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**VICTORIA
POLICE**

IMPROVING OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

VicPD's Action Plan Re: The Plecas Report

September 2012

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2011, the senior management team of the Victoria Police Department (VicPD), in consultation with the police union, asked Dr. Darryl Plecas to conduct a staffing and deployment analysis of the police department's Patrol Division, Investigative Services Division and the Communications Centre.

On June 12, 2012, Dr. Plecas presented his findings and recommendations to the Victoria Police Board, Councillors from the Township of Esquimalt and the City of Victoria, Victoria Police Department senior managers and members of the police union executive. His report is entitled *Setting the Stage for Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness: A Review of Victoria Police Department Operations* (hereafter referred to as "The Plecas Report.")

The Plecas Report provides an assessment of the workload handled by the Department and an evaluation of its capacity to handle that workload. It also recommends changes the department might consider to manage that workload in a more efficient and effective manner.

Some of the key highlights from the Plecas Report included the following:

The department is dealing with a "core city phenomenon". That is, as with other major centres, Victoria and Esquimalt have high ambient populations because they are tourist destinations, major work locations, and places people go to for night life and major events. While Victoria and Esquimalt have a combined population of about 100,000 residents, some 375,000 people regularly work and recreate in the city core and an additional 3.2 million tourists visit downtown Victoria every year. As a result of this core city phenomenon, higher concentrations of criminals are attracted to the core, resulting in an increased number of calls for service and an increased call load.

The Victoria Police Department generally deals with a substantially larger volume of Criminal Code offences per capita than most cities in British Columbia. In fact, over the period of 2006 to 2010, Victoria had a per capita crime rate that was consistently 50% higher than the British Columbia average and twice the Canadian average. Further, over that five-year period, Victoria has had the highest crime rate among cities policed by municipal police departments, and in this regard, was surpassed only by two cities policed by the RCMP (Campbell River and Nanaimo). Moreover, Victoria has had a much higher per capita crime rate (120 offences per 1,000 population) when compared directly to other BC cities of roughly equal population, such as Saanich and Kamloops. Also important to note is the fact that Victoria Police also deal with more serious offences than other cities in British Columbia, as illustrated by the city's high score of 144.4 on Statistics Canada's crime severity index for 2011. Victoria's crime severity index score is considerably higher than the British Columbia average and is nearly double the Canadian average. Of 240 municipalities in Canada, only 29 communities has a worse crime severity index score than Victoria and Esquimalt in 2011.

The primary reason taxpayers in Victoria and Esquimalt are paying more for policing services than their fellow taxpayers in other jurisdictions is that the volume of crime and the seriousness of that crime is such that relatively more officers are needed to police Victoria than is the case for other jurisdictions. In this regard, the case burden per officer in the Victoria Police Department is 67% higher than the Canadian average – and this situation will not change until the volume of crime is reduced.

With this high case burden, it is clear that the VicPD Patrol Division requires significant resources to manage the high call volume. If the department is not able to push towards a regional policing model and doesn't have the support of municipal councils to increase resources, then a re-alignment of current resources is necessary. With its very high case load per officer, the department cannot continue to function the way it has been functioning if it wants to get serious about achieving reductions in the volume of crime and the severity of crime.

The most significant thing police departments can do to ultimately reduce the cost of policing is to improve their effectiveness in reducing crime. The single most influential and forward-looking action that VicPD can take is to embark on a plan to reduce the volume of cases the department would be required to deal with in the future.

There are some very specific things that police in British Columbia have done under the umbrella of crime reduction to improve their ability to tackle crime. Chief among them has been a shifting of focus from a reactive response to crimes to an intensive and proactive focus on criminals – particularly prolific and chronic offenders and the “hotspot” locations where they most commonly frequent. Police departments have also invested heavily in their intelligence capacity to better facilitate their ability to take on this new focus.

The issue of police capacity to respond is at the heart of police effectiveness and is what is needed to reduce the volume of crime, and ultimately the cost of policing.

It is important to note that while the overall number of calls for service at VicPD decreased over 3 years (2008-2010), the overall seriousness of the calls increased, thus not allowing VicPD to reap any potential dividends associated with a general reduction in the overall annual number of calls for service.

Some of the key recommendations stemming from the Plecas Report included the following:

Regionalization of the Communications Centre

The department should work with neighbouring police departments with a view to establishing a Victoria-based regional communication centre.

Introduction of New Technology

There are undoubtedly many technological advances in existence that VicPD could consider adopting to improve both its efficiency and effectiveness and, in an ideal world, the department would regularly assess the potential contribution new technologies could make as an investment towards reducing costs.

Allocation of Discretionary Time

Discretionary time is the time officers have at their disposal in between calls. It must be kept in mind that, from time to time, officers will need to decompress between calls and at any given time on any given shift, there needs to be a number of officers with a readiness to immediately respond to any eventuality. In other words, discretionary time, as it generally occurs in policing, is not actually free time for an officer. In any case, what is important is that the department examines ways to manage this discretionary time in an effort to be more efficient and productive.

Deployment Model

As police radio coverage continues to improve (and thus reducing the requirement for officers to work in pairs for safety reasons), there should be a shift from two-person cars to more one-person units.

Focus on Analytics

The information-led and intelligence-led style of policing is important. Most police agencies in Canada, including Victoria, remain far behind a number of jurisdictions in the world in terms of having the capacity to be truly information- and intelligence -led. The department needs to add additional resources to the single crime analyst position it currently deploys and must re-focus the current crime analyst towards more analytical work so the position can be used to full capacity or in a manner which respects the lead role it should have in reducing crime.

Targeted Model

In the absence of moving forward with a regional policing model or having the ability to hire additional officers, any re-alignment of officers should consider increasing the capacity to specifically target chronic and prolific offenders with a level of intensity and sustainability. A more proactive targeted approach focused on the gathering of intelligence and problem-solving for the sole purpose of crime reduction is recommended over a more reactive model of sending additional resources to the Patrol Division.

Information and Technology Section

Currently the IT department is grossly understaffed and in effect is operating at half capacity. In comparisons with the City of Victoria and in review of their workload, it appears the IT Section is unable to meet the demands placed upon it. Specifically, the City of Victoria IT Section employs 17 staff compared to the police department which employs 5 staff. Even if VicPD were able to add four new IT people, it still wouldn't put them on par with the rest of the city in that the demands of IT within police agencies are greater given they require IT support 24/7 and, at times, must provide immediate assistance to support front-line officers.

Forensic Identification Section

The Forensic Identification Section must maintain highly skilled and extremely knowledgeable employees who have an on-going need for skills and knowledge up-grading to stay abreast of scientific advances and technological changes relating to forensic investigation. The problem is that the VicPD, like departments everywhere, has a workload within its forensic identification section that does not allow individual specialists the on-job time they truly need to stay at the cutting edge of their field. This is not to say that the forensic specialists within the VicPD are not at the cutting edge of their specialties – they are. But they are making this happen with great non-sustainable individual stress and sacrifice. In short, we should expect that unless forensic specialists within the Department are given more time than they currently have now to stay abreast of scientific advances and technological change they will be at risk of burning out. Our recommendation is that one additional specialist be considered for this section.

Investigative Services Division

On average, VicPD deals with relatively more serious cases than other departments, resulting in more complex and significantly longer investigations. The majority of these investigations are handled by the Investigative Services Division which, when compared to other police agencies, is grossly under-resourced and does not have the ability to meet current workload demands. When comparing staffing levels of other municipal police and municipal RCMP detachments, on average 19% any police force is made up of on-site detective investigators. That figure for VicPD is 12%. Adding nine detectives would still only bring Victoria's complement to 16%, which is still below the average.

VICPD'S ACTION PLAN

Once the Plecas report was finalized, the VicPD senior management team assessed the report's recommendations and developed this action plan to implement changes that the management team believes will improve efficiency and effectiveness.

This action plan is based on broad input from across the department, including supervisors, front-line officers, and the police union executive. Feedback and recommendations were obtained in meetings, one-on-one discussions with staff, and via email. This consultation helped provide the framework for the re-alignment of the organization.

The biggest challenge for the police department is that it has to deal with a disproportionately higher volume of crime and that a larger proportion of that crime is of a serious nature, requiring significant investigative resources over a longer period of time. Simply put, the department has relatively more to contend with on average per officer than most other police departments in BC and Canada.

Failing a move to regionalization, Victoria and Esquimalt will most certainly need to increase the police budget if they wish to address the shortcomings in "the need to have" staffing levels identified in Dr. Plecas's report. If, however, meeting a budget increase to the extent needed is not an option, then it is recognized that the department must re-align resources such that they are fully pointed towards a crime reduction approach. The volume and severity of crime cannot be ignored and must be addressed.

The senior management team believes that doing nothing is not an option. If no changes are implemented, even if crime declines generally across Canada, so long as Victoria and Esquimalt don't do something significant to actively drive down crime, they will remain as jurisdictions with relatively high crime rates and places with more violent crime compared to other jurisdictions. The Canadian Crime Severity Index currently bears witness to this phenomenon in Victoria and Esquimalt.

Based on all the consultation and input, the department will be taking the following action:

Regionalization of the Communications Centre

The department has initiated negotiations with the RCMP regarding a regional approach to police communications. The department will pursue these discussions in an effort to establish a cost effective model which provides a standardized model that enhances public and officer safety.

Introduction of New Technology

A renewed emphasis and focus is being placed on examining and assessing new technology that will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our department. This initiative is being managed and scrutinized under our Strategic Plan Bold Step "Enhancing Operational Effectiveness". Technology such as "move-up" technology, the automated license plate recognition system, and voice recognition software are all either implemented or are being examined.

Allocation of Discretionary Time

Inspector Durrant, the Officer-in-charge of the Patrol Division, will be tasked with reviewing this recommendation and implementing a model which maximizes the use of officers' discretionary time. Depending on the call load, consideration will be given to assigning one or two officers on a special detail or special attention to specific areas in need of police presence.

Deployment Model

Senior management will initiate immediate discussions with the police union to shift to a deployment model which increases the number of one-person units in the Patrol Division.

Focus on Analytics

It is important to understand the duties and responsibilities of a crime analyst to fully appreciate the value they bring to a police organization. Part of an analyst's duties include having the ability to properly analyze crime trends and patterns, read arrest reports, link criminals to crime patterns, track their movements and disseminate the information to front-line officers in a timely manner. It is also the responsibility of the crime analyst to provide current statistical crime data for the consideration of the Police Board, senior managers and the general public. This information is critical to the police leaders in our community to put into place crime reduction programs, crime prevention initiatives, and other resources necessary to address the influx of crime. Lastly, it is the analyst's responsibility to provide tactical analysis that is invaluable in major crime investigation. The crime analyst produces a broad range of tactical intelligence products including criminal organizational charts, timelines and lists of potential suspects. This type of analysis allows investigators to review vast amounts of information in a timely manner and allows investigators to make timely decisions during the course of an investigation. In addition, the success of the Operations Council, where all operational sections supervisors discuss the latest crime trends and patterns and identify weekly priorities to reduce crime, identify active criminals and target those committing crimes, is largely dependent upon the analyses of the crime analyst.

The management team recognizes the workload demands placed on the lone crime analyst are unrealistic. To add an additional crime analyst to the organization is considered a priority if the Victoria Police Department is to achieve any meaningful success in reducing the volume and severity of crime in the region. The goal is to have the analysts play a major role in driving a police focus on prolific and chronic offenders and a problem-oriented approach to priority crime problems. As a result, a 2013 staffing request will be discussed with the Police Board for this one position.

Targeted Model

Each week the Officer-in-charge of the Analysis and Intelligence Section chairs an Operations Council meeting where supervisors from all operational sections discuss the latest crime trends, identify weekly priorities to reduce crime, identify active criminals and target those committing crimes. Currently, the department lacks sufficient resources to effectively target chronic and prolific offenders that are identified through Ops Council. This has been identified as an

organizational priority as many of these offenders are responsible for a disproportionate number of crimes. The current four-member Street Crime Unit will be increased by five additional officers and given a new, revised mandate that supports an aggressive targeted crime reduction approach. The strategy is to build a broad-based intervention style so all stakeholders (health authorities, social services, drug and addition services, probation officers and crown counsel) commit resources to helping the offender break free from a life of crime.

Information and Technology Section

Unlike most employers, police departments require IT staff to be available 24/7 to support front-line officers in carrying out their duties. The management team recognizes that the IT section is severely understaffed. Five (5) IT staff provide seven day week coverage, support over 480 user profiles and over 400 computer devices. The lack of IT resources has created much inefficiency throughout the organization. The current IT to personnel ratio is 1 IT staff for every 120 employees. This ratio needs to be reduced to a more manageable number. In comparison, the City of Victoria, which provides IT support five days a week, employs 17 IT staff. A further discussion will take place with the City of Victoria in an effort to try and properly align IT resources in a more equitable manner.

Forensic Identification Section

The management team recognises the importance of adding one additional officer to this section but unfortunately, due to staffing pressures faced throughout the organization, another new position cannot be filled.

Investigative Services Division

The resource challenges faced in this division are considered a top operational priority. With the continuing increase in expectations for criminal investigations, the Investigative Services Division has experienced an increased case load for the last several years. The department has identified a significant risk with current staffing levels as they struggle to find enough resources to initiate and complete serious, complex and lengthy investigations in a timely manner or dedicate appropriate resources to meet deadlines for preparing crown counsel reports, disclosure packages, and witness management. Moreover, in order for any crime reduction efforts to be successful, VicPD must have the investigative capacity to see cases through to their conclusions.

A re-alignment of the department will allow for an additional five investigators to be assigned to the division. An in-depth analysis of the tasks performed by investigators within the Investigative Services Division has shown that investigators are spending a great deal of time completing administrative tasks and duties that can be accomplished by civilian support staff trained in this area. Therefore, in addition to the five new investigators, efforts will be made to add one civilian support staff to address the clerical and administrative demands that are required when putting complex files together. This will free up investigators to focus on their primary duties of investigating crimes.

Additional Re-alignment

In addition to the above changes, the department will be adding an audit function to one of the Sergeant positions within the Human Resources Division. Ideally, a full-time employee should be assigned to conduct regular research audits of the department but due to competing priorities and lack of resources this responsibility will be assigned to current staff and conducted on a part-time basis.

Sergeant Mike Chicorelli, who manages the K9 Unit and deploys two dogs, will be asked to shift his responsibilities to work part-time in the Operational Planning Section while still retaining his current duties. The workload in the section has increased substantially and additional assistance is required to manage special events, the Marine Response Unit, the Crowd Management Unit and the Emergency Management Program.

SUMMARY OF RE-ALIGNMENT OF RESOURCES:

The following ten positions will be eliminated and re-assigned towards a crime reduction focus and to the Investigative Services Division:

- 2 School Resource Officers
- 2 Youth Investigators
- 2 Dayshift Patrol Cars
- 1 Regional Domestic Violence Unit investigator
- 1 Focused Enforcement Team
- 1 Community Resource Officer
- 1 Crime Prevention Sergeant Position

New re-alignment will consist of the following 10 new positions:

- 5 investigators to the Investigative Services Division
- 5 officers to the Street Crime Unit

CONCLUSION

Once implemented, this action plan should realize significant efficiencies that will allow VicPD to better manage the high case burden that currently defines its operational efforts. Ultimately, these efficiencies, couple with a renewed focus on crime reduction, are intended to reduce the department's case load and allow for the more effective delivery of public safety services to the citizens of Victoria and Esquimalt.