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To: Toronto Public Library Board – June 9, 2003
From: City Librarian
Subject: **Police Reference Checks for Volunteers at Toronto Public Library**

Purpose:

To obtain approval to enter into an agreement with the Toronto Police Services Board to provide police reference checks for Toronto Public Library Board volunteers who work with children and youth in the Library's programs.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The 2003 part-year costs can be provided for in the operating budget. The total annual cost, estimated at up to \$9,000, is a budget pressure and will be addressed as part of the 2004 budget process.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board implement police reference checks as part of the screening process for volunteers working with children and youth in the Library's programs.

Background:

The Library has been reviewing the need to implement police reference checks, particularly as there has been an expansion in the number of branches offering children's reading and homework support programs.

Concurrently, the City of Toronto has implemented police reference checks as part of its screening practice for volunteers. At its meeting of June 9, 1999, Council authorized the City to enter into an agreement with the Toronto Police Services Board for the purposes of securing police reference checks. This authorization covered staff employed in the City's Parks and Recreation programs. At its meeting of November 23, 1999, the agreement was subsequently amended to encompass staff, volunteers, and home child-care providers associated with the City's directly operated child-care programs, through Children's Services Division. Children's Services Division has begun implementation effective January 2002.

Comments:

Police reference checks are part of a risk management process that can include a number of other screening mechanisms. The checks are used by agencies as one measure of candidate acceptability and provide information on an individual's previous contacts with the criminal justice system. The current screening process at the Library includes the application form, interviews, personal reference checks, observation during branch orientation and training and ongoing feedback concerning performance. In reviewing its screening practices, the Library has concluded that police reference checks should be implemented.

In assessing where police reference checks for volunteers are necessary, the focus is on children and vulnerable adults. In programs where volunteers come into close and regular contact with children and youth and where there is the potential for close relationships to form, police reference checks should be part of the screening process. In the Leading to Reading and Homework Club programs, which are offered in 37 branches, volunteers are matched with elementary school-aged children. In the Rap N' Read program, which is offered at the York Woods branch, volunteers are matched with youth from ages 12 to 19. In the interest of children and youth safety, police reference checks should be part of the screening process for these programs. Police reference checks are not required for volunteers in the Adult Literacy Program or Friends Groups.

Police reference checks would be applied only to new volunteers and not retroactively to current volunteers. This is to assist with the implementation of the new process and to minimize the impact on staff time and budget. As well, the impetus to conduct police reference checks on returning volunteers is reduced because these volunteers are known to staff, and have been observed by staff in the performance of their duties. Consequently, the level of risk associated with them is less than with new volunteers. The impact of the new process will be assessed and this decision will be reviewed.

The City of Toronto has developed procedures for the implementation of the police preference check, in particular to ensure compliance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Library will adapt these procedures for use.

The content of this report has been reviewed by staff at the City of Toronto Legal Department.

The implementation of the police reference checks process will begin after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Toronto Police Services Board, and the development of detailed procedures.

Conclusion:

Implementation of police reference checks would complete the volunteer screening process followed by Toronto Public Library.

Contact:

Jane Pyper; Director, Service Planning and Support; Tel: 416-395-5602; Fax: 416-395-5542;
E-mail: jpyper@tpl.toronto.on.ca

Greg Kelner; Manager, City-Wide Services; Tel: 416-395-5502; Fax: 416-395-5542;
E-mail: gkelner@tpl.toronto.on.ca

City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Not applicable.