



EDMONTON POLICE SERVICE

REPORT TO THE EDMONTON POLICE COMMISSION

DATE: January 12, 2017

SUBJECT: Project Watch Quarterly Update (October – December, 2016)

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That this report be received for information.

INTRODUCTION:

This report will summarize and update the current status of the Project Watch Task Force (PWTF).

The PWTF was formed to address crime, disorder and violence occurring in and around several Edmonton hotels, motels, as well as rental accommodations. Many of these locations were found to house numerous families and vulnerable persons, including vulnerable workers in derelict conditions. In response to this situation, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) has taken the lead in forming an integrated team (not formalized) to address these concerns city wide.

On April 24, 2015, subsequent to a Project Watch presentation provided by Chief Knecht to the Edmonton Police Commission (EPC), EPS was requested to provide monthly updates on the status of Project Watch, going forward.

BACKGROUND:

In January 2016, EPS formalized a position for the Project Watch Coordinator within Collaborative Policing Section. In June 2016, the Project Watch program was moved to Coordinated Policing Division/Integrated Community Safety Branch. The current external agencies are the City of Edmonton (CoE) Development Compliance, Edmonton Fire and Rescue (EFRS), Alberta Health Services (AHS), Child and Family Services (CFS), Alberta Works and Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S).

Inspections Conducted in October-December 2016:

1. Project Watch Initial Inspection: Southeast Division apartment building 2016 October 13:

- The initial request for Project Watch to inspect this location was by the Southeast Division Community Crime Management Team.

- In consultation with Southeast Division, it was determined that police have had numerous calls (most of them involving violence, weapons and drugs) for service to this location.
 - The majority of the occupants were on government assistance.
 - Several of the occupants were being used as vulnerable workers for dangerous repairs and renovations to the building.
 - Throughout the investigation it was learned that major alterations to the building (numerous safety codes violations) have been completed without proper permits or inspections. The permitted use of the property was altered with several illegal suites occupied in the basement of the building.
 - There had been numerous complaints reported about this problem property via 311, including numerous bylaw and community standards complaints.
 - AHS has already closed five suites as unfit for human habitation for issues including mould, bed bug infestations, non-functioning appliances and missing or blocked windows.

Orders/Action planned:

- The CoEs Development Compliance/Problem Properties Unit has issued immediate fines and orders for misuse of the property. Safety Codes Branch will be conducting enforcement for all safety codes infractions.
- AHS will not be re-opening any suites until there is full compliance to all existing orders and a full engineering report for the building.
- Alberta Works is currently working with all remaining occupants to relocate them to safer accommodations, due to the likely closure of the building.
- EFRS has issued violation notices regarding non-functioning and absent smoke alarms, as well as numerous fire-safety concerns, including illegal suites with no egress.
- OH&S found evidence of substantial renovations taking place using vulnerable workers. A full hazard assessment request order was issued for sampling for asbestos containing materials.
- The Southeast Community Crime Management Team member (in charge) will be monitoring the building for any further crime and disorder issues in and around the building, including ongoing monitoring for compliance to outstanding safety concerns.

**2. Project Watch Initial Inspection: Northwest Division apartment building
2016 Nov 24:**

- The initial request for Project Watch to inspect this location was by an EPS Youth Offender Management Member (Specialized Investigation Division).
 - The member advised that when attending the apartment to locate a suspect, he noted that the building was in a state of disrepair with both entrances to the building insecure.
 - Most of the occupants, including several families, were on government assistance.

- The main floor interior walls and exterior walls were tagged with gang graffiti. Several of the suites had broken appliances and heating issues.
- Many of the smoke alarms were not working in the building.
- There were used, discarded syringes found in the common areas throughout the building.
- There appeared to be someone living in the furnace/utility room.

Orders/Action planned:

- AHS issued an order for the immediate repairs to the front and rear doors of the building and a cleanup of all the syringes in the common area. Unoccupied suites have been closed pending a full inspection by AHS prior to re-occupying.
- Alberta Works is currently working the occupants to confirm they are receiving adequate supports.
- EFRS has issued violation notices regarding non-functioning and absent smoke alarms, as well as numerous fire-safety concerns.
- OH&S has also issued an order for a hazard assessment for asbestos containing materials, an eyewash station for the building (as per the WHMIS requirements for onsite cleaning supplies), and a “sharps” container for needles.
- The Northwest Division patrol member (in charge) will be monitoring the building for any “found ins” illegally occupying the insecure building and ongoing monitoring for compliance to Project Watch violation notices and orders.
- The CoE will be following up with Community Standards for enforcement regarding garbage, debris and graffiti found throughout the property.

**3. Project Watch Initial Inspection: Northwest Division Apartment building
2016 Nov 24:**

- The inspection of this location was proactively initiated by the PWTF.
- During the inspection of the apartments, the PWTF noted the neglected state of the building directly across the road.
 - The building was in complete disrepair with both entrances to the building insecure.
 - Most of the occupants, including several families, were on government assistance.
 - The main floor interior and exterior were heavily tagged with gang graffiti.
 - Several of the suites had appliances that were not working.
 - Many of the smoke alarms were not working in the building.

Orders/Action planned:

- AHS issued a violation notice for the immediate repairs to the front and rear doors of the building and a general cleanup of the common areas.

- CFS conducted an emergency apprehension of two young children in a neglect situation. There was little, if any, food for the children and what appeared to be obvious drug use taking place in the suite (suspected cocaine on the living room table). An investigation by CFS, in conjunction with Northwest Division members, is ongoing.
- Alberta Works is currently working with their clients to confirm they are receiving adequate supports.
- EFRS has issued violation notices regarding non-functioning and absent smoke alarms, as well as numerous fire-safety concerns.
- The Northwest Division patrol member (in charge) will be monitoring the building for any “found-ins” illegally occupying the insecure building and monitoring for compliance to Project Watch violation notices and orders.
- The CoE will be following up with Community Standards for enforcement regarding the garbage, debris and graffiti found throughout the property.

4. Project Watch Follow-up Inspections of a West Division Motel and a Northeast Division Motel

2016 December 20 – 20:

- Follow-up inspections were conducted at the two motels; both of which currently house the vast majority of vulnerable families waiting for housing.
 - The focus of the inspections were to ensure compliance to any outstanding violation notices, ensure that each facility is providing a safe environment, and that the occupants are safe with adequate supports.
 - It was the general feeling of the Project Watch inspectors that there was a noticeable improvement in the cleanliness and maintenance of both motels.
 - Project Watch has asked for Alberta Works to limit the use of both motels, due to the lack of monthly rates, kitchenettes and access to services.

Additional Orders / Actions Planned:

- CFS and Alberta Works will continue to work with families and individuals needing further supports and working with their case workers to get them properly housed.
- CFS initiated an investigation in conjunction with Northeast Division CIS for a child neglect situation at the one of the motels. A child was found in a suite with limited food and the parent was in possession of suspected stolen property. Investigations are ongoing.
- The PWTF provided activity bags for vulnerable children having to spend the holidays in the motels. The EPS and EFRS provided colouring/activity books, toys and crayons for the children. Over 50 activity bags were handed out by Project Watch.
- It was determined that most of the families were not registered with 630 CHED’s Santa’s Anonymous.
- The PWTF, with the assistance of Santa’s Anonymous, were able to pick up and deliver toys for all unregistered families at both motels. A Merrier Christmas was had by all!

5. Project Watch Initial Inspection: Northwest Division Apartment 2016 Nov 24:

- The inspection of this location was proactively initiated by the PWFT.
- During the inspection of another apartment, the PWTF noted the neglected state of this building.
 - The building had extensive graffiti and tagging on the outside of the building, including several broken windows.
 - There was visible mould growing on the curtains in one of the suites, seen through one of the windows.
 - Most of the occupants were on government assistance.
 - There are several vulnerable families that were living at this location (also on assistance).

Orders/Action planned:

- AHS issued a violation notice for the immediate repairs to any non-functioning appliances, missing and broken windows, and proper pest control for a bed-bug infestation in the building.
- CFS has initiated an investigation for child neglect in one of the suites where there was little, if any, food for the child.
- Alberta Works is currently working the occupants to confirm they are receiving adequate supports.
- EFRS has issued violation notices regarding non-functioning and absent smoke alarms, as well as numerous fire-safety concerns.
- The Northwest Division patrol member (in charge) will be monitoring for compliance to Project Watch violation notices and orders.
- The CoE will be following up with Community Standards for enforcement regarding garbage, debris and graffiti found throughout the property.

PWTF Project Outcomes:

1. West Division Apartment Complex:

- The first of many Project Watch inspections at this apartment was conducted on November 14, 2014. This is a multi-unit apartment complex. The following is a summary of the initial concerns identified by Project Watch:
 - The complex was responsible for numerous police calls for service, namely violence, and was a haven for gang activity.
 - All buildings were completely insecure with extensive graffiti, broken windows, and heating issues. There was over 12 million dollars in critical infrastructure deficiencies, including leaking galvanized water lines, raw sewage backing up into

several of the buildings, and an infestation of bed bugs, cockroaches, ants and mice.

- There were several known gang members and associates living there.
- The majority of the occupants were on government assistance.
- During the course of the ongoing Project Watch inspections of the apartments throughout 2015, it was clear that the ownership group was not supporting their property managers and making a minimal effort to comply. As tenants were relocated, AHS closed suites (unfit for human habitation), completely stopping problem landlords from re-renting suites that were unsafe. With group enforcement, including orders and violation notices from EFRS, AHS, and OH&S (and the property managers quitting), the ownership group listed the property for sale.
- In August, 2016, another corporation purchased the apartments. Working in conjunction with Project Watch, they are fully complying with all outstanding orders and violation notices. There has been a notable reduction of police calls for service and the amount of violence and severity of crimes. The corporation has expressed an interest in participating in EPSs Crime-Free Multi-Housing (CFMH) Program and will also use the program as a cornerstone for all their current and future properties. This has the potential of being a positive outcome.

2. Eight West Division Motels:

- All of these hotels/motels were being used by Alberta Works, Assured Income for Severely Handicapped (AISH) and CFS for housing vulnerable persons. Some of these individuals and families had been living in these hotels/motels for years, with no monthly rates. The following is a summary of the initial concerns identified by Project Watch:
 - All of the listed hotels/motels were responsible for numerous police calls for service, namely violent calls.
 - There were no minimum standards or regular inspections conducted at these hotels/motels.
 - The living conditions in most of the hotels/motels inspected were deplorable, including health, fire and OH&S safety concerns.
 - Several of the buildings not only had safety codes violations, illegal suites and structural concerns, but also exposed vulnerable persons and workers to asbestos containing materials.
 - Almost all of the inspected hotels/motels had massive pest infestations, including bed bugs and cockroaches.
 - Numerous children were in neglect situations and countless families and individuals were in need of additional supports (food, medical care, and advocacy).
- During the course of the ongoing Project Watch inspections of the hotels/motels throughout 2015-2016, a joint effort of strategically relocating vulnerable persons, on assistance, to safer locations and joint enforcement brought the hotels/motels into compliance. Caseworkers from Alberta Works/AISH are now assigned to Project Watch. They attend all inspections to assist with case management and the housing vulnerable persons in the hotels/motels.

- Although all of the hotels/motels are in full compliance with Project Watch orders and violation notices, many of them are no longer utilized by Alberta Works/AISH (due to a lack of monthly rates, kitchenettes, poor access to services, etc.). Project Watch has been assisting Alberta Works/AISH with ongoing monitoring of the hotels/motels still being used to house vulnerable persons and identifying new safe locations for clients.
- Due to the joint enforcement of Project Watch, the hotels/motels were forced to spend significant money in renovations to comply with outstanding orders/violation notices. One of the Inns has recently undergone a massive renovation and is probably the most notable in upgrades. Of note, all of the hotels/motels inspected by Project Watch have not only experienced a reduction in police calls for service, but a massive reduction in violence and severity of crimes that had been occurring.
- Use of the hotels/motels by Alberta Works/AISH has been reduced dramatically. Currently there are about 40 families housed in the hotels/motels. On average, in 2014-2016, there were typically 150 – 200 families on assistance in the hotels/motels. With an increase of vacancy in rental accommodations in Edmonton, and better coordination between agencies, housing has been occurring faster.

3. West Division Apartment Complex:

- The initial Project Watch inspection at the apartment was conducted on February 12, 2015. This was a five-story, multi-unit apartment with commercial space on the main floor. The following is a summary of the initial concerns identified by Project Watch:
 - The complex was responsible for numerous police calls for service; namely violence, drugs and gang activity.
 - The building was completely insecure with recent fires (arson) that had occurred on both the east and west sides of the building. As a result of the fire, the entire second level did not have adequate heating.
 - There was extensive tagging/graffiti in and around the building, including notable blood stains on the walls and the carpeting.
 - There were numerous health and safety concerns, namely a massive cockroach/bed-bug infestation.
 - Most of the occupants were forced to wash their clothing in an off-site laundry mat or in their bathtubs, due to vagrants defecating in the buildings washer and dryer.
 - The vast majority of the occupants were on some form of government assistance.
- With group enforcement, including orders and violation notices from EFRS and a closure of the several of the suites by AHS, the owner listed the property for sale.
- In March, 2016, another corporation purchased the apartment. Working in conjunction with Project Watch, they are fully complying with all outstanding orders and violation notices. The building is undergoing massive renovations and the new ownership group wants to participate in EPS CRMH Program going forward and recently had some of their property managers attend the CFMH course.

- There has also been a notable reduction in police calls for service and severity of crimes that had been occurring there. This apartment has undergone the most visible physical renovation and transformation to date (post Project Watch).

4. West Division Apartment Complex:

- The initial Project Watch inspection was conducted on September 7, 2016. This was a two-story, multi-unit apartment. The following is a summary of the initial concerns identified by Project Watch:
 - The complex was responsible for numerous police calls for service, namely violence, weapons complaints and a recent homicide.
 - The building was in complete disrepair with all main floor windows broken, insecure exterior doors, no heat, extensive water leaks, mould and a massive cockroach infestation (in many of the rooms they were swarming).
 - All occupants (including a family with young children) were Sudanese refugees and on government assistance.
 - OH&S identified asbestos containing materials that the occupants and workers were being exposed to.
- With group enforcement, including orders and violation notices from EFRS, OH&S and a closure of the entire building by AHS, the owner listed the property for sale. All occupants were relocated to safer accommodations during the closure of the building.
- In September, 2016, a corporation purchased the apartment. Working in conjunction with Project Watch, they are fully complying with all outstanding orders and violation notices. The building is currently closed during the renovation and the new ownership group wants to participate in EPS CFMH Program, prior to re-opening.

Relationships with External Agencies:

On December 6, 2016, the Project Watch Sergeant, along with the Project Watch AHS-Environmental Health Officer, presented to E4C (Homeward Trust Housing First). The focus of the presentation was on the collaboration between Homeward Trust and Project Watch in identifying problem properties that their clients, as well as caseworkers, are exposed to and how Project Watch can assist.

PWTF has been assisting the CoE Problem Properties Unit with additional resources, coordination of external agencies (formalized with Project Watch), and inspections of problem properties. Going forward, Project Watch will be assisting with police de-confliction and assistance coordination of any additional resources which may assist the Problem Properties Unit.

Terms of Reference:

The formalization of the Terms of Reference and Memorandums of Understandings are still in progress. Drafts have been submitted and are being reviewed by external agencies. This process is overseen by EPS Investment Governance Section.

Upcoming:

The PWTF will continue to identify and conduct joint inspections of problem properties housing vulnerable persons and workers. Project Watch currently has several ongoing investigations of apartment buildings and a motel.

Project Watch will be ensuring safety compliance, as well as accountability for occupants and owners. Project Watch will continue to monitor previously inspected properties for compliance and ensure the safety of occupants and in some cases conduct re-inspections as needed.

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