use or enjoyment of public or private property and/or contribute to street disorder and/or cause fear among citizens and the community at large.

• This includes liquor.
• We recommend that a person's behaviour and/or the context of the psychoactive substance abuse, rather than the actual unlawful possession of the substance, should be the primary factor in determining whether to lay a charge.

• Enforcement will be specifically directed at parks and school grounds. Children, in particular, should not be placed at risk by the negative behaviours associated with psychoactive substance abuse.

• This will be the enforcement guide for our police officers on the street.

Harm Reduction

• We support a board range of strategies and initiatives by the health authority and other organizations.

• The VPD believes that harm reduction should have a broader scope beyond health measures and include all practices and initiatives that reduce harm.

• We believe that the degree to which harm reduction measures are needed is proportional to the degree to which the other pillars, prevention, enforcement, and treatment have failed to achieve success.

• The VPD is reluctant to engage in a debate about public health practices as our expertise lies in policing, not health.

• At a fundamental level all harm reduction practices must be lawful.

• The VPD supports the public health objectives of needle exchange and the Health Canada mandated research project at the Supervised Injection Site and NAOMI.

• We have a concern that the longer a given user is maintained in a cycle of addiction without a readily accessible pathway to treatment, the more likely they are to engage in negative behaviours that harm themselves, other citizens, and the community at large.
Treatment

• The VPD supports accessible and immediate treatment for substance abuse on demand by both adults and youth.

• The VPD supports, in principle, the treatment plan proposed by the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority in 2003.

• The VPD believes that society as a whole has an obligation to provide whatever treatment tools and resources are necessary to reduce addiction to psychoactive substances.

• The VPD strongly supports criminal sanctions such as drug court that facilitate and enforce treatment programs.

• We suggest mandatory treatment (Netherlands) be studied.

• Overall the VPD position is simply that there needs to be more effective treatment, whatever the delivery model.

• Effective treatment certainly supports our mission and values and will contribute to a safer community.

Drug Policy Process

• The mandate of the drug policy coordinator is to review, and take the lead on drug policy issues for the VPD in consultation with VPD managers, and subject to the direction of the VPD executive.

• The drug policy coordinator will audit the VPD drug policy annually to ensure it is up to date and consistent with current VPD practice and perspectives on drug policy issues.

Conclusion

I hope my presentation has been informative and has assisted the Board.
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Secondly, to solicit feedback from the Board as well as seek its approval for this document to become the drug policy for the VPD.

I would close by saying that the Vancouver Police Department has an integral part in establishing healthy communities and maintaining a safe and vibrant city.

The VPD drug policy is a clear and progressive position that the public, stakeholders, government, institutions and other police services can examine and look to for direction and leadership.

The VPD has been, and will continue to be, a national leader in creating, implementing, and evaluating initiatives that complement and support the Four Pillars approach in the City of Vancouver.