DISPATCH FOR THE CITY OF RED DEER RCMP: CURRENT PRACTICE, OUTCOMES AND OPTIONS

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Prepared for:

The City of Red Deer

February 22, 2008

Executive Summary

This project report presents the findings of an examination of dispatch for the City of Red Deer Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

The scope of work for the examination of dispatch for the City of Red Deer RCMP called for the following to be completed:

1. Review of the existing dispatch service to determine:
   a. The efficiency of the current process
   b. The cost of the current process
   c. The ability of the current process to facilitate communication among the parties involved

2. Provide options, rationale and costs for service delivery:
   a. That maintains the status quo (recommendations may include suggestions for improving the current service)
   b. Through the Emergency Services dispatch
   c. By providing a separate police dispatch system

The primary research question guiding the present study was: *What arrangements and protocol for the dispatch of RCMP officers in the City of Red Deer would provide the best "value for service"?* To address this question, the project team utilized a multi-method approach, involving a review of the current literature of call centres generally and police dispatch centres specifically, site visits, interviews, and the collection of statistical information.

These tasks were completed within a framework that considered best practices in police dispatch and, as well, the initiatives taken by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) at E-Comm in Vancouver, British Columbia; the RCMP at the Southeast District Operational Communications Centre (OCC) in Kelowna, British Columbia; and the Calgary Police Service at the Public Safety Communications Centre (PSC), to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of police dispatch services.

Interviews were conducted with Senior City of Red Deer RCMP officers, RCMP Watch Clerks, municipal and Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) officials, senior provincial RCMP officers, and Southern Alberta OCC staff. Interviews were also conducted with members of the VPD Telecom Response Team (TRT) at E-Comm in Vancouver, civilian and sworn members involved in the TRC initiative at the Kelowna OCC, and with senior civilian and sworn members of Calgary's PSC.

Statistical information on the calls for service received by the Southern Alberta OCC was gathered, with particular reference to calls originating from the City of Red Deer. Planning and environmental scan documents for the City of Red Deer were reviewed, as was a previous report on justice and safety completed by a private consulting group.

An examination of the Southern Alberta OCC's calls for service data revealed that the vast majority of the calls received (90%) are dispatched. This is an exceptionally large proportion of calls to dispatch for a patrol response, particularly since the overwhelming majority (95%) of these calls are also routine, non-emergencies (Priority 3 and 4 calls). This means that some calls are being "over-prioritized" and other calls are being "under-prioritized."

It also appears that the call management model in place at the Southern Alberta OCC is fostering unrealistic expectations about the capacity of the Red Deer City RCMP among the citizens of Red Deer. A review of the current dispatch procedures at the Southern Alberta OCC indicates that a "traditional" model of call management is being used; that is, all calls are answered in sequence and, significantly, in contrast to "best practice" communication centres, virtually all calls for service are dispatched to patrol units, regardless of their seriousness. OCC dispatchers do not prioritize calls for service for the patrol officers. These practices contribute to a situation within which it is almost certain that RCMP patrol resources in the City of Red Deer are utilized in a manner that is neither effective nor efficient.

Interestingly, although the City of Red Deer pays 90% of the costs associated with its RCMP detachment's service, the City does not contribute financially to the dispatch services provided by the Southern Alberta OCC. The full cost of these dispatch services is covered by the Province of Alberta. This funding arrangement has resulted in a situation wherein the City of Red Deer has a limited ability to affect the policies and procedures of the OCC with respect to the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP officers. The implication of the funding arrangement is that any changes to the operations of the Southern Alberta OCC must be funded by the Province of Alberta, or the City of Red Deer.

The literature review and case studies revealed that the City of Red Deer is not the first region faced with a problematic dispatch-related situation. Since the early 1980s, numerous police forces have experienced challenges similar to those that exist in the City of Red Deer, and a variety of innovative practices have been incorporated into models of police dispatch that have proven to be effective.

Evidence-based best practices in call management include:

- implementing a 311 non-emergency complaint line (managed by the police or by the municipal government);

- educating the public on the proper use of 911 and 311;

- employing various call intake strategies such as seven–digit non-emergency telephone numbers, walk-in reporting, mail-in reporting, and Internet reporting; and

- implementing a call management model that uses differential police response strategies characterized by call prioritization, priority queuing, and tailored police responses (in terms of level and immediacy) based on call type, which may amount to no response at all. This call management model is most often carried out in practice by a Telecom Response Team (TRT).

Telecom Response Teams (TRTs) are situated in police call centres and staffed with "light duties" (or "accommodated") police officers (e.g., officers who are injured, pregnant, etc.). Within the TRT model, a supervising police member and staff review the calls that have been screened, classified and prioritized by the call-takers to select calls that may be handled by the TRT, namely non-emergency calls that do not require an immediate police response. These calls are removed from the Dispatch Queue and transferred electronically to the TRT Queue, so that they may be dealt with by TRT staff. These calls include those where a crime is not in progress, there is no suspect, no-one is injured, there is no evidence and no witnesses. Examples include cases of theft from auto, property damage, stolen vehicles, lost property, and thefts of small value. In many cases, these low priority calls can be fully serviced over the phone by TRT staff, but there is always the option of using alternative differential police response strategies if required. TRTs have been widely adopted by police services around the world over the past 30 years, with great success. Research reveals that the use of a TRT increases call management efficiency, increases customer satisfaction levels, and decreases the number of calls dispatched to patrol officers. The case studies conducted for this study also attest to the benefit of TRTs in solving the very same issues that the City of Red Deer is currently facing in terms of its police dispatch situation.

Three options are considered in an attempt to address the issues that currently surround dispatch in the City of Red Deer:

OPTION 1: Retaining dispatch services for the City of Red Deer in the Southern Alberta OCC, with a focus on enhancing capacities to improve dispatch services.

OPTION 2: Relocating dispatch services for the City of Red Deer to the Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre.

OPTION 3: Creating a Municipal Police Dispatch Centre for the City of Red Deer.

In light of the examination of the Red Deer dispatch situation, statistics, growth trends, best practice literature review, and qualitative research findings, the project team recommends Option 1, but with considerable changes to the current arrangements for police dispatch. More specifically, it is recommended that the following initiatives be undertaken:

1. **Clarification of OCC clients.** While the general view of RCMP officers in Red Deer was that the police were the primary clients of the OCC, the OCC staff identified 911 callers as the primary clients. There appears to be an outstanding question as to

whether the clients of the OCC are the police, the public, or both. The project team suggests that the clients of the OCC are both the police and the public.

2. **Identification of the Core Functions of the OCC.** There appears to be a number of outstanding issues surrounding the mandate of the Southern Alberta OCC with respect to the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP. There is a need to identify the core functions of the OCC, which might include: 1) call-screening, 2) complaint-taking, 3) dispatch, and, 4) ensuring police officer safety. This would also include defining the role of the OCC vis-à-vis the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP. Since the Southern Alberta OCC is funded by the Province of Alberta, it is important that the provincial government be a partner in any discussions to enhance the capacity of the OCC.

Contributing to the currently unclear role of the Southern Alberta OCC is the absence of a business plan for the OCC that sets out goals, objectives, performance measures, and provisions for "report-backs" to the communities served by the OCC. As well, the OCC's capacity to analyze calls for service and dispatch data (i.e., trends and outcomes) could be improved. Since virtually all calls for service are dispatched, there is no analysis of the various priorities of the calls received, nor a consideration of a differential response to the lower-priority calls.

3. **Creation of an OCC "Users' Committee."** At present, the City of Red Deer (nor any of the other communities to whom calls for service are dispatched) is not involved in identifying the core, or secondary, functions of the Southern Alberta OCC. This makes it difficult for the municipality to have any input into the policies and procedures of the OCC in terms of improving the efficiency of police dispatch for the City. A Users' Committee would facilitate an ongoing dialogue between the Southern Alberta OCC, the City of Red Deer RCMP, the City of Red Deer, and the other communities served by the Southern Alberta OCC.

4. **Development of a Call Response Policy.** The City of Red Deer RCMP, in consultation with the City of Red Deer, should begin discussions to identify the types of calls for service that will generally receive a patrol response and those calls for service that will be handled via alternative means, such as a TRT. Once it is decided between the City of Red Deer RCMP and the City of Red Deer how the different calls will be handled, the Southern Alberta OCC should modify its Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to reflect those changes.

5. **Division of emergency and non-emergency calls for service.** This would allow police officers to give high priority to more serious calls while facilitating a timely response to Priority 3 and 4 calls for service.

6. **Division of tasks at the OCC between call-takers and dispatchers.** For the City of Red Deer, this would require hiring an additional person to handle calls for service from the City of Red Deer. In the words of one Southern Alberta OCC staff member:

> "This would streamline the process and make it more efficient… We would need another workstation… for the additional dispatcher for Red Deer City (to split up the call-taking and dispatch functions)."

In addition, a dedicated "information channel" should be added to the radio system to answer queries from RCMP members (i.e., CPIC queries), and free up the radio "air" for dispatching.

7. **Abandonment of the idea of delivering "Cadillac" service for the City of Red Deer.** The Southern Alberta OCC, in consultation with the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP, should develop a differential police response capacity for calls for service received from the City of Red Deer. As it is currently operating, the policies and procedures in place at the Southern Alberta OCC do not reflect best practices. There is no capacity to divert less serious, non-emergency calls (often classified as Priority 3 and 4 calls). The Taxi Cab Dispatch Model of "one size fits all" that is currently used does not address the specific needs of the City of Red Deer, which accounts for a large majority of the calls for service received at the Southern Alberta OCC.

The RCMP and the City of Red Deer should inform the community that it is not possible to have a patrol car response to all calls for police service and that alternative strategies will be developed to address the needs and concerns of citizens. As one Southern Alberta OCC staff member stated: "The police should tell the communities what they are able to handle, and what they can't handle, and what the public should do with the things that the police can't deal with." Further, there should be an ongoing media campaign to reduce the number of non-emergency calls that are put through via 911.

8. **Collection of statistical information on City of Red Deer Dispatch.** A mechanism should be established to gather, on an ongoing basis, information on the calls for service from the City of Red Deer, including call patterns; response times of officers to calls for service; the number of officers deployed to calls for service; and the outcomes of calls for service response.

9. **Development of a Telecom Response Team in the OCC.** It is an established best practice to have a uniformed police presence in police dispatch centres. The Telecom Response Team at E-Comm in Vancouver and at the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna have facilitated effective differential response strategies. More specifically, these initiatives have reduced the number of lower-priority calls that are dispatched to patrol officers, while at the same time ensuring that there is an effective response to these calls for service.

Discussions between the City of Red Deer and the Southern Alberta OCC should begin to explore the development of a TRT to facilitate the triaging of calls in the OCC and the associated costs. If a TRT is established at the Southern Alberta OCC, it would be dedicated to assisting with the calls for service from the City of Red Deer, and as such, the City of Red Deer, or the Province of Alberta, could fund the cost of that initiative.

The cost of the TRT would partly be determined by the number of Red Deer RCMP officers transferred from the City of Red Deer detachment to the OCC. For example, if the TRT would require one Sergeant and two or three Constables at any given time, the City of Red Deer could fund that by hiring new frontline officers to replace the ones transferred to the OCC. Alternatively, retired officers could be hired to staff the TRT. Equipment, desks and supplies would also have to be purchased for the TRT officers. Personnel involved in the development of the TRT in the Kelowna OCC have offered their time and expertise to assist in creating a similar capacity in the Southern Alberta OCC.

10. **Diversion of less serious calls for service.** A Southern Alberta OCC staff member commented: "We could eliminate a good one-third of the workload by diverting non-police files, because those files tie up a police officer and a dispatcher." It is likely that the City of Red Deer would have to fund the TRT positions in the OCC.

It is the view of the project team that Option 1 and the associated recommendations provides the greatest, most cost-effective strategy for addressing the current difficulties that surround police dispatch for the City of Red Deer. However, a major caveat is that the operation of the Southern Alberta OCC is entirely within the purview of the provincial government, and of the RCMP as the contracted provincial police service. As such, there are currently no protocols in place, or framework, within which these recommendations can be considered. The extent to which such protocols could be developed remains to be determined. Certainly, the history of efforts to influence, and alter, the operations of the Southern Alberta OCC to more effectively address City of Red Deer policing requirements would suggest that there are significant obstacles to this occurring.

The adoption of Option 1 will require the City of Red Deer to assume at least some costs associated with enhancing dispatch for City of Red Deer calls for service. This would include the costs associated with having a sworn members present in the Southern Alberta OCC to screen calls and to staff a Telecom Response Team. These costs, however, would be more than offset by the increased efficiencies in patrol deployment and investigations. Research studies on the outcomes of TRTs have consistently found that the implementation of differential response strategies do not compromise levels of public satisfaction with the police; in fact, evidence suggests that in an effectively managed differential response strategy, service levels increase, along with public satisfaction.

The adoption of Option 1 would also require the City of Red Deer to initiate discussions with the province and with K Division to alter the policies and procedures relating to the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP.

This study satisfies the required scope of work, to wit:

1. A Review of the Existing Dispatch Service to Determine:

a. The efficiency of the current process

The current Southern Alberta OCC policies and procedures for dispatch do not meet the needs of the City of Red Deer nor do they reflect best practices for police dispatch. The policy of dispatching all calls for service overburdens police officers, hinders the response to, and investigation of, serious crimes, and also has significant human resource implications for OCC staff. A best practice dispatch facility employs a differential response model in which lower priority calls are screened out and managed through alternative means, such as a TRT. Both RCMP officers and Southern Alberta OCC staff interviewed for the project expressed frustration with the current dispatch arrangements.

b. The cost of the current process

The fiscal cost of the current dispatch to the City of Red Deer is nil, as the city does not contribute to the operation of the Southern Alberta OCC. However, there are other, equally significant "cost" implications of the current arrangements for police dispatch. First, the City of Red Deer has no means of communicating with the Southern Alberta OCC on an ongoing basis, nor have any previous attempts to influence OCC policy and practice with respect to call dispatch proven to be successful. Secondly, there is a human resource cost, associated with high stress levels, burnout, and attrition of OCC staff who are required to dispatch all calls for service. Third, patrol officers are being burdened with higher call loads, consisting of emergencies and non-emergencies, that must be prioritized and re-prioritized "on the go" as new calls for service are received. Fourth, the citizens of Red Deer are also suffering unnecessarily as their calls for service are either getting under-prioritized or over-prioritized. Finally, the current arrangements for dispatch have not provided a framework for the adoption of best practices, such as the development of a TRT in the Southern Alberta OCC.

c. The ability of the current arrangements to facilitate communication among the parties involved

The current arrangements are not facilitative of ongoing contact and communication between the Southern Alberta OCC and the municipalities that it serves. Although ad hoc discussions have occurred between the City of Red Deer RCMP, the City of Red Deer, and the Southern Alberta OCC, these contacts are not formalized nor is there any structure by which the deliberations could result in changes to OCC policy and practice. This is partly a function of: a) the role and mandate of the OCC, which is provincially funded, and b) the role and mandate of the City of Red Deer RCMP, a contracted municipal police service. If the current process was facilitative of ongoing communication between the parties involved, the necessary structures to facilitate an ongoing dialogue would be in place. Such structures do not currently exist.

2. Provide options, rationale and costs for service delivery

a. that maintains the status quo

This study found that the status quo arrangements for the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP do not reflect best practices and do not meet the needs of a growing community that is experiencing an increase in the severity and complexity of criminality. More specifically, the policy of the Southern Alberta OCC to dispatch all calls for service overburdens patrol officers and compromises the ability of these officers to respond to more serious incidents in a timely and effective manner. There was a shared view among RCMP officers, OCC staff, and others in Red Deer that there is a need to alter the status quo arrangements for police dispatch. The option recommended in this report is that the City of Red Deer RCMP dispatch services should remain in the Southern Alberta OCC, but that significant changes be made in dispatch policies and procedures with respect to the City of Red Deer. More specifically, it is recommended that the Southern Alberta OCC, with support from the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP, should develop the capacity to screen and prioritize calls for service and that a TRT, similar to the units operating at E-Comm in Vancouver and at the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna, be created.

b. through emergency services dispatch

Preliminary discussions with a senior Fire/EMS official suggest that this may be a viable option, with proper strategic planning, and if the City of Red Deer was prepared to assume the costs associated with operating a police dispatch service in the Fire/EMS facility. The challenges of co-locating police dispatch with Fire/EMS were seen as significant, but not insurmountable. A comprehensive strategic plan, premised on extensive discussions among all of the affected parties, would be required to effectively implement this option.

c. by providing a separate police dispatch system

The creation of a separate police dispatch capacity (i.e., a municipal OCC) in the Red Deer RCMP detachment is, perhaps, the least favourable option. It would be the most costly of the three options and it would be counter to the trend toward amalgamation of police communications centres. Moreover, it is uncertain whether the requisite facilities and infrastructure to support a police dispatch centre at the Red Deer RCMP detachment currently exist.

The recommendation of the project team is that Option 1 be fully explored. Should efforts to make the necessary changes to the operating policies and procedures of the OCC be unsuccessful, then it is recommended that Option 2, the co-location of police dispatch with Fire/EMS, be pursued. Regardless of the specific option for police dispatch that is implemented, it is important that the necessary structures be put into place to ensure that the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP have ongoing input into how dispatch services for its police service are operated. This will not only

assist in ensuring that the City of Red Deer receives "value for service," but it will also ensure that police resources are being utilized as effectively and efficiently as possible.

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Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to how the delivery of police services can be made more effective and efficient. Concurrent with this has been a focus on police dispatch and the development of differential response strategies to handle calls for service. The increasing demands on police services, coupled with a static or declining resource-base, have presented challenges to both the government and police to explore alternative strategies for service delivery.

This project report presents the findings of an examination of dispatch for the City of Red Deer Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The City of Red Deer has, and will continue to experience high rates of growth. This will present significant challenges to the City, both in terms of the demands that are made on city services and on the need to ensure that resources for service delivery are utilized in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

One area of concern that has emerged is whether the current arrangements for the dispatch of police services provide best "value for service" for the City of Red Deer and its residents. This project was commissioned by the City of Red Deer to examine the current arrangements for dispatch of police services, to determine whether the city is receiving "value for service," and to identify options for improving dispatch services. More specifically, the Statement of Work for the current project set out the following Function/Purpose of the study:

> The Police Dispatch Study will review the existing dispatch system and provide recommendations on future direction for the service with consideration of providing a high standard of service to the public.
>
> 1. Review of the existing dispatch service to determine:
>   a. The efficiency of the current process
>   b. The cost of the current process
>   c. The ability of the current process to facilitate communication among the parties involved
>
> 2. Provide options, rationale and costs for service delivery:
>   a. That maintains the status quo (recommendations may include suggestions for improving the current service)
>   b. Through the Emergency Services dispatch
>   c. By providing a separate police dispatch system

Accordingly, the current arrangements for police dispatch in the City of Red Deer were examined with the intent of identifying improvements that could be made to enhance the current model of dispatch, or, alternatively, the viability of other options for police dispatch. Data for the project were gathered during the time period October 2007 to January 2008.

Options for the Delivery of Dispatch Services

There are three primary dispatch options for the City of Red Deer:

OPTION 1: Retaining dispatch services for the City of Red Deer in the Southern Alberta Operational Communications Centre (OCC), with a focus on enhancing capacities to improve dispatch services.

OPTION 2: Relocating dispatch services for the City of Red Deer to the Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre.

OPTION 3: Creating a Municipal Police Dispatch Centre for the City of Red Deer.

The increased focus on police communications centres is a consequence of a number of factors, including:

- High-profile incidents in which police dispatch services were subsequently found to have been a contributing factor to injury or death;

- A concern with the increasing workload of patrol officers and the concurrent recognition that, in most police services, there are insufficient resources to respond to all calls for service with a patrol unit;

- A concern on the part of municipalities as to whether police services generally, and dispatch centres in particular, are operating according to "best practice" standards and providing "value for service";

- The increasing onus on municipal governments, public sector agencies, and police services to develop business practices that document how resources are being utilized and the impact of resource expenditures; and

- The recognition that interoperability (the ability of the police and other agencies to "talk" to one another and to share information) is a best practice that enhances service delivery.

Research Method

The primary research question that guided the present study was: What arrangements and protocol for the dispatch of RCMP officers in the City of Red Deer would provide the best "value for service"? "Value for Service" is operationalized as a delivery model that is cost effective, reflects best practices, and maximizes the use, and impact of, available police resources.

To address this question, the project team utilized a multi-method approach, involving a review of the current literature of call centres generally and police dispatch centres specifically; site visits; interviews; and, the collection of statistical information. Data sources included senior police officers, telecom centre managers, dispatchers; RCMP Watch Clerks; representatives from Red Deer Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS); and City of Red Deer officials. The amount of communications centre work experience among staff at the four police communications centres visited ranged from six months to over 25 years. Of particular interest were the perceptions and experiences of RCMP officers and Southern Alberta OCC staff with the current dispatch arrangements in the City of Red Deer, along with the initiatives that have been taken in other jurisdictions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of police dispatch and the delivery of policing services.

The quantitative data gathered for the study consisted of call loads from CIIDS and PROS, as well as financial information on the operating costs of the police communications centres examined, when available.

Literature Review

A review of the published literature on call centres and police communications centres was conducted to identify current call management models and the best practices in police service dispatch arrangements. Scholarly academic journal databases, university library catalogues and the Internet were searched for relevant material. This search revealed an extensive literature that was informative and evidence-based.

Site Visits

The project team conducted a site visit to Red Deer in October 2007 to become familiar with the current dispatch arrangements for the City of Red Deer RCMP and to learn about any challenges with these arrangements. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including RCMP officers and staff members, Southern Alberta OCC employees, and City of Red Deer officials. Respondents were queried on a wide range of issues relating to policing and police dispatch, the operation of the OCC, current challenges, and suggestions for improving police dispatch. The interview schedule for this site visit is contained in Appendix A.

To complement the literature review and to assess whether there were best practices in police dispatch service arrangements and call management models that had not been documented in the published literature, site visits were conducted in three additional police communications centres in Western Canada: 1) the E-Comm facility in Vancouver, British Columbia; 2) the Southeast District (Provincial RCMP) OCC in Kelowna, British Columbia; and 3) the Public Safety Communications (PSC) Centre in Calgary, Alberta. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key representatives from each of these sites. The interview schedules for each of these sites are also set out in the Appendix A. Detailed information regarding the data sources, sampling method, data collection instruments and data analyses are presented immediately below, and the findings from the qualitative case studies are presented in the section following the literature review findings.

Selection of Persons Interviewed

The persons interviewed for this project were identified using the convenience sampling technique. Specifically, the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Red Deer RCMP detachment identified key stakeholders to be interviewed in Red Deer and in Kelowna. The project team's contacts in Vancouver and Calgary facilitated the site visits and interviews conducted at those locales. The key contact person at each of the additional three sites assisted in identifying other persons to be interviewed.

To be selected for an interview, it was required that the person have knowledge and experience in the telecom environment or knowledge and experience in an area affected by telecom procedures, and a willingness to participate voluntarily in the present study. During the interviews, additional respondents were identified. A total of 34 individuals were interviewed for this study, 16 of whom regarding the Red Deer dispatch situation specifically. The remaining interviews were conducted with 4 senior VPD officers and 5 VPD Constables regarding the TRT at E-Comm; 2 RCMP Inspectors and 4 OCC staff members regarding the Kelowna OCC; and 3 senior management team members of the Calgary Public Safety Communications Centre regarding their dispatch arrangements. Informed consent was obtained from the interviewees, and the data were anonymized.

An interview schedule was developed and used to guide the semi-structured interviews at each site visit (see Appendix A). Generally speaking, the interview schedules are all quite similar, as the goal was to extract comparable data on the key issues under study from each of the sites. Both content-mapping and content-mining questions were used to guide each interview. Extensive hand-written notes were taken during the interviews and later typed and formatted into transcripts for analysis.

Limitations of the Project

The relatively short time-line for the completion of the project, combined with relatively limited financial resources, prevented the project team from conducting a more thorough

analysis of the issues surrounding police dispatch in the City of Red Deer. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to conduct extensive interviews with line-level patrol officers, in order to solicit their perceptions and experiences with the current dispatch arrangements. Similarly, it would have been beneficial for members of the project team to spend time conducting observations in the Southern Alberta OCC and to participate in ride-a-longs with patrol officers. Both of these activities would have provided more extensive insights into the dynamics of the dispatch process in the City of Red Deer and allowed the project team to cite specific incidents and situations that reflected the challenges being encountered by OCC operators and patrol officers given the current dispatch arrangements.

Similarly, confidentiality considerations precluded a comprehensive assessment of the costs of the three options set out in this report. In any event, many of these costs are qualitative in nature (i.e., stress and burn-out experienced by OCC dispatchers and police officers), and may not be reflected in statistical information. To this end, the extent to which the current arrangements for dispatch compromise the ability of RCMP officers in the City of Red Deer to effectively carry out their mandate remains largely unexplored. While it can be anticipated that the protocol requiring virtually every call to be dispatched has a significant impact, not only on the workload of patrol officers, but also on their ability to carry out their tasks effectively and efficiently, the specific nature and extent of this impact has not been documented.

Regardless of the option selected by the City of Red Deer, the project team recommends that mechanisms be created to gather statistical information that will facilitate the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of police dispatch. This will assist in ensuring that the City of Red Deer receives "value for service" for police dispatch and the delivery of policing services.

Growth, Change, and Challenges in the City of Red Deer

Any consideration of the most appropriate arrangements for police dispatch in the City of Red Deer must consider the social, demographic, and economic context within which policing and other municipal services are provided, along with the demands that will be placed on these services in the coming years.

The City of Red Deer is situated mid-way between Edmonton and Calgary, in Central Alberta. It is an urban area, which spans 71 square kilometers and is currently home to approximately 83,000 residents. The community has experienced significant economic and population growth in recent years and it is predicted that this growth will continue in the coming decades. One report estimates that the city's population will reach 300,000 in the next 45-75 years (Harvie-Shemko, 2006). The City of Red Deer is experiencing rapid economic and population growth (Schollie & Buan, 2006). Over the past seven decades, the population in the city has grown by an average of 5.2% per year and key indicators suggest that this growth will continue (Schollie & Buan, 2006). The data suggest that by the year 2031, the population in the City of Red Deer will be approximately 136,502 ("low growth"), 151,182 ("baseline growth") or 184,945 ("high growth"), depending on the average annual growth rate over the projection period, which was calculated to be in the range of 2.02% to 3.26% (Schollie & Buan, 2006). The city is taking steps to address the challenges that will accompany this growth with the objective of maintaining a high quality of life for community residents.

This growth and the associated impacts require that the municipal government engage in a continual process of strategic planning to ensure that the delivery of municipal services, including policing, is carried out in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

To date, the city has completed a number of plans designed to guide growth in the city in the coming decades (Red Deer County & City of Red Deer, 2007; City of Red Deer, 2005; Preiksaitis et al., 2007). The Strategic Plan for the City of Red Deer (2005-2008) is being used to guide the development of city services and programs from a future-oriented perspective. With respect to protective and emergency services in Red Deer, the Strategic Plan states that the goal is:

> To provide our citizens with a safe and healthy living environment, through the cooperative efforts of our police, fire, ambulance, E911, inspections, disaster service providers and community members (City of Red Deer, 2005:10).

The strategic plan sets out a number of specific strategies that are designed to achieve this goal:

> 4.4.1. Monitor changing emergency service and response needs to maintain appropriate levels of service as our city grows.

4.4.2. Incorporate community-based policing and other recommendations as identified in the Crime Prevention and Policing Strategy (2004).

4.4.3. Continue to offer protective inspections in areas for which The City has responsibility for regulating, including the building code, the fire code, taxis and business licensing.

4.4.4. Develop and implement public education and prevention programs in protective and emergency services.

4.4.5. Work with, respond to, and contract with community agencies and surrounding municipalities to deliver effective, regional protective and emergency services, where appropriate (City of Red Deer, 2005:10).

Public consultations conducted as part of the planning process have identified policing, crime prevention, and emergency services as areas of concern for community residents (Harvie-Shemko, 2006). This includes the planning and provision of emergency services between the two municipalities (Red Deer County & City of Red Deer, 2007).

Policing in the City of Red Deer

Contract police service in the City of Red Deer is provided by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) which is the largest municipal RCMP force in Alberta, and its headquarters are centralized in one downtown location. The authorized strength for the detachment is 125 members, and the detachment currently has 107 members. In addition, there are 50 municipal employees, nine of whom are working in operational by-law enforcement positions. The City of Red Deer has been experiencing an increase in the amount and seriousness of crime and associated calls for service, at a time when the detachment is under its authorized strength.

The Current Organization of Emergency Response Dispatch in the City of Red Deer

Emergency response operations in the City of Red Deer are currently housed in three separate entities: 1) the Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre, 2) the OCC for Southern Alberta, and 3) the City of Red Deer RCMP Watch Clerks. Each of these operations is discussed below.

PSAP: The Regional 911 Call Centre

The Red Deer Regional 911 Communication Centre is located in the Red Deer Fire Hall and serves the City of Red Deer and several outlying communities. This centre is referred to as the Primary Service Answer Point (PSAP), since its operators answer all 911 calls initially (on average within 8.3 seconds from when the call is first received), and then route each call to the appropriate dispatch centre. To illustrate: when a citizen

dials 911, an operator at the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre will answer the call for service and ask: "Police, fire or ambulance?" If the caller asks for fire or ambulance services, then the operator will continue to handle the call, as the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre is operated by Fire and EMS, which are combined. If the caller asks for police service, then the operator will route the call to the RCMP's Southern Alberta OCC. When calls are routed to the OCC from the Red Deer Regional 911 Communication Centre, the call is answered by an OCC operator (usually in less than 10 seconds)

The Red Deer Regional 911 Communication Centre receives a significant number of 911 calls on a daily and annual basis (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Red Deer Regional 911 Communication Centre Calls for Service Statistics (2002-2007 YTD)

Year	Calls for Service (Annual Total)	Calls for Service (Daily Average)
2002	47,800	131.0
2003	48,249	132.2
2004	46,629	127.4
2005	48,401	132.6
2006	51,690	141.6
2007*	52,375	153.0

*Note: Statistics for 2007 represent data collected from January 2007 to mid-December 2007.

The data clearly show an upward trend in the number of calls for service received at the Red Deer Regional 911 Communication Centre over the past five years.

The majority of calls received at the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre are for the police. These calls are routed by 911 operators to the Southern Alberta OCC. Figure 1 below displays the proportion of calls for service received by the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre in 2006 that were for Police, Fire and EMS, respectively.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Calls for Service Received at the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre for Police, Fire and EMS, 2006
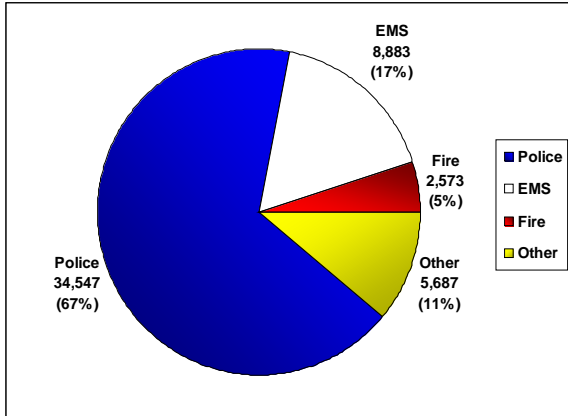
Calls classified as "other" 911 calls include calls that do not require emergency services, such as prank calls, hang-ups, and information-type calls.

It is important to note that the figures presented above do not represent the number of calls for police service handled by the City of Red Deer RCMP. Although the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre routed approximately 34,547 calls for police service to the Southern Alberta OCC in 2006, not all of those calls for police service are for the City of Red Deer. This is due to the fact that the Red Deer Regional 911 Centre serves other areas in addition to the City of Red Deer, as does the Southern Alberta OCC (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Service Coverage by the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre and the Southern Alberta OCC* (Approximate)

9
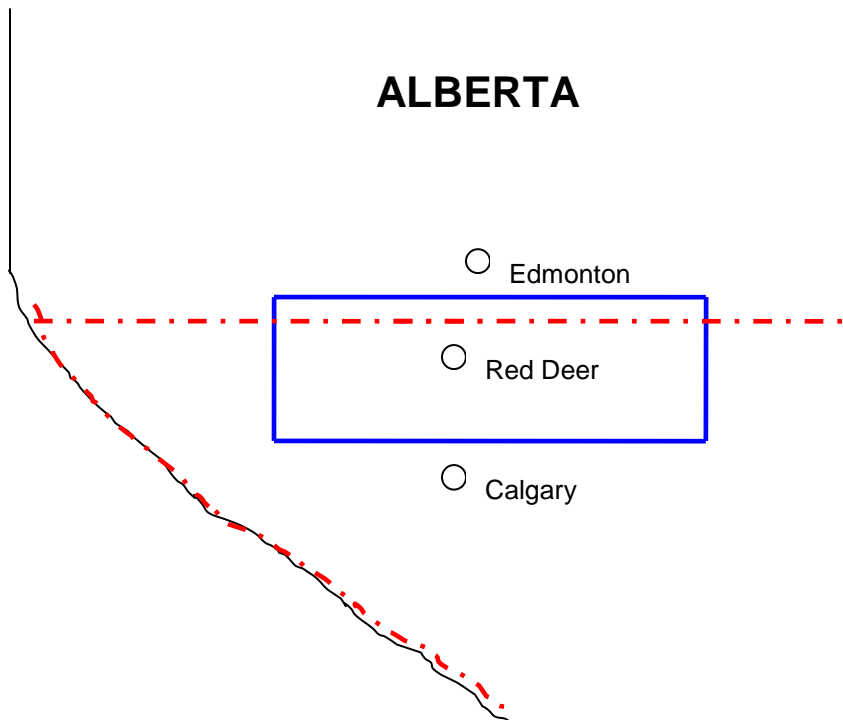
*Note: This map was drawn "free-hand" to give the reader a rough visual idea of the general service areas of the two call centres; the map was not drawn to scale, nor does it represent details accurately.

Legend:

————— - represents service coverage of the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre.

– · — · — - represents service coverage of the Southern Alberta OCC.

SSAP: The RCMP's Operational Communications Centre (OCC)

The Secondary Service Answer Point (SSAP) is the Operational Communications Centre (OCC), which is a component of the RCMP. There are two provincial OCCs in the Province of Alberta: the "Northern Alberta OCC," located in Edmonton, and the "Southern Alberta OCC," which is located in Red Deer. These two call centres are the consequence of an extensive amalgamation of OCCs in the province (and across Canada). Prior to the amalgamation, there were ten OCCs in Alberta: Edson, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Fort McMurray, St. Paul, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge and Banff. The first centres to amalgamate were Grande Prairie, Peace River and Fort McMurray. The remainder of the OCCs amalgamated, generally speaking, two or three at a time, until 1996, leaving the two current OCCs in operation.

The Southern Alberta OCC serves 55 RCMP detachments covering a wide geographic area, from the Millet overpass (south of Leduc) to the Montana border, and from the BC border on the west to the Saskatchewan border on the east (see Figure 2 above, which reveals the area of service coverage with a broken red line). Interestingly, while the Southern Alberta OCC is operated by the RCMP, there is no Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Red Deer RCMP that sets out the terms of service agreements because the Southern Alberta OCC is a part of the RCMP. This is due to the fact that the OCC is operated out of the provincial contract section of the RCMP at K Division Headquarters and the City of Red Deer RCMP is a contracted municipal police service.

Calls for Service Statistics for the City of Red Deer

In addition to the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre, which has a direct telephone line to the Southern Alberta OCC, there are nine "call answer points" that direct calls for police service to the Southern Alberta OCC from different parts of Alberta. As noted by one of the interviewees for this study, however, calls for the City of Red Deer RCMP usually originate from the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre. The Southern Alberta OCC receives nearly 200,000 calls for emergency and

non-emergency police service annually, double the number received a decade ago. Indeed, in 2007, the Southern Alberta OCC received a total of 199,052 calls for service. This number includes the approximate 35,000 calls for police service routed to the Southern Alberta OCC in 2007 by the Red Deer Regional 911 Communications Centre.

The analysis of call volume for the Southern Alberta OCC is best depicted pictorially in the form of a "funnel" (see Figure 3 below). As the figure shows, the Southern Alberta OCC received a total of 199,052 calls for service in 2007. Of those calls for service, only 39,975 (20%) were for the City of Red Deer RCMP. Although 20% does not seem like a "majority," the proportion is large given the number of smaller cities and towns that the Southern Alberta OCC serves. Of the 39,975 calls for Red Deer RCMP service received by the OCC, the vast majority (90%, or 36,217) get dispatched. Ninety-percent is a significant proportion of calls to dispatch for a patrol response, particularly since the overwhelming majority (95%) of these calls are routine and not emergencies (Priority 3 and 4 calls).   A review of the PROS general occurrence data for 2006 and 2007 indicates that only about 4-5% of the calls dispatched by the Southern Alberta OCC for Red Deer RCMP service are Priority 1.

Figure 3: The Calls for Service Funnel[1]

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[1] Calls for service data from the Southern Alberta OCC was provided for the periods June – December 2006, and January to December 12, 2007. Since the data for 2006 was only for half a year, the examination was limited to the 2007 data.

2007

199,052
The total number of calls
for service *received* by the
Southern Alberta OCC in
2007.

$\frac{39,975}{199,052}$

= **20%** of the
OCC's calls
for service
are for the
Red Deer
RCMP.

39,975
The total number of
files *created* by the
OCC for the
Red Deer RCMP
Detachment in 2007.

36,271
The total number of
files *dispatched* by
the OCC to the Red
Deer RCMP
Detachment in 2007.

$\frac{36,271}{39,975}$

= **90%** of the
calls for service
for the
Red Deer
RCMP are
dispatched by
the OCC.

The definitions used in this report for Priority 1, 2, 3 and 4 calls for police service are in consonance with the definitions used by the RCMP, and other major police departments, such as the Vancouver Police Department (c.f. Demers, Palmer & Griffiths, 2007), as follows:

Priority 1 Calls for Police Service: emergencies that require immediate attention by the police. The nature of the incident poses an immediate threat to life that may result in death or grievous bodily harm. Priority 1 calls include in-progress assaults and armed robberies.

Priority 2 Calls for Police Service: urgent situations that require immediate attention by the police. The nature of the incident may or may not pose a serious threat to life. Priority 2 calls include in-progress break and enters, in progress frauds, and 911 hang-ups.

Priority 3 Calls for Police Service: Non-emergency, routine calls; everyday occurrences that require police attention. Priority 3 calls include suspicious circumstances/persons/vehicles, missing persons and sudden deaths.

Priority 4 Calls for Police Service: Non-emergency, low priority, information type calls required for recording purposes only. Priority 4 calls include thefts and mischiefs.

Interestingly, although the City of Red Deer pays 90% of the costs associated with the City RCMP detachment's service, the City does not contribute financially to the dispatch services provided by the Southern Alberta OCC. The full cost of these services is covered by the Province of Alberta. While this, in itself, would seem to suggest that the current arrangements for dispatch are satisfactory, there are other less visible, but nevertheless significant, costs associated with the current dispatch system and the manner in which OCC operates. For example, as this report will reveal, the fact that OCC operators are solely "call-takers and file-makers" means that RCMP members are inundated with a steady stream of calls of all priority levels. This decreases the levels of service that could be achieved with a more efficient system, and increases recruitment and training costs due to high turnover among OCC operators. It also means that some calls are being "over-prioritized" and other calls are being "under-prioritized." Over-prioritization" results in dispatching all calls for service as though they are all emergencies; the costs of this include delays to future high-priority calls and robbing the police of the time to engage in proactive community-based policing. "Under-prioritizing" results in slow-responses to high priority calls, and the costs may include loss of property or life or injury (Larson, 1990:6). This funding arrangement has also resulted in a situation in which the City of Red Deer has a limited ability to affect the policies and procedures of the OCC with respect to the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP officers.

It also appears that the call management model in place at the OCC is fostering unrealistic expectations about the capacity of the Red Deer City RCMP among the citizens of Red Deer. The implication of the funding arrangement is that any changes to

the operations of the Provincial OCC must be funded by the Province of Alberta, or the City of Red Deer.

Crime Statistics for the City of Red Deer

The rapid economic and population growth in the City of Red Deer has been accompanied by an increase in crime and calls for police service (Converge Consulting Group, 2004). There was a shared perception among Southern Alberta OCC staff that the call load from the City of Red Deer had increased, along with the severity of the calls.

However, it is difficult to quantify the increase in crime in the City of Red Deer over time due to the lack of comparable data. Specifically, with the RCMP's adoption of PROS, the new Records Management System (RMS) in 2006, significant changes were made with respect to the ways in which data are collected and scored for statistical purposes. These changes were so significant that comparing pre-2005 data to post-2006 data would be analogous to comparing "apples to oranges." A senior RCMP officer noted that this situation prevented the City of Red Deer RCMP detachment from providing data to city council for a two year period of time.

This occurrence is not uncommon, as other police services have experienced the same issues as a result of changing records management systems and offence scoring rules. In an effort to overcome the issue of incomparable data, the typical practice is simply to use the data from the new RMS. In the present case, this renders crime data dating back to 2006 available for examination. The "Mayor's Reports" for the City of Red Deer and select surrounding municipalities reveal that for the first three quarters (January to September) of 2006 and 2007,[2] the City of Red Deer RCMP dealt with the most police-related incidents, as compared to the other RCMP detachments serving surrounding areas (see Figure 4 below). It is important to note that these data were extracted from the RMS using the "most serious offence" scoring method, which is the standard method of producing crime statistics by Statistics Canada. This means that, in incidents involving more than one offence, only the most serious offence was counted for the purpose of producing these statistics.

These crime statistic totals include calls that were dispatched by the Southern Alberta OCC, and "over the counter" calls generated by the respective detachment. In other words, the Southern Alberta OCC is not the only means by which citizens can file requests for City of Red Deer RCMP service. This explains why the crime incident data for the City of Red Deer over the first 3 quarters of 2007 as depicted above (45,215) exceeds the Southern Alberta OCC's calls for service *dispatch* data revealed in Figure 3 (36,271).

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[2] These data were requested of the City of Red Deer RCMP before the end of 2007. As a result, the data only represent the first three quarters of 2007. For comparison purposes, data from the first three quarters of 2006 are also used.

Figure 4: Total Crime Incident Statistics for the City of Red Deer and Select Surrounding Communities

	Red Deer City	Okotoks	Sylvan Lake	Rocky Mountain House	Cochrane	Innisfail	Stettler
■ 2006 (Jan - Sept)	39882	6072	5722	4505	4382	2339	1890
■ 2007 (Jan - Sept)	45215	5506	5677	5735	6209	2408	2652
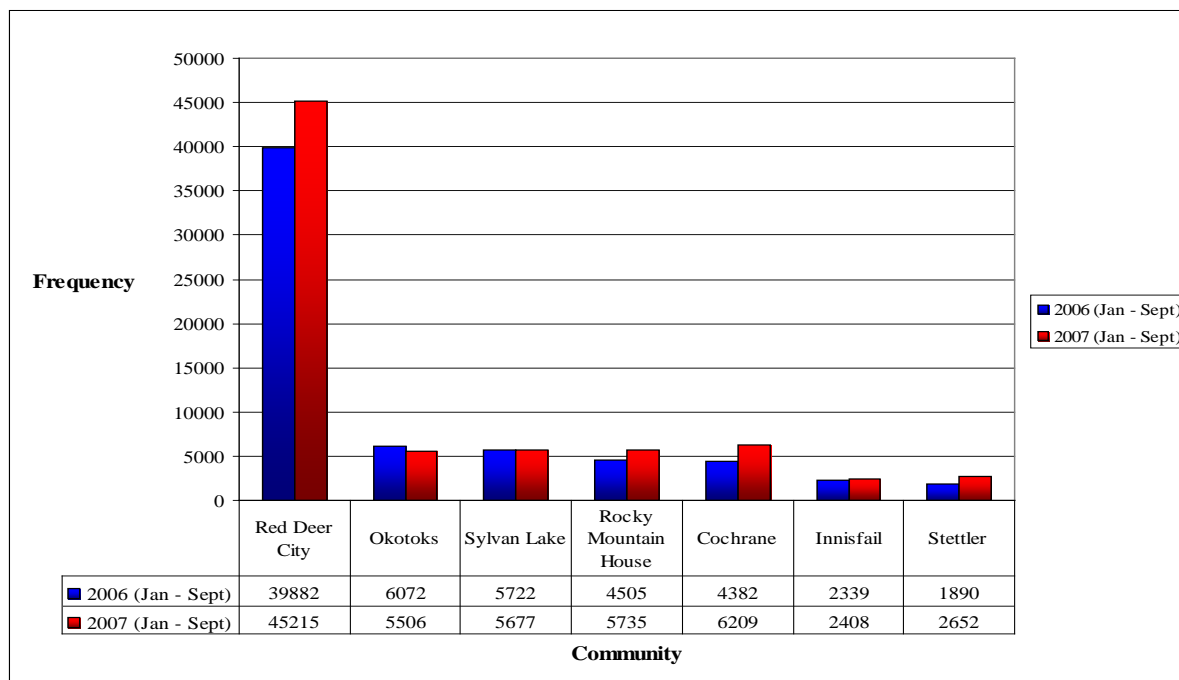
However, it should be noted that a direct comparison between the calls for service statistics presented above in Figure 3 and the crime statistics presented here in Figure 4 cannot be made because: 1) the calls for service data are for all of 2007 while the crime occurrence data are for the first three-quarters of 2007; 2) "call types" of calls for service data differ from the "offence types" used in crime incident data; and 3) calls for service data often contain duplicate calls (calls relating to the same incident). To illustrate the second point, Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems (e.g., CIIDS) offer dispatchers a selection of "call types" from which to choose when classifying a call. These "call types" include items such as "suspicious person" and "person annoying." These CAD call types are not criminal offences, as per the Uniform Crime Reporting system used in police records management systems. Moreover, circumstances in calls sometimes change, leading the police to score the offences differently than what the call type for the incident was originally noted to be. These differences make it difficult to draw direct comparisons between the data.

The Structure and Operations of the Southern Alberta OCC – Red Deer

The Southern Alberta OCC currently employs approximately 60 dispatchers who are deployed in four rotating Watches. On a regular working day, each Watch is composed of 11 operators. From Thursday to Saturday, there are at least 13 operators per Watch plus the supervisor, while on long weekends, there are usually 14-15 operators per shift. The estimated "cost per seat/employee" at the Southern Alberta OCC is within the

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range of $100,000 - $200,000 per year. This figure includes all of the costs for the employee (i.e., salary, benefits, equipment, etc.).

Only one operator is assigned to receive calls for service for the City of Red Deer at the Southern Alberta OCC, although other operators are available to assist on an "overflow" basis. The workload at the Southern Alberta OCC is divided by region. Specifically, each dispatcher is assigned to a position that handles calls for service from selected areas (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Division of Workload by Region at the Southern Alberta OCC

Position 1	Red Deer City
Position 2	[Only staffed during peak times]
Position 3	Red Deer Rural and Innisvale
Position 4	Rimbey, Sylvan Lake, Rocky Mountain House
Position 5	[Unknown]
Position 6	Hobbema, Ponoka and Wetaskiwin
Position 7	Didsbury, Olds, Three Hills
Position 8	Airdrie, Drumheller, Hannah, Oyan
Position 9	Cochrane, Canmore, Lake Louise
Position 10	[Only staffed during peak times]
Position 11	Brooks, Chestermere, Strathmore
Position 12	Turner Valley, Okotoks, High River
Position 13/14	All of Southern Alberta

When a call is received by the OCC, call-takers create a file using CIIDS (Computer Integrated Information and Dispatch System). The file is then routed to the police for their attention. The member receives the file and then sends it to the RCMP Watch Clerks who "tie up the loose ends" with the file (e.g., diary date it, fill in missing information, link entities – a quality control type function). When members get the file in CIIDS, they convert it into PROS (Police Reporting and Occurrence System). PROS is a secure police RMS – operators need specialized police training and a special "EnTrust" token (a security token issued by the police to authorized users to allow access to the secure system). Most of the OCC dispatchers do not have access to PROS.

Several OCC dispatchers mentioned that it would be preferable if there was one system, rather than two. PROS appears to be ideal for reporting; CIIDS is faster for creating the call. One OCC dispatcher stated that CIIDS is used at the OCC for this reason:

> "…Just create the file as quickly as possible and get it off to the police for them to deal with. But someone decided that PROS is more secure. Old school is CIIDS. The new school is PROS."

When the number of calls for service for the City of Red Deer exceeds the capacity of the Red Deer City dispatcher, coverage is provided by dispatchers assigned to less busy regions. However, no statistical information is gathered on the number of instances in which additional operators have to assist in the handling of Red Deer calls in an overflow capacity. This is important information that should be gathered on an ongoing basis.

Similar to other telecom centres, the Southern Alberta OCC is presently experiencing a staffing shortage, and running overtime shifts in an attempt to maintain service levels. A review of the current dispatch procedures at the Southern Alberta OCC indicates that a "traditional" model of call management is being used; that is, all calls are answered in sequence and, in contrast to "best practice" communication centres, virtually all calls for service are dispatched to patrol units, regardless of their seriousness. OCC dispatchers do not prioritize calls for service for the patrol officers. These practices contribute to a situation within which it is likely that RCMP patrol resources in the City of Red Deer are not being effectively and efficiently utilized.

Factors Contributing to the Traditional Call Management Approach

It was readily acknowledged by OCC staff interviewed for the project that nearly all calls for service received from the City of Red Deer are dispatched as quickly as possible to patrol units. There are a number of factors that contribute to the continued use of this traditional approach to call management. First, there is currently no capacity to provide an alternative response to less serious calls for service. To date, neither of the OCCs in Alberta have developed a differential response strategy. Secondly, there have been several high profile incidents in which OCC staff, in the words of one OCC dispatcher, "got burned" for not creating a file when one should have been created. Perhaps the most serious incident of this nature in recent years was a case in which a call was received, but a file was not opened, the call was not dispatched, and a multiple-murder/suicide occurred.

The OCC's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Information provided by OCC staff suggests that the OCC's SOP was written by a team of OCC civilian employees, in absence of collaboration with sworn members of the RCMP.

Qualitative data gleaned from interviews with Southern Alberta OCC staff members suggest that the SOP includes the following:

- A file shall be opened for every complaint received by the OCC;

- Calls concerning by-law complaints that are received after business hours shall be routed to the by-law office to be handled the following day.

- Calls from citizens regarding their rights are directed to the administrative line of the respective RCMP detachment.

- With a few exceptions, i.e. by-law calls and information requests, all calls for service are dispatched. The role of dispatchers is one of ""info in, info out."

- OCC operators are assigned to receive calls from specific regions of the OCC's coverage area (as per Table 2 above). When necessary, operators assist each other on an "overflow" basis.

- Beyond diverting by-law calls and requests for information, there is no screening or pre-sorting of calls for service by OCC dispatchers. As one OCC operator stated: "Our job is to answer the phone, create a file, and take that file off our screen." Another commented: "The OCC dispatchers don't screen the calls. They just send everything straight through to the police."

- The priority level of the call for service is not communicated to police members. As one OCC staff member noted, "Common sense dictates the priority of the call."

Concerns were also expressed with respect to how calls for service were dispatched for the communities served by the OCC. Several staff at the Red Deer OCC were questioned about the current dispatch practices and whether the needs of the City of Red Deer were being met. There was a widely-shared view among OCC staff who were interviewed that Red Deer City was unique from other communities in the southern Alberta region in terms of its population, call volume, and the types of calls for service.

The large majority of communities served by the Southern Alberta OCC are rural. One OCC staff member, in observing that the needs of the City of Red Deer do not necessarily fall in line with the current service delivery standards, stated:

"This has been communicated to [the OCC Manager], and the chain of command upwards, on numerous occasions. What smaller detachments might respond to, the Red Deer City detachment might not…. It's been communicated that the service delivery is not meeting their needs – that we're giving them everything and they can't handle everything. There are volume issues with what is being dispatched."

Another OCC staff member described the difficulties encountered in the OCC attempting to dispatch for both city and rural policing:

"At the OCC, it can be difficult, because city policing and rural policing are like two different worlds [tailoring to the needs of both can be difficult]. The City is asking for more out of the dispatchers here because that's the

service they got before, but the OCC is saying 'we're serving 55 detachments, why should we give you special treatment?' We have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). So, the Watch Clerks pick up the slack by tying up a lot of the loose ends that the RCMP officers want addressed, like filling-in missing info, etc… A lot of the OCC operators just want to start and close the files…"

The general view was that, while the rural areas served by the Southern Alberta OCC received "Cadillac" (or "no-call-too-small") police service, this was not a practical model for the City of Red Deer, due a lack of time and resources. As well, calls to the City of Red Deer are dispatched to a larger officer pool than in the rural areas. One dispatcher commented: "The rural operators take care of one or two police officers on a shift, while City operators are looking after 11 police officers per shift."

A Watch Clerk at the City of Red Deer RCMP detachment concurred that there should be different dispatch policies for different detachments, noting: "Right now, it's [OCC policy] straight across the board [applying to every detachment, urban and rural]." One suggested remedy was for there to be a police officer in the Southern Alberta OCC to screen the calls:

> "They [police] should supervise what's happening there… they should have an Inspector or a Sergeant there. If that was the case, a lot of the problems we see now wouldn't be the case."

There are a number of features of the OCC's current SOP that do not reflect best practices. These include the absence of the capacity to pre-screen and prioritize calls, and the practice of dispatching all calls for service. The implications of this, and possible options for addressing this situation, are set out later in this report.

The Basis of the OCC's Current SOP

While dispatching nearly all calls for service is acknowledged by some dispatchers as "a waste of time," Southern Alberta OCC protocol requires this. As one OCC operator explained:

> "They [the OCC] think that there's a possibility that things may change and escalate (e.g., that a barking dog complaint could escalate into something more serious like a firearms incident). If the OCC goes ahead and starts the file, it allows the OCC to track what they started, and it allows them to finish it."

This is a further indication that a primary objective of the OCC dispatchers is to move the call as quickly as possible from their desk to the patrol officers. This leads to the following attributes of dispatch in the OCC:

- A file is created for all calls for service. This includes calls involving serious incidents and calls of a minor nature, i.e. vandalism of a bicycle; speeding vehicles, etcetera. In the words of one OCC staff member:

  > "Operators at the OCC are told that they will never be chastised for creating a file, but they may be chastised if they don't create a file. If it's a tenant/landlord issue, they make a file, because it's better to be safe than sorry. So, it's not cut and dry. I'm a firm believer that it's better to be safe than to be sorry. The file can always be cancelled [by the police]."

- Calls regarding an existing file are directed to the respective detachment;

- Callers enquiring about police availability to make a presentation at a school or for an RCMP officer to attend with a horse are routed to the administrative line at the respective detachment;

- OCC operators view their role as "call-takers and file makers." In the words of one operator,

  > "We are simply the information gatherers, not the ones to decide whether a police officer attends a call or not."

  Another OCC staff member commented:

  > "I have listened to many calls where a file was not created, and I have also seen the ramifications of the absence of such files, and the ramifications that resulted from not notifying the police. It's a catch-22. Some operators have working relationships with the members in the field, and if the police officer says "I don't want a file on that," they don't create the file… but they've been burnt for that, so that's why there's the directive."

- Consideration has in the past been given to the notion of setting a "filter" for City of Red Deer calls, but under the current SOP, this is not possible;

- There have been discussions in recent years regarding how calls for service for the City of Red Deer might be screened. These discussions, however, became mired, as it became difficult to determine what calls should be diverted and what procedures would be set in place to manage diverted calls. One OCC staff member recalled:

  > "Because the decision-makers couldn't get a list of the types of crimes to filter out, or how to handle them (a list of steps

for callers to follow when calls are diverted), the idea was dismissed. In general, people "bought-into" the idea, but they didn't know how to get to the next step."

Interestingly, it was noted by an OCC staff member that the technology exists to add an electronic filter to the City of Red Deer dispatch pod, "…but its exact composition wasn't clearly communicated, and no decisions were made on the types of calls to filter out."

Challenges in the OCC

A number of individuals interviewed for this study, including RCMP officers and OCC staff members alike, characterized the current police dispatch situation as being in "crisis." OCC staff members interviewed for the project identified a number of challenges that significantly impacted their ability to provide effective dispatch services. These included:

1. **Overwork.** One OCC staff member observed:

> "Sometimes [the workload] is monstrous. Some files are very cut and dry, other times it's more complicated. It all depends on the type of call. When it's busy, you can't get away to go to the bathroom. Typically, for a 12-hour regular shift, we usually get a 45 minute lunch break and three 15-minute breaks. But when it's busy, they have to cut out the three 15-minute breaks, and when they do run to the washroom, they're pulling down their pants on the way to the washroom, and pulling up their pants on the way back to their work station."

2. **Stress.** In addition to the workload, a number of additional factors were identified as contributing to high stress levels among OCC operators. One was the OCC's mandate of creating a file for every call. As well, employees in the OCC are RCMP civilian staff members, which means that they are non-union, not allowed to strike, and held to a code of conduct under the *RCMP Act.* A consequence of this is that dispatchers can be ordered to work. A workload analysis found that OCC staff take, on average, 30 days of sick leave per year, as compared to the national average of 10 days per member per year (McGee, 2007). This is one indicator of the high levels of stress among OCC staff.

The high levels of stress among OCC staff contributes to a vicious cycle: stress leads to long-term absences and resignations, which results in staffing shortages, and the need for OCC staff to work overtime, which, in turn, contributes to higher levels of stress. One OCC staff member

estimated that OCC operators had worked over 3,000 hours of overtime during the time period June 2007 to August 2007.

3. **A mutual lack of understanding between OCC dispatchers and police officers.** OCC staff noted that there was, for many police officers and OCC staff, a lack of understanding of the roles, pressures, and challenges that each party encounters on a daily basis. To address this, it was suggested that the police and the OCC staff have more communication with one another. There was the view that, in many instances, the RCMP in Red Deer and the OCC are working at cross-purposes of one another.

In the words of one OCC staff member:

> "We need a team. We need to help each other out… You have to be able to rely on your co-workers – the job is stressful enough. But if we can learn to work together as a team, life would be so much easier."

4. **Absence of Red Deer RCMP and City of Red Deer input into OCC operations.** There are currently no formal mechanisms in place that would facilitate ongoing communication between the City of Red Deer, the Red Deer RCMP and the Southern Alberta OCC. Such contact would be beneficial for both parties. As one senior RCMP member commented, "All we are asking is to have a voice in how dispatch is operated…"

There was a widespread view among RCMP members that the Southern Alberta OCC's policies and procedures were not considerate of the police, one officer stating:

> "Decisions are made at the OCC for their own benefit – they don't realize who their client is… the OCC is floating in its own world… The police need some control in the matter… The OCC needs a paradigm shift – they need to understand who their client is. It's a dispatch centre that's based on a rural model of dispatch."

Another supervisory officer observed:

> "The OCC says 'We can't customize,' but they can (e.g., consider Banff and the way they manage property calls; the Kelowna OCC and its separate SOPs for urban and rural detachments). We could have a modified dispatch: a police response and a non-dispatch response too."

Still another senior RCMP member stated:

> "The biggest frustration is that things [at the OCC] are done in isolation. Consultation does happen, but it is more informative than deliberative… We understand their challenges… the inability to customize [at the OCC] is due to a lack of staff – they have capacity issues; but they are a support service, there needs to be a balance. There needs to be a formal discussion point; meetings on a monthly basis, to discuss issues of concern, planning, day-to-day processes and issues, that impact service delivery. The idea won't be to point fingers, but to look at positive solutions to implement."

Similarly, a number of RCMP members noted the importance of the City of Red Deer having input into OCC operations. This would include assuming an active role in identifying the priorities for police service delivery. In the words of one officer:

> "There is a need for the City of Red Deer to define what it wants to attend, to tell people what types of calls they will respond to, and for which types of incidents they should come to the detachment…"

5. **Difficulties in retaining OCC staff.** A major challenge confronting the OCC is to recruit, and retain, dispatchers. This has resulted in the OCC being chronically understaffed. Historically, there was very little turnover of staff; yet, in 2007, the OCC lost 10 employees, with experience ranging from 3-10 years. The difficulties in maintaining adequate staffing levels were attributed to a number of factors, including an increasingly competitive job market, a small applicant pool, job stress, and relocation. As a senior RCMP officer noted, "The current situation is demoralizing for OCC dispatchers."

6. **The training process for OCC dispatchers.** Training OCC staff is a lengthy and cost-intensive enterprise. The training regimen for new operators consists of an introductory examination, a structured interview, an enhanced security clearance, and medical and psychological tests. Once these are completed, the recruits participate in a 7-week long training class (i.e., job duties, multi-tasking, etc.). This is followed by three weeks of coaching with a senior operator, after which the recruits are mentored for two months. The total training time is approximately six months. The time between the submission of a job application to being able to work independently as an OCC dispatcher may be as long as nine months.

7. **Staffing levels.** There has been no increase in the number of full-time positions in the Southern Alberta OCC for 15 years, despite the population growth in the City of Red Deer and other communities in the southern Alberta region.

8. **Absence of a police presence in the OCC.** As currently structured, the OCC is an entirely civilian-based operation. There are no sworn members in the OCC. One OCC staff member stated, "In my 26 years of working as a dispatcher, I have never seen a police officer in the same room as us at the OCC." This staff member felt that not having sworn members in the OCC was a disadvantage, as sometimes, some clients ask to speak to a police officer and don't want a call-taker: "So it's actually extra work for the dispatchers without having a police officer around to help field certain calls… having a male police officer field some calls would make a huge difference – it would put the client at ease, knowing that they just spoke with, and received advice from, a sworn member."

Both OCC staff and RCMP members interviewed for the study suggested that, in order to move away from the current practice of dispatching virtually every call for service, there should be a police presence in the OCC. In the words of one OCC staff member, with a police officer stationed in the OCC, the dispatchers **"would feel comfortable that they won't be reprimanded when they divert calls."** In addition, it was suggested that the call-taker could open a file on every call received, but that a police officer could determine whether the call is criminal or civil and whether a police response was warranted. Otherwise, as another OCC staff member observed, "The dispatchers are just doing their best to cover their own butts." Given that one police officer could not screen calls for the entire OCC, the mandate of the officer(s) assigned to the OCC could be limited to screening, prioritizing and assisting with City of Red Deer calls for service.

It appears that the possibility of having a police presence in the OCC to assist in screening calls has been explored at various times in the past, but that none of the options were acceptable to both the City of Red Deer and the OCC.

9. **OCC operator lack of discretion.** There was the view that OCC staff should be able to exercise more discretion in determining whether to create a file on a call for service and to determine whether a call is a criminal or civil matter. This, however, was unlikely to happen, since there have been incidents in the past in which dispatchers did not open a file when one should have been opened. This practice results in a large workload being sent to the police officers. As a senior RCMP officer observed:

"The OCC makes a file for every call… the OCC dispatches all calls, no matter what… that results in a huge time delay for police officers, as they have to deal with those files. It's necessary for the OCC to prioritize calls."

One OCC staff member noted that, while some dispatchers do, on occasion, exercise discretion with respect to what calls to dispatch, "…Upper management at the OCC has said that 'If you don't follow our rules, we won't back you up.'"

Commenting on the need to differentiate between emergency and non-emergency calls to improve efficiency, one Watch Clerk at the City of Red Deer RCMP detachment stated:

"A lot of people call 911 for non-emergency incidents – everything from by-law to animal complaints – everything. Everything should be separate – bylaws, complaints, emergency versus non-emergency – instead of all those types of calls coming in to one area."

In the view of this clerk, it is not necessary to create a file on every call that is received, and many of the calls could be dealt with in the first instance. By not screening calls, the perception is that the OCC is creating a huge workload for RCMP officers. Further, this clerk commented that the policies of the OCC

"…should cater to the police, not the other way around. The police feel like they are catering to the OCC. There's a need [for the OCC] to be more sensitive and accommodating to the needs of the police…"

10. **Absence of a differential call response strategy.** As previously noted, the Southern Alberta OCC is structured around a "one-size-fits-all, no-call-too-small" rural-style dispatch model in which the dispatchers are "call-takers" and "file-makers." There is currently no capacity to screen or prioritize calls, by severity and type of crime/complaint. More specifically, police dispatchers do not screen or prioritize calls for service. This results in all calls for service being dispatched to patrol officers which, in turn, results in officers attending many lower-priority calls that may not require a patrol response. In addition to over-burdening patrol officers, this may result in slower response times to high priority calls for service. As one senior RCMP member observed:

"A big issue is that the Red Deer City RCMP is a large, high volume detachment which delivers urban policing – yet, dispatch is still done in a rural way – the OCC staff members

aren't realizing that. The regional centre opens files for all calls received. Instead of closing cases at first instance, they don't, they pass them on. As soon as they create a complaint, the police must allocate resources to deal with it."

Another senior RCMP member offered the following comments on the impact of the Southern Alberta OCC policy of dispatching all calls for service:

"The current system does not allow for the delineation of the seriousness of offences/situations. About 30% to 50% of what comes in to OCC does not [ultimately] receive a car, but, it defaults to the Constable level. There is no direction or policy in place to have supervisors get involved in triaging. It is not a priority. At present, Constables make the decision; the decisions as to who goes, and how many go, should be made by the road supervisors, but, in fact these decisions are being made by the Constables themselves.

"This leads to the view among Constables that they are too busy and, as a result, they don't take the time to deal with serious issues… the members feel overwhelmed and don't do a good job. They don't take the time, since they know another call is coming in. A culture has developed where the officer's worth is measured by how many calls he takes, so as not to be seen as a slacker.

"The Road Supervisors are too busy to assign calls. The staffing levels are too low. Usually we have only 1 or 2 supervisors; it's hard to pull people off the road and put them in a supervisory role. Most triaging happens at the Constable level: what calls to attend in what order and who should go to them. In cases of serious crime, supervisory staff are available…

"We've increased the data-input requirements for Constables. Constables are stuck doing massive work… The Constables are anxious for change. They are overwhelmed by paperwork and the lack of triage of calls for service. It has an impact on officer performance. As a result, officers escape – to plain clothes, to other areas of the detachment, or they leave.

"The way we police here will kill you…"

These concerns were echoed by another RCMP officer:

> "The OCC works very well for the rural areas. There isn't the volume of calls for service. We have to address this environment. Dispatch is a major part of the dynamics that exist here which make it a very difficult environment for the officers to work in. In the absence of triaging, how are we supposed to do Intelligence-led Policing?"

It appears that attempts have been made in the past to develop the capacity to screen lower priority calls for service. One OCC staff member, in commenting that the OCC did not have a TRT to handle Priority 3 and 4 calls, indicated that "For years, we have wanted a light-duties officer to help us by performing a TRT function." For a variety of reasons, however, this capacity has never been developed.

11. **No specifically-defined levels of service.** A number of senior police personnel noted that it was important to: a) define the core functions of the OCC; b) define the parameters of the OCC's operations; and, c) set out the expectations and implications for service. As one officer stated:

> "Tight parameters need to be drawn around the OCC function – and those parameters need to be made explicit… The expectations of OCC service need to be better defined. If it's the three main types of service, the OCC can manage it. If the expectations are not well-defined, then unrealistic expectations will be placed on the service delivery model. It should be limited to those three core functions [as discussed above]. Call screening would be an additional feature…. [but] the OCC [civilian staff] shouldn't do it; there should be a member to make those decisions."

This would also involve a differentiation between emergency and non-emergency calls, one senior RCMP officer observing:

> "The OCC processes both emergency and non-emergency calls. Some streamlining is needed to differentiate between emergency and non-emergency calls, so as to decrease the workload for the police. I hear lots of complaints from the police about this (i.e., the OCC's inability to streamline calls)…"

However, it was also acknowledged by RCMP members that the increased involvement of the City of Red Deer would most likely have associated costs:

> "To close the gap between municipal expectations and the operations of the OCC, [the City of] Red Deer would have to 'own' the cost… If Red Deer wants screening, they would have to pay for it."

The Development of a Call Screening Capacity in the OCC

There was the widespread view that the current practice of dispatch at the OCC was not a "best practice," and that, should dispatch services for the City of Red Deer remain in the OCC, a call-screening capacity should be developed. A component of this capacity would be the presence of sworn members in the OCC to assist in call screening and to be available as a resource for OCC operators and police officers. In the words of one senior RCMP officer:

> "The OCC needs police supervisors (i.e., a regular member or a civilian member who is experienced, tasked and authorized to make those decisions) to facilitate appropriate responses to calls for service."

In the words of another senior RCMP member:

> "The biggest complaint that I hear the police officers talking about concerns non-urgent calls that really don't need a file. It's time-consuming for both parties and perhaps that time could be better spent in dispatch. The current situation is a waste of time. What ever happened to someone being able to call the OCC to speak with a live police officer, for advice or to ask a question? The OCC had a police officer stationed there in the past – a light-duties officer. It was a great learning opportunity for the officer, who in turn could provide first-hand information about the way things work at the telecom centre to the members when he/she returned to the frontline. The officer could also help educate the dispatchers about what the police need out on the road. If someone was there to answer mundane questions, it would help streamline the operation and help provide a better service for the citizens of Red Deer…"

Noting the absence of call screening at the OCC, one RCMP member stated:

> "There is a culture at the OCC that expects dispatchers not to make a decision: "let the Constables make the decisions." The OCC has evolved to the point where they won't make decisions for fear of making a bad decision."

Another senior-level RCMP officer noted that efforts to have OCC dispatchers screen cases had proven unsuccessful: "The supervisors at the OCC are paranoid about having a botched call."

Contributing to the concern and frustration being experienced by senior RCMP members in the Red Deer detachment was the resistance to having a uniformed presence in the Southern Alberta OCC to assist with call screening. One senior RCMP officer explained that the source of the opposition to having an RCMP member involved in the call-screening process at the OCC emanated more from the Province of Alberta than from the OCC itself:

> "…it's the Province of Alberta that doesn't want fully paid gun-carrying officers in the OCC because [the Province thinks] it [the telecom operation] is a civilian function…"

Contributing to the resistance of the OCC to adapting its operations to better address the dispatch requirements of the City of Red Deer is the history of the OCCs in Alberta. As a senior RCMP member observed:

> "The OCC has become protective of its role because of the history of amalgamation. There's lots of distrust, stress, bitterness and hard feelings because of that, so they are resistant to change. To make matters worse, calls have doubled in recent years but resources have stayed the same. Telecoms are getting more positions, but the issues have now become training and retention."

There was a general recognition among the RCMP members interviewed for the project that the development of a call-screening capacity in the OCC would require the City of Red Deer to pay, proportionately, for this service.

The Red Deer Crime Prevention and Policing Strategy

A number of the above-noted issues were identified in 2004 in the report *The Red Deer Crime Prevention and Policing Strategy: Building a Safer Community Together* (Converge Consulting Group, 2004). This report was produced to assist the municipality in developing a future-oriented, best practice approach to crime prevention and policing. The project study found numerous deficiencies in the arrangements for police dispatch with respect to quality of service and speed of response currently provided to the citizens of Red Deer.

The report contained a number of recommendations, four of which were specifically designed to improve efficiencies at the Southern Alberta OCC when dispatching calls to the City of Red Deer's RCMP. Two of those four recommendations were specific to the Southern Alberta OCC:

- (3.2.3.1) "ensure appropriate priority setting and routing is occurring on 911 calls," and
- (3.2.3.2) "modify dispatch centre operations and criteria" (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:7; 39).

With respect to the first recommendation, #3.2.3.1, the consultants explained that the types of calls received should be examined to determine whether they are: appropriate for the current system, directed to the appropriate agency, and prioritized properly. With respect to recommendation #3.2.3.2, the consultants stressed that the OCC for Southern Alberta should tailor its dispatch business practices to meet the urban needs of the City of Red Deer, which are significantly different than its rural neighbors (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:39; see also Figure 4 above). The consultants explained that such a change in business practices at the Southern Alberta OCC would function to educate the public as to the service delivery capacity of the RCMP in the City of Red Deer, create realistic service delivery standards and expectations among citizens of Red Deer, and reduce the workload for the City of Red Deer RCMP officers by reducing the number of dispatched low priority calls for service, thereby freeing officers to respond more quickly and effectively to higher priority calls.

The "actions/accountabilities" associated with these recommendations were, respectively:

- "dispatch centre to conduct a statistical review/audit of the error rates and delays associated with current system," and
- "City of Red Deer RCMP and Dispatch agree on format of call assignment by Spring 2005; Dispatch to make required changes to support deployment by Fall 2005; deployed for September 1, 2005."

An RCMP Review Team is currently examining these and other issues surrounding the OCC. As of early 2008, there had been no significant changes in the practices and protocols of the OCC.

The other two recommendations of relevance to the present study were specific to the City of Red Deer RCMP detachment:

- (3.2.5.1) "response criteria for Red Deer need to be established," and
- (3.2.5.2.) "response standards for Red Deer need to be defined" (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:8).

The consultants used the words "*response criteria*" to refer to "…defining those circumstances in which the RCMP will, and will not, respond to a request for response" (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:49). In contrast, the words "*response standards*" were used to refer to "…the time in which the RCMP expects to respond in different circumstances" (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:49). The consultants explained that, while the Southern Alberta OCC currently has response criteria and standards, those criteria and standards are the same for all of Southern Alberta, and as such, do not meet the urban policing needs of the City of Red Deer.

With respect to recommendation #3.2.5.1, the consultants advised that the City of Red Deer RCMP need to determine which calls for service they will, and will not, respond to, and that those criteria need to be adopted into the business practices of the OCC for

Southern Alberta. Moreover, a media campaign should be undertaken to educate the public about the new police response criteria (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:50). With respect to recommendation #3.2.5.2, the consultants advised that once the response standards are defined, a measurement system is needed to track and evaluate performance (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:50).

The associated "actions/accountabilities" for these recommendations were:

- "City of Red Deer RCMP to define the specific set of response criteria and standards."
- "Criteria established by Spring 2005 for input to Dispatch redesign."
- "Response standards defined by Summer 2005 in time for Report Card to the Community."
- "Response standards and criteria embedded in RCMP 2006 Business Plan" (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:8).

The consultants also noted the process by which these two recommendations should be realized. Specifically, the City of Red Deer RCMP should define the response criteria and standards, and then present those response criteria and standards to the Community Services Division (CSD)/Red Deer City Council for approval. Once the response criteria and standards are approved by the CSD/Red Deer City Council, the Southern Alberta OCC should make any necessary changes to accommodate the new response criteria and standards (Converge Consulting Group, 2004:73).

With respect to the developments regarding these action points, the City of Red Deer's RCMP detachment has been operating an informal call management system for the last year and a half, whereby Priority 3 and 4 calls (i.e., lower priority calls not requiring an immediate patrol response) received at the detachment are reviewed by a member, and that member performs a triage function (i.e., canceling calls for service that do not require a police response, etc.). The Southern Alberta OCC, however, has not implemented a similar call management system for Red Deer City calls for service, due to a lack of capacity/staff, and because the City of Red Deer does not have any authority to impact change in the provincially-funded Southern Alberta OCC.

Best Practices in Dispatch Service Arrangements and Call Management Models

Best Practices in Call Management

The City of Red Deer is not the only jurisdiction to be confronted with a problematic dispatch-related situation (c.f. Corby, Gilbert, Purdie & McKenna, 2005; Kennedy, 1993). Since the early 1980s, numerous police services and municipalities have experienced similar challenges and have developed a variety of innovative and effective dispatch practices (See Knee, 1986:2; see also Plecas & Cohen, 2007:1).

This section of the report provides a review of the general literature on call centres, which have received increasing attention in recent years, driven largely by concerns as to whether call centre practices are providing "value for service." The discussion then turns to a specific consideration of police communications centres, police call management models, and differential response strategies. The discussion concludes with a brief overview of the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch (NAED) and the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), both of which offer accreditation to public safety communications centres for compliance with their standards and protocols.

A significant trend with respect to call centres of all types has been amalgamation for the purpose of cost-effectiveness through economies of scale (Batt & Moynihan, 2002:14; Glucksmann, 2004:808; Taylor & Bain, 2007:358). A similar trend has occurred with police telecoms, which have increasingly come to resemble other types of call centres. As well, police telecoms experience many of the problems and challenges that confront call centres, including short and infrequent breaks for staff, pressures on staff resulting from monitoring and supervision, and chronic understaffing due to cost-effectiveness policies (Taylor & Bain, 2007:358).

Call Centre Management Models

There are three models of call centre management: 1) the "classic mass production model," 2) the "professional service model," and 3) the "mass customization model" (Batt & Moynihan, 2002:14). The classic mass production model and the mass customization model represent the ends of the spectrum, while the professional service model lies mid-spectrum (Batt & Moynihan, 2002:17). In the "classic mass production model," the goals are to "maximize volume and minimize costs" – much like a factory (Batt & Moynihan, 2002:15). On the other end of the spectrum is the mass customization model which is designed to provide quality service. This model often results in high costs and lower volume, which is comparable to how lawyers operate. The professional service model attempts to minimize costs and increase quality/customization, which represents the union of two previously seemingly incompatible goals (Batt & Moynihan, 2002:17). Understandably, there has been a

movement toward the "professional service model," since consumers want it all: quality, customization, and cost-effectiveness (Pine, 1993 as cited in Batt & Moynihan, 2002:18). However, this model has been critiqued by a number of observers, as reflected in following comments:

> One way of resolving the tension between service and efficiency is to adopt [a]… 'sacrificial human resource strategy.' Rather than resolving this tension by improving employee morale, organizational commitment or job satisfaction, employers deliberately sacrifice the wellbeing of staff, accepting 'high levels of stress and emotional burnout of the frontline staff, accompanied by high turnover' as the price for maintaining high levels of service at low cost (Wallace et al., 2000:182 as cited in Deery & Kinnie, 2002:6).

Clearly, it is difficult to achieve a balance between the competing goals of quality/customization and cost-effectiveness. One symptom of this effort is stress, which is widespread among call centre employees. The well-being of call centre employees is important to consider when selecting a call centre management model. When unchecked, stress leads to emotional exhaustion among employees, which in turn decreases quality levels in customer service and contributes to long-term absences/resignations, staffing shortages, increased overtime, and even greater stress among those employees who remain (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2005:22).

One study of call centre employees found that, among the factors contributing to well-being are: autonomy over work methods/procedures and a supportive immediate supervisor who provides minimal monitoring (Holman, 2002:35,46). In addition, high stress levels among employees in call centres have also been linked to "low job control, low variety and excessive job demands" (Holman, 2002:36).

To effectively handle the increasing numbers of calls for service without compromising public safety in an era of amalgamation and limited fiscal resources, and to more effectively allocate resources, police call centres throughout the world have adopted call *management* models (Kennedy, 1993; Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:1; McEwen, Spence, Wolff, Wartell, & Webster, 2003:8, 17; Waddington, 1993:185). The word "management" implies that "…thoughtful decisions [are made] based on knowledge, experience and priorities" (McEwen et al., 2003:35). In the discussion below, the evolution of the various police service call management models is presented, beginning with call intake strategies and continuing with differential call response strategies.

Call Intake Strategies

The 911 emergency response service was first implemented in select areas in North America in 1967 (21st Century Solutions, 2003:1). By the early 1980s, the simplicity associated with dialing 911 resulted in many citizens calling about non-emergencies; in some jurisdictions, non-emergency calls for service came to account for up to 90% of

the total number of calls for service (21st Century Solutions, 2003:1; Frazier & Reintzell, 1997:1; Witkin & Guttman, 1996). Generally speaking, serious emergencies generally represent, on average, only about 10% of a police telecom's total call load (McEwen et al., 2003:18). The increasing use of 911 for non-emergency calls for service created a serious situation, as it often resulted in high priority calls not receiving a timely response (21st Century Solutions, 2003:1; Stewart, 1988:9; US Department of Justice, 2007:1; Witkin & Guttman, 1996).

The misuse and abuse of the 911 emergency may be either unintentional or intentional (Sampson, 2004:2). Unintentional 911 calls may result from accidentally pressing "automatic re-dial" or "speed dial" buttons on phones, or they can be misdials or hang-up calls (Sampson, 2004:2-4). Intentional 911 calls that result in the emergency response system's misuse include non-emergency calls, prank calls, exaggerated calls (to prompt a faster emergency response) and "lonely complainant" calls (Sampson, 2004:5-7). In the case of Red Deer, it appears that intentional non-emergency calls are the most frequent and problematic type of call received at the Southern Alberta OCC.

The literature suggests that, in addition to the various differential police response strategies (to be discussed below), the implementation of a 311 non-emergency complaint line (managed by the police or by the municipal government), coupled with a public education campaign on the proper use of 911 and 311, are best practices that can enhance call management and address the problems posed by non-emergency calls to 911 (21st Century Solutions, 2003:1; Mazerolle, Rogan, Frank, Famega & Eck, 2005:1; McEwen et al., 2003:3; Sampson, 2004:20-21; US Department of Justice, 2005:2).

In 311 systems, a portion of the burden for call prioritization is shifted to the public, who essentially pre-screen their own calls for the police when choosing between 911 and 311 (Kennedy, 2002:126; Mazerolle et al., 2005:5). In those jurisdictions that have implemented 311 non-emergency lines, there have been significant decreases in the number of 911 calls. This has made 911 lines more accessible, increased response times to high priority emergency calls, and also served to improve relations between the police and community (Colston, 2005:1; Frazier & Reintzell, 1997:1; Mazerolle et al., 2005:1, 5; US Department of Justice, 2005:1; US Department of Justice, 2007:1).

Disadvantages of 311 call systems include the costs associated with creating, staffing, maintaining and advertising the system (Colston, 2005:98; Frazier & Reintzell, 1997:1; Mazerolle et al., 2005:1, 7; McEwen et al., 2003:21; US Department of Justice, 2005:2). And, while 311 call lines are an effective call intake strategy, it is still important to develop differential response strategies in order to enhance call management.

Additional call intake strategies include seven–digit, non-emergency telephone numbers; walk-in reporting; mail-in reporting; and Internet reporting (Bracey, 1996:156; HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2005:28; Kennedy, 2002:126; Kessler, 1993:487; Larson, 1990:4, 5; Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:4; Mazerolle et al., 2005:5; McEwen et al., 2003:3, 9, 11; Sviridoff, 1982:2; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167). Among the more common call intake strategies of US police services, other than 911 and seven-digit

non-emergency telephone lines, are walk-in storefronts where citizens may make reports, telephone reporting units/teams, scheduled appointment systems, and mail-in reporting systems. Less than ten percent of police services currently have Internet reporting systems, and 311 reporting systems (McEwen et al., 2003:19). The implementation of these call intake strategies can significantly reduce the demand on 911 systems.

Call Response Strategies

Historically, the development of call-response strategies was precipitated by the challenge posed by an ever-increasing number of calls for service to the police and an inability of police services to respond to these calls in a timely and effective manner. Models of call response can be generally categorized as either "old school" or "new school."

Old School: The Taxi Cab Dispatch Model

There is a vast body of literature, dating back almost 40 years, that documents the inability of police organizations to handle an overwhelming number of dispatched calls due to their use of the "Taxi Cab Dispatch Model." In a "Taxi Cab Dispatch Model," patrol units are assigned to calls for service in the same way that taxi cabs are assigned to customers: on a "first-come, first-served queuing model" which assumes that all calls are of equal importance and seriousness and that all calls require the same priority of response (see Kennedy, 2002:125; Kessler, 1993:490; Sumrall, Roberts & Farmer, 1981:3; see also Sviridoff, 1982). Despite this approach, research studies have consistently found that a significant portion (approximately 80%-90%) of all police calls for service are low-priority, non-emergency calls, and calls that are not police-related (Sviridoff, 1982:5, 14).

Critics of the Taxi Cab Dispatch Model have argued that a police response to calls for service within this model significantly affects their ability to act in a preventive manner and to engage in pro-active policing. As well this model does not result in the most efficient and effective use of police patrol resources but rather is viewed as a situation in which it is the "tail that wags the dog" (Larson, 1990:7; Gay et al. 1997 as cited in Sviridoff, 1982).

For these, and a variety of other reasons, the Taxi Cab Dispatch Model has been deemed to be ill-suited for policing. However, this model of dispatch likely continued in some places because these poor practices were entrenched into early police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, and because there was a widely held belief that a rapid police response time to all calls for service would lead to higher arrest rates and higher citizen satisfaction levels (Larson, 1990:7; McEwen et al., 2003:8).

Since then, numerous studies have been conducted to test these hypotheses. The results of those studies showed that higher arrest rates and citizen satisfaction levels are not necessarily associated with a rapid police response to all calls for service

(Stewart, 1988:7; Pate et al., 1976 & Van Kirk, 1978 as cited in Sviridoff, 1982:3-4). Rather, it is important to prioritize calls for service and focus on achieving a timely response to the most serious incidents[3] while developing alternative strategies for responding to less serious calls for service.

New School: Call Management through Differential Police Response Strategies

Differential response strategies allow the police to manage demand load by focusing their patrol resources on high-priority calls for service, while at the same time ensuring that less-serious calls for service are effectively handled (Bracey, 1996:154; Stewart, 1988:8; Sviridoff, 1982:4). Thus was born "police call management through differential response strategies" – an innovation that has captured the attention of academics and police practitioners alike for over 25 years.

A call management model that employs differential response strategies is characterized by call prioritization, priority queuing, and tailored police responses (level and immediacy) based on call type, which may amount to no response at all (Sacks et al., 1993:222; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167). This innovative call management model allocates police resources much more efficiently than the Taxi Cab Dispatch Model, and it reduces the cost associated with the delays of such a model that result from the over-prioritization and under-prioritization[4] of calls (Sacks et al., 1993:222). In this call management model, call-takers assume the role of triage agents, dispatchers assume the role of police resource guardians and deployers, and patrol officers assume the role of "mobile autonomous professionals" (Larson, 1990:7, 10; Sviridoff, 1982:24).

This innovative approach to call management began in the early 1980s, with pilot research projects on various differential police response strategies completed by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) using select US police services (Bracey, 1996:156). The benefits of this model were quickly realized and this best practice model is now in widespread use in Canada, the US and internationally. The various evidence-based differential police response strategies used to manage the demand for non-emergency calls for service are detailed below.

The viability of a differential police response to calls for police service is illustrated by research findings that citizens are satisfied with a delayed police response to non-emergency calls if they are told when they may expect the police to arrive or, alternatively, the call for service is effectively dealt with by other means not involving the dispatch of a patrol unit (Bracey, 1996:154; McEwen et al., 2003:8; Stewart, 1988:7, 8; Sviridoff, 1982:4). Moreover, police budgets were decreasing due to tax cuts, and

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[3] A rapid response to serious incidents may contribute to higher arrest rates, the preservation of evidence, and increased public confidence in the police.

[4] "Over-prioritization" results in dispatching all calls as though they are all emergencies, and the costs of this include delays to future high-priority calls and robbing the police of the time to engage in proactive community-based policing. "Under-prioritizing" results in slow responses to high priority calls, and the costs may include injury or loss of property/life (Larson, 1990:6).

police services were being forced to manage increasing calls for service with less resources, making it impossible to respond quickly to all calls for service (Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:1; McEwen, Connors & Cohen, 1986:1; McEwen et al, 2003:8; Sumrall et al., 1981:2; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167).

Priority Queue Dispatch Model

In this model of dispatch, calls for service are screened and classified by call-takers to facilitate the assignment of a correct priority level by the dispatcher. This allows the immediacy and level of police response to calls for service to be tailored to the specific request for service (Kessler, 1993:490, 497; Larson, 1990:5, 6; Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:4; McEwen et al., 2003:49; Sviridoff, 1982:25; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167). Differential police responses may be either immediate or delayed, mobile or non-mobile (examples of non-mobile police responses include: telephone reporting, outside agency referrals, mail-in reporting, walk-in reporting and Internet reporting) (Bracey, 1996:153; Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:17; Research Management Associates, 1983:6).

The immediacy of the police response will vary depending on the priority of the call, with Priority 1 calls receiving an immediate response and other calls being queued and responded to in the order of their severity, i.e., Priority 2, Priority 3, and Priority 4. Within this model, the response to low-priority calls is purposely delayed even in those cases where there are available patrol units. The intent is to hold patrol units in reserve so as to ensure that there is patrol support for high priority calls (Bracey, 1996:156; Kessler, 1993:487; Larson, 1990:4, 7, 10; McEwen et al., 2003:4, 8, 35; Sviridoff, 1982:2, 25; Sacks, Larson & Schaak, 1993:203, 204, 223). This is often referred to as "call stacking" or "cut-off priority queuing" and is usually done by the CAD system to ensure that higher priority calls are always dispatched first (McEwen et al., 2003:35). Optimum cut-offs depend on the number of calls for service received, which fluctuate by time of day, and the day of the week (Sacks et al., 1993:214, 223). It is worth stressing that this model of priority queuing decreases the costs associated with patrol delays that result from the traditional Taxi Cab Dispatch Model (Sacks et al., 1993:207, 223).

The process of call prioritization is overseen by a patrol supervisor, who retains the authority to re-prioritize calls as required by upgrading, downgrading or canceling the call (McEwen et al., 2003:42). To service high priority calls, pre-emption may occur, whereby patrol units in the midst of servicing lower-priority calls are re-called and re-dispatched to higher priority calls (Larson, 1990:10). Technological advances even allow the supervising officer on the road to view the "Dispatch Queue" via a mobile data terminal, depending on the dispatch software (McEwen et al., 2003:42).

A key component of the Priority Queue Dispatch Model is the recognition that not all calls for service are the same and, as such, do not require the same level and immediacy of response. This serves to streamline the workflow of patrol officers and to increase the time available for proactive policing (see Kennedy, 2002; McEwen et al., 2003:18). As one researcher observed:

> The adoption of a call-screening system is the first step away from the maxim that 911… runs the police department. It implies that police will no longer let individual complaining citizens – an unrepresentative sample of the population – decide how the police will spend their days. It commits the department to using analysis and planning to decide on crime prevention strategies and to carry them out on its own initiative. It is the first step in transforming the public police from a primarily reactive force to a more goal-seeking organization (Sherman, 1983:157 as cited in Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:170-171).

An established best practice strategy that is premised on the Priority Queue Dispatch Model is the Telephone Response Team (TRT), discussed below.

The Telecom/Telephone Response Team (TRT): A Best Practice Strategy of the Priority Queue Dispatch Model

In recent years, telecom (or telephone) response teams have emerged as a best practice manifestation of the Priority Queue Dispatch Model. Telecom Response Teams (TRTs) are situated in police call centres and staffed with "light duties" (or "accommodated") police officers (e.g., officers who are injured, pregnant, etc.).

A recent national survey conducted in the US found that TRTs are used in 77% of the jurisdictions with population counts between 50,000 and 250,000 citizens, and they are used in 93% of the jurisdictions with populations of over 250,000 citizens (McEwen et al., 2003:23).

Within the TRT model, a supervising police member and staff review the calls that have been screened, classified and prioritized by the call-takers and dispatchers to select calls that may be handled by the TRT, namely non-emergency calls that do not require an immediate police response. These calls are removed from the Dispatch Queue and transferred electronically to the TRT Queue, so that they may be dealt with by TRT staff. These include those calls for service where a crime is not in progress, there is no suspect, no-one is injured, there is no evidence and no witnesses. Examples include cases of theft from auto, property damage, stolen vehicles, lost property, and thefts of small value (McEwen et al., 2003:24; Witkin & Guttman, 1996). The TRT Sergeant and staff constantly review the Dispatch Queue, not only for calls suitable for TRT, but also for quality assurance purposes, so as to determine whether any calls need to be upgraded to a higher priority classification for an immediate mobile patrol response (i.e., to arrest a suspect), or whether the calls can be downgraded for a differential police response (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:1). This would include cases in which a police report is required for insurance purposes or for statistical reporting (Kessler, 1993:497; McEwen et al., 2003:9, 23).

The Effectiveness of Differential Response Strategies

Many observers have identified the TRT model as a "win-win" situation for both the police service and the police officers involved since the TRT provides a suitable job

opportunity to the "light duties" officers, and the organization and public continue to benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experience that the officers bring to the position (McEwen et al., 2003:24; Witkin & Guttman, 1996). It has been found that the use of a TRT increases call management efficiency, and decreases the number of calls dispatched to patrol officers (Kessler, 1993:497; McEwen et al., 2003:24; Plecas & Cohen, 2007:2). In many cases, calls can be fully serviced over the phone by TRT staff, but there is always the option of using alternative differential police response strategies if required (Bracey, 1996:156; Plecas & Cohen, 2007:1; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167). In those cases where police officers need to retrieve items of evidentiary value, or callers wish to speak with an officer in-person, appointments may be scheduled for mutually convenient days/times (Kessler, 1993:487; Larson, 1990:5; McEwen et al., 2003:31; Sviridoff, 1982:2). As well, TRT staff may refer callers to outside agencies when appropriate (Bracey, 1996:156; Kessler, 1993:487; Larson, 1990:5; Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:4; McEwen et al., 2003:35; Sviridoff, 1982:2, 25). TRT staff may also suggest to callers that their report simply be completed and submitted to the police by mail or the Internet for later processing (Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167).

Evaluations of differential police response strategies since the mid-1980s have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. More specifically:

1. Differential response strategies facilitate more effective management of patrol resources, thereby decreasing response times for high priority calls and increasing time for proactive policing, and

2. Citizens are pleased with the differential police response strategies if the call-taker: is polite and considerate, explains why there will be a delay in the patrol unit's arrival or, conversely, if the complainant is subsequently contacted by telephone by a police officer who addresses the specific issues surrounding the call (Bracey, 1996:157; Larson, 1985:3; McEwen et al., 2003:9; McEwen et al., 1986:13; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:167).

Interestingly, research studies have found that citizen satisfaction with police response is more dependent on whether or not their expectations were fulfilled (which can be managed by the call-taker who informs them of any delays and explains the cause(s) of the delay), as opposed to the speed of the police response (Bracey, 1996:154; Kennedy, 1993:2; Larson, 1985:4; Sumrall et al., 1981:9; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:168). As well, the adoption of differential response strategies has allowed police officers to engage in more proactive policing activities (McEwen et al., 1986:2, 10).

Differential police response strategies empower police administrators to develop resource allocation policies that increase the chance that their police service will meet the challenge of doing more with less (Kennedy, 1993: 4, 7; Worden & Mastrofski, 1998:187). The most relevant differential police response strategies are to be selected to meet a given community's needs, and then used to develop an integrated police call management model (McEwen et al., 2003:64). When used in this way, patrol officers

are left with more time to respond to true emergencies faster, and more time to engage in proactive, community-based policing (Larson, 1990:5).

Implementation Steps

The implementation of a call management model that includes differential police response strategies requires buy-in from the affected stakeholders, including the police service, communications personnel and the community (Lewin & Acevedo, 1980:25; McEwen et al., 2003:58). Some police services begin by developing a list of the calls that they believe would benefit from a differential police response. This list is then shared with community representatives for input and endorsement. Policies are then developed for call screening, classification, and call prioritization. A fully-developed differential police response plan is required as well (McEwen et al., 1986:14). Once the community endorses the plan, the model is adopted by the dispatch centre, dispatch personnel are trained in the system and performance indicators are established to facilitate an evaluation of the program (see Larson, 1990:5). A public education campaign must follow to ensure that community residents are aware of the new system (e.g., proper use of 911 versus 311, the differential response strategies, the rationale and goals of the initiative, and call response times for the various levels of call priority). These steps are important to ensure that the initiative does not suffer "political fallout" (Mazerolle et al., 2005:7; McEwen et al., 2003:48, 55).

Research studies indicate that the differential police response strategies discussed above quickly decrease the demand posed by calls for service and, in so doing, free-up police resources for high priority calls, without a substantial increase in resource costs (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:4).

Accreditation Programs for Public Safety Communications Centres

The increased focus on dispatch practices has been accompanied by the emergence of processes for accrediting public safety communications centres. Both the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch (NAED) and the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) offer accreditation to public safety communications centres that adhere to their standards/protocols, which are available for purchase from the respective organizations.

The National Academies of Emergency Dispatch (NAED)

The mission of the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch (NAED) is to "advance and support the public safety emergency telecommunications professional and ensure that citizens in need of emergency, health, and social services are matched safely, quickly, and effectively with the most appropriate resource" (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2007).

The goals and objectives of the NAED are:

- "To use and promote the fundamental principles of the scientific method in the pursuit of the Mission."
- "To advocate a single, scientifically defensible protocol which becomes the unifying standard under which all professional emergency dispatchers practice."
- "To advance professionalism within the dispatch community by establishing and promoting an ethics policy as well as minimum standards for curriculum, instruction, certification, recertification, and accreditation of centers."
- "To provide opportunities for members to improve themselves and their organizations through facilitation of communication, providing comprehensive information resources and creating high-quality training and continuing dispatch education through seminars, publications and other media designed to meet our member's needs."
- "To establish and promote a collegial, research-based culture that welcomes the expertise of many disciplines through the creation of standing committees, task forces, and subgroups that reach out to other organizations and advise the Academies."
- "To be recognized as the authoritative, independent voice that represents the emergency dispatcher and enhances the profession" (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2007).

The NAED provide emergency dispatcher (police, fire and medical) certification courses, emergency dispatcher quality assurance courses, dispatch center manager courses and instructor training courses. Their website lists the dates and locations of course offerings; coincidentally, one emergency dispatch certification course will be held in Red Deer from April 11 to 13, 2008 (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2007). The NAED provide accreditation to emergency dispatch centres that use its system (management, training, protocols, etc.) which has been "officially recognized by the Academy as safe, efficient, and effective, and as its standards for emergency dispatch" (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2007; Scott, 2003).

The Southern Alberta OCC is neither involved with, nor accredited by, the NAED.

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA)

Public safety communications accreditation is also provided by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA; www.calea.org), which is located in Fairfax, Virginia. The CALEA Public Safety Communications Accreditation Program provides communications centres with the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to excellence, and limit liability/risk, by way of a systematic review process of its operations against internationally recognized public safety communications standards (CALEA, 2007).

The Southern Alberta OCC is neither involved with, nor accredited by, the CALEA.

Another best practice in police communications centres that is not in place in the Southern Alberta OCC is the use of performance indicators for call management.

A Note on Call-Taker Interactive Script Protocols

It should be noted that there is some controversy over the use of "interactive script" protocols to guide police call-takers when speaking with callers. These scripts traditionally took the form of flip-chart card-sets, with a tab on each card to quickly locate various call types, the contents of which prompted call-takers to ask citizens the correct questions depending on the situation/circumstances, so that information could be gathered most efficiently and in a standardized manner across calls (see Garden Grove Police Department, 1983; Smith, Burrell, Le Gras & Lerner, 2005:3, 5). The interactive script protocols are now often found embedded in call-taking software for call-takers to read from their computer screen when handling a call (Smith at el., 2005:3, 5).

Although there are a number of benefits associated with using an interactive script, including the standardization of protocols, improved quality of service, decreased training requirements, and decreased liability issues, these interactive scripts are most often used to address calls for fire and/or ambulance service (Scott, 2003; Smith at el., 2005:6, 12). In practice, they appear to be an unpopular method of guiding the intake of calls for police service due to their rigidity, and the fact that there are thousands of police call types. These circumstances make it more effective for call-takers to rely on their training and experience to gather information from callers (Scott, 2003).

An Examination of Police Dispatch: Select Case Studies

To explore the potential for developing alternative strategies for police dispatch in the City of Red Deer, the project team examined dispatch services in three locales in Western Canada: 1) the E-Comm facility in Vancouver, British Columbia; 2) the Southeast District (Provincial RCMP) OCC in Kelowna, British Columbia; and 3) the Public Safety Communications (PSC) Centre in Calgary, Alberta. These jurisdictions have all developed innovative approaches to dispatch.

The Emergency Communications Centre (E-Comm) in Vancouver, British Columbia

Background

The Emergency Communications Centre (E-Comm) was created to address the lack of an interoperable radio communications system for emergency service providers in the Greater Vancouver region. Informed by best practice research, E-Comm opened on June 8, 1999 with the intent of providing "one-stop shopping" for all emergency services. More specifically, E-Comm was intended to unify communication service for police, fire and ambulance, and to better coordinate emergency response during incidents that require two or more such services.

Prior to the creation of E-Comm, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) maintained its own dispatch centre, which was operated as a section within the department. The centre was overseen by an Inspector, and a uniformed presence was always "on the floor." Officers working in the dispatch centre utilized a differential police response model.

Operations Management and Governance of the E-Comm Centre

The structures for operations management and governance of E-Comm are illustrated in Figure 5.

With respect to police presence in the E-Comm Centre, there is a VPD Inspector, a VPD Sergeant in charge of communications, a VPD Sergeant in charge of informatics, two VPD Sergeants for the Telecom Response Team (TRT), and a TRT staff of VPD Constables.

The Inspector functions in the role of a liaison between the between VPD and E-Comm, making certain that any issues that arise are resolved, and that positive communication between the two agencies is maintained. The Sergeant in charge of communications is responsible for the daily operational dimensions. Both the Inspector and Administrative

Sergeant stationed at E-Comm are tasked with ensuring that VPD and E-Comm work well together.

Figure 5: Operations Management and Governance of the E-Comm Centre
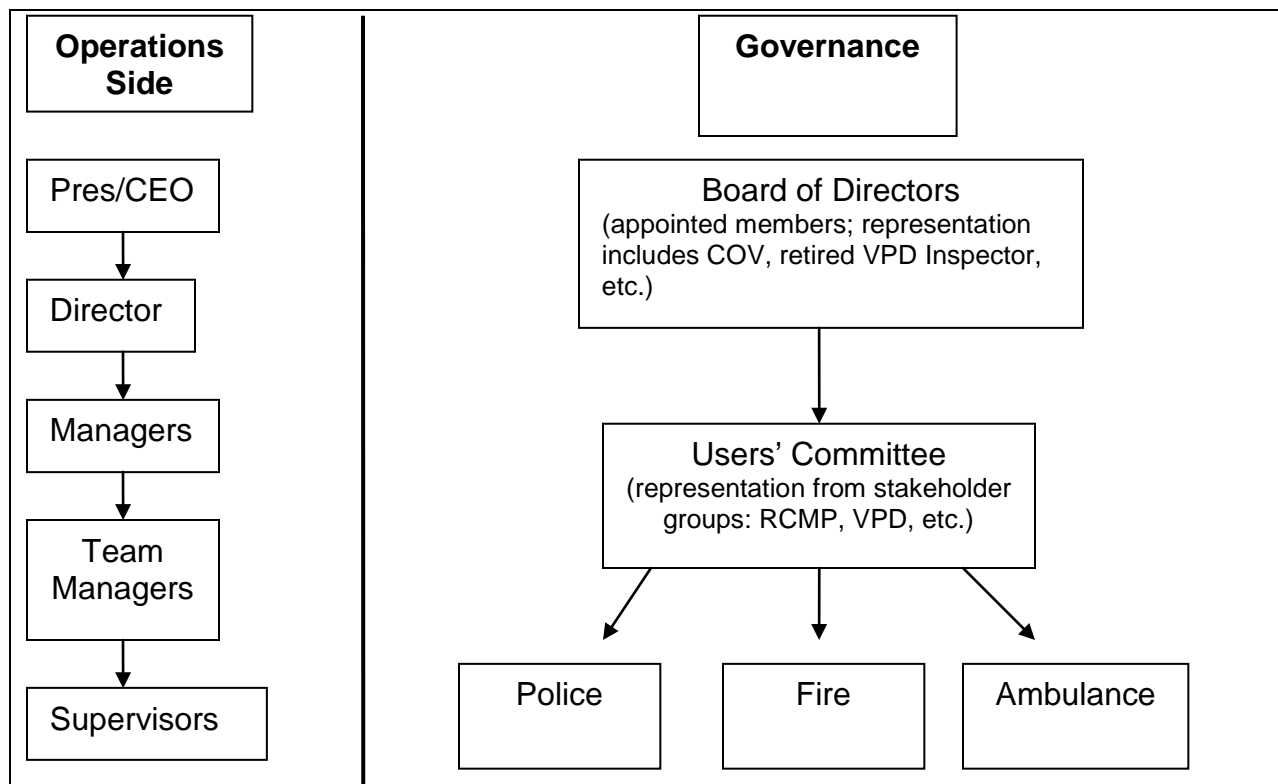
Operation of the E-Comm Centre

E-Comm provides 911 operator ("police, fire, ambulance?") service for the Greater Vancouver Regional District, east to Hope, British Columbia. With respect to emergency service dispatching, the number of cities served is limited, because a number of police, ambulance and fire services have maintained their own dispatch centres. For instance, some RCMP detachments have their own telecom centres, and some fire halls have their own telecom centres. With respect to police service dispatching, E-Comm serves the Vancouver Police Department, Richmond RCMP, Ridge Meadows RCMP, the Railway Police and RCMP 43 (Whistler, Squamish, etc.). The RCMP detachments and municipal police forces in the Greater Vancouver region that are not served by E-Comm have their own telecom centres. As such, E-Comm does not function as a centralized, integrated dispatch centre, as originally designed.

At E-Comm, call-takers and dispatchers are separate entities. The view is that if the two roles were combined, the workload would be too onerous. The Vancouver Police pay for a total of 13 call-takers and 6 dispatchers; at least 4 dispatchers are in operation at any given time, with one dispatcher serving each of the 4 patrol districts in the City of Vancouver.

In addition to call-taking and dispatch service, E-Comm also provides the following services:

- PRIME (CAD/RMS) service for all emergency services in the Lower Mainland;
- Wireless (Wide Area Radio System – "WARS") Transmissions for all emergency services in the Lower Mainland; and
- Equipment leasing for all emergency services in the Lower Mainland.

E-Comm receives over 1,000,000 calls for service per year, 90,000 calls for service per month, and 3,000 calls for service per day. Of the calls received on a daily basis, approximately 1,000 are for the Vancouver Police Department. Of those, 300 are filtered out (duplicate calls, illegitimate, etc.) and 700 calls are routed to the dispatchers. Of the 700 calls, 200 are Priority 1 and 2 calls, and the majority (500/700, or 71%) are Priority 3 and 4 calls (i.e., non-emergencies). The Priority 1 and 2 calls are dispatched for immediate response, and the Priority 3 and 4 calls are handled by the Telecom Response Team (TRT). Of considerable interest to the present study is the way in which non-emergency (Priority 3 and 4) calls for Vancouver Police service are managed, since call management is the main issue in the Red Deer situation. Therefore, the general Vancouver Police dispatch process at E-Comm is presented below, followed by a discussion of the differential police response model that the VPD implemented at E-Comm, namely the TRT.

Call–Taking and Dispatch at E-Comm

Training for the 911 operators is minimal, since there is little involved in responding with "police, fire, ambulance" and then appropriately routing the call. Call-taking and dispatcher training courses are lengthier. Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers are not cross-trained and there is a difference in the training that each group receives. This contrasts with the Calgary dispatch model, wherein all dispatchers are cross-trained to dispatch police, fire, and ambulance.

Despite the original vision that E-Comm would be a centralized dispatch centre, dispatchers are agency-specific, so as to better accommodate the needs of the agencies served. This means that there are agency-specific call-taking procedure manuals, since there are different standards regarding the types of calls to which police services will respond. Indeed, some police services have a "no call too small" policy, while others, including the VPD, will not send a patrol unit to all requests for service. E-Comm is attempting to amalgamate and standardize the policies for all of the jurisdictions.

Procedural changes are implemented by the agency. Whenever the VPD wants a change, for example, they change their own RPM policy, advise E-Comm of the change, and then E-Comm changes their own procedure to reflect VPD procedure. In other words, E-Comm's procedures are dictated by the VPD's Regulations and

Procedures Manual (RPM). The clients of E-Comm are its shareholders (i.e., the police and other emergency response providers) and the public.

Differential Police Response to Calls for Service by the VPD

Figure 6 below illustrates the dispatch process at E-Comm, with a focus on calls for Vancouver Police service. As Figure 6 illustrates, calls for Vancouver Police service are received at E-Comm via the 911 and non-emergency lines, and ultimately routed to Vancouver Police call-takers, who gather information about the calls. The operators differentiate between criminal and civil matters when possible. In cases of calls that are clearly non-police matters, operators use their training and common-sense to decide whether to divert such calls. The centre's policy and procedures manual sets out the types of calls that will be responded to and, conversely, those that shall not receive a response. For example, it would state that if in the case of a motor vehicle accident there are no injuries, no alcohol is involved, and other conditions are met, then the police will not attend. Operators are to alert the supervisor of diverted calls, and of changes in conditions regarding the calls, so as to prevent liability issues.

In the third quarter of 2007, 68% of 911 calls were for police, 27% were for ambulance and 5% were for fire. These figures are for the entire southwest region of British Columbia. Files are created for virtually all police calls for service. The calls are then prioritized by the system (CAD software), by call-type and in accordance with the Provincial standard, not by the operator. Then, the calls are electronically routed to the "Dispatch Queue" (also referred to as the "Dispatch Board"). Since the demand for service usually outnumbers the supply of police patrol resources at any given time, calls for service "stack" in the Dispatch Queue. That is, they accumulate until a dispatcher determines that a patrol unit is available to take call, at which time the call is dispatched. A file number is generated for every call that gets *dispatched*; not all calls for service get file numbers because some calls are re-routed (e.g., bylaw calls, etc.).

Emergency calls are always dispatched over the radio first, and then electronically. When calls are dispatched, they are sent first to a primary patrol unit. Other specialty units may subsequently assist. In certain cases (e.g., no suspect, incident is not in progress; property damage only; low probability of solvability), calls may be dispatched directly to a civilian report-taker. While E-Comm operators cannot cancel calls, this can be done by the Patrol Sergeant or TRT Sergeant. The reason for the call cancellation will be authorized and noted in the file by the Sergeant for future reference.

Since the majority of calls for service received at E-Comm are non-emergency in nature (i.e., Priority 3 and 4 calls), most do not require a patrol response and can be handled over the telephone. To better manage resources and to preserve public safety, the VPD implemented a call management model at E-Comm featuring differential police response strategies, including the creation of a Telephone Response Team (TRT).

Figure 6: The Call-Taking and Dispatch Process at E-Comm, with a Focus on Vancouver Police Department Calls for Service

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              │ ("Police, fire or│          │ Emergency Line   │
              │  ambulance?")    │          │ (604-717-3321)   │
              └──────────────────┘          └──────────────────┘
            ╱          │         ╲
      ┌────────┐   ┌────────┐   ┌────────────┐
      │ Police │   │  Fire  │   │ Ambulance  │
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│ E-Comm  │ │ E-Comm  │ │ E-Comm │ │E-Comm  │   │  E-Comm    │
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│Richmond,│ │White Rock,│
│ etc.)   │ │North Van.,│
└─────────┘ │ etc.)   │
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              ┌──────────────┐
              │  Vancouver   │
              │  Call-taker  │
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              │    Queue     │◀─────│ 3 & 4    │◀─────│  and the    │
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The VPD's Enhanced Call Management System: The Telecom Response Team (TRT)

The VPD's TRT is an excellent complement to the arrangements for dispatch at E-Comm. The TRT is independent of E-Comm and provides an effective and cost-efficient way for VPD to manage an increasing number of calls for service.

The VPD TRT unit is composed of ten light-duties officers during the day, and six officers at night. These officers work under the direction of a Sergeant. All of the officers are cross-trained and can perform the duties of the TRT Sergeant when the Sergeant is away from his/her desk. The VPD TRT workstations are located in E-Comm, in the same large telecom room as the call-takers and dispatchers for the region.

Recall that prioritized calls for service "stack" in the Dispatch Queue while awaiting a police response. The Patrol Sergeant manages this Dispatch Queue. From here, call priorities can be elevated and calls can be cancelled, and this information is reflected on the mobile data terminals of patrol officers. The Dispatch Queue is also where the TRT intervenes to ease the call load on patrol officers, decrease call wait times, increase police response times, and manage police resources efficiently.

The intent is that the Dispatch Queue should not be a "holding-pen" for calls. The TRT Sergeant regularly reviews the prioritization of calls in the Dispatch Queue to double-check and adjust the priorities as necessary. The TRT Sergeant also selects non-emergency calls that are suitable for TRT to handle (e.g., Priority 3 and 4 calls, low level crimes, crimes with video evidence), electronically transferring TRT type calls from the Dispatch Queue to the VPD's TRT Queue called the "S Queue" (i.e., "Supervisor's Queue," which is a component of Versadex CAD).

The selection criteria for TRT calls are calls that can generally be addressed with a non-patrol/telephone response, such as incidents in which there are no suspects, crimes that are not readily solvable, missing person calls, shoplifting calls, or follow-up calls. The TRT does not handle sex offence calls or assaults (such calls get routed to specialty units) or neighbour disputes (calls with long histories are difficult to unravel over the phone). If a call requires a translator, the call is left for patrol. To illustrate, if there was a break and enter report that the TRT Sergeant thought could be most efficiently handled by the TRT, then the TRT Sergeant would electronically transfer the call into the S Queue. If the TRT Sergeant is away from his/her desk, then the TRT staff can perform the Sergeant's duties in that regard. Once the call is in the S Queue, the TRT Sergeant assigns TRT officers to handle the calls as appropriate, or if the TRT Sergeant is away from his/her desk, TRT officers select the calls they want to handle.

The S Queue screen is divided into upper and lower parts: the "TRT Dispatch Queue," and the "TRT Hold Queue," respectively. The TRT Dispatch Queue, which is the upper part of the S Queue screen, contains calls for TRT that can be immediately "dispatched" to TRT staff or a DARS unit (to be discussed in greater detail below). The TRT Hold

Queue of the S Queue stores calls that cannot be immediately dispatched to TRT staff or a DARS unit (e.g., the caller is not home, or an officer is not available to attend a TRT call) – calls are held in the TRT Hold Queue until they can be dispatched to TRT staff or a DARS unit. When the call is in the TRT Hold Queue, it gets assigned a time/date for when the call will return to the TRT Dispatch Queue for attention. TRT staff will call the complainant to confirm that he/she is home before the call is sent back to the TRT Dispatch Queue. In this way, TRT staff members are always aware of the status of the calls. Note that the TRT does not actually "dispatch" calls in the traditional sense of the word; rather, in this context, dispatch refers to responding to the caller via a TRT (differential police response) method.

In this way, patrol units become more available to assist with Priority 1 and 2 calls, as the bulk of the Priority 3 and 4 calls go to the TRT members. This also reduces the amount of time required of police Constables at the scene when conducting follow-up on certain Priority 3 and 4 calls, since the TRT staff will have already completed much of the information-gathering/file populating over the telephone.

It is important to note that the E-Comm operators do not "dispatch" or assign the non-emergency calls to the TRT. Rather, the TRT Sergeant and TRT Constables view the Dispatch Queue and select calls that are suitable for a TRT response. In the words of one VPD Sergeant: "[E-Comm operators] take the calls and leave the police work to the police." That is, E-Comm operators leave the determination of *how* to handle the calls to the police.

In handling the Priority 3 and 4 calls, TRT staff may determine that an officer is required to gather evidence from the scene, or documents/statements must be collected. In those cases, the TRT Sergeant may deploy a "mobile" TRT Constable or request that a District Alternate Response System (DARS) car assist. Mobile TRT Constables are police officers who are fit to go out on the road; some TRT officers are "mobile" and some are not. A DARS car is a 1-officer patrol unit that is assigned by the Patrol Sergeant to spend the shift responding to basically "paper" (report-taking/follow-up) calls as booked/scheduled by the TRT.

On any given day, two patrol units act in the capacity of a DARS car – one patrol unit from the Bravo shift, and one patrol unit from the Charlie shift. Complainants set up an appointment with the DARS car through the TRT. The TRT officer also tells the caller what to bring/have ready for the appointment (e.g., statements, documents, etc.) and books the appointment for a mutually convenient time for the caller and the DARS car. The DARS car can attend the complainant's home/business, or the complainant can meet the DARS unit at the police station. The DARS car duties include picking up statements, follow-up, and even handling entire calls from start to finish. Mobile units are different than DARS units in that TRT Mobile units are made of TRT Constables, while DARS units are made of patrol staff on Bravo and Charlie shifts.

When a call for service must be serviced by a TRT Mobile unit or a DARS car, the call for service is electronically transferred into the TRT Hold Queue. Once the call is ready

for "TRT dispatch" service again, the call is electronically transferred back into the TRT Dispatch Queue to show that the servicing of the call is in progress.

The priority of a call can be raised/lowered at any point in the system. For instance, if a low priority call suddenly has a change in circumstances that raises it to a Priority 1 or 2, the system can deal with it – the call can be transferred to the regular Dispatch Queue for patrol. The system is very flexible. When there are updates to a call, the updates are reflected regardless of where the call happens to be electronically, even if the call is in the TRT Hold Queue. This explains why the queues are constantly being reviewed – to ensure that every call is being dealt with appropriately in real-time. The calls in the queues are constantly being dispatched and refreshed.

To counter liability issues, the VPD directed E-Comm to create a file for every call for Vancouver Police service received. This policy works because the VPD TRT Sergeant subsequently makes the decision as to whether the police will attend, or whether a call will be cancelled; these types of decisions are not be made by a telecom operator. The Patrol Sergeant and/or TRT Sergeant note the reasons why each cancelled call was cancelled in the "Notes" page of the General Occurrence (GO) report.

One VPD Sergeant provided an example of the TRT system in action on Halloween night, which is one of the busiest nights of the year for the VPD, due in large measure to fireworks calls. On this night in 2007, TRT was able to electronically transfer 160 calls from the Dispatch Queue to the S Queue, for attention by the TRT. For those calls, the TRT Sergeant called the complainant back within 5 minutes of their original 911 call and he/she said, "Hi, it's the Vancouver Police returning your call. Are there still problems?" Reportedly, the complainants were very satisfied with this system. Most of the time, the complainants would reply, "the kids moved on" and the patrol dispatch service was not used.

The same VPD Sergeant noted that the VPD now takes *all* calls, serious and less serious, since there is a call management system (TRT) to respond to them. As this Sergeant explained,

> "Before, the system was managing itself – it was a rudderless ship. Only when people complained would a call get managed."

The TRT Sergeant is ultimately responsible for how the call is handled, and for the electronic ("paper") trail that documents how each call is managed. The TRT considers the nature/risk level of the call, along with VPD resources, and takes appropriate action. The TRT has contributed to a decrease in workload.

In sum, the primary functions of the VPD TRT are to:

1. Divert lower-priority calls away from patrol units;

2. Ensure a timely response to lower priority calls for service;

3. Facilitate an appointment with the complainant by a TRT mobile unit or a DARS unit, where required;

4. Initiate a General Occurrence (GO) file that is then sent to patrol. TRT officers can make note of the preliminary facts, enter information such as serial numbers of stolen goods on to CPIC, and then inform the caller that a police officer will attend in two hours; and

5. Complete a full report and investigation on a file. This is often done in fraud cases.

An Evaluation of the VPD TRT Program

A recent evaluation of the VPD's TRT Enhanced Call Management (ECM) system by Plecas and Cohen (2007) found that the system is effective and efficient. Among other things, their examination revealed that between the period November 1, 2006 and April 9, 2007, the VPD's TRT handled the following call types: "Break and Enter (80 per cent), Fraud (11 per cent), Theft (6 per cent), Threatening and Harassment (2 per cent) and Mischief (1 per cent)" (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:2). The analysis of the TRT's ECM was limited to the handling of Break and Enter calls, due to statistical validity considerations (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:2).

Plecas and Cohen (2007) also found that the VPD's TRT ECM resulted in a 73% decrease in response times for Priority 3 and 4 calls, as compared to when the TRT system was not utilized (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:2). Patrol also benefited from the TRT in that 24% of their overall time was freed (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:2). Significantly, Plecas and Cohen noted that their research findings suggest that the implementation of a TRT can be done without a substantial cost increase (Plecas & Cohen, 2007:4).

One VPD Sergeant reported that customer satisfaction levels also increased because TRT officers call back the callers and alter their expectations, by informing them that an officer will not be responding immediately and that it may take several hours. Citizen complaints about dispatch were reduced to virtually nil.

This VPD Sergeant also explained that TRT officers are more productive than the patrol Constables who are out on the road, because they do not have to drive, and the conditions for writing the reports are much better in an office than in a patrol car. The high level of productivity and the success of the TRT appears to be due, at least in part, to ensuring that there is a good "fit" between the police member and the duties of the TRT. This was not always the case.

Although the VPD TRT has been in operation for a number of years, attention has not always been given to the importance of which officers were selected to staff the unit. In the past, there were instances in which the VPD Human Resources Section sent officers to the TRT who were the subject of internal investigations, or who had been emotionally traumatized or physically injured. This staffing practice often did not result in effective performance by TRT members. There was also a widespread perception in

the VPD that officers were assigned to the TRT as a disciplinary measure. As a result, morale among TRT was low and this had a significant impact on productivity. Greater care is now taken by the department in ensuring that there is a "fit" between the VPD officers and the TRT position. Current practice involves HR providing officers to the TRT, including pregnant officers, who have expressed an interest in the position. Productivity is measured, high performers are rewarded, and many police officers now want to work in the TRT.

Interviews with VPD TRT members revealed that they are very pleased with the call management model. One TRT Sergeant identified a number of positive features of the unit:

> "The unit provides an excellent learning opportunity for junior members. When they go back to the field, they know so much more about how to handle a file. They each take different calls, and they get trained in good report-taking. That's a bi-product of the service – it's a double benefit [not only are Priority 3 and 4 calls being dealt with efficiently, but the police officers are learning too]. The benefits of TRT outweigh any costs of the reorganization, and the benefits never go away – they are continual, and they compound. The more experienced TRT staff can train new TRT staff. They all train and learn from each other. Some members have many years on the job, and experience in specialty units, and that all helps too. And, we have the time here to do a good job on the files, in a calm and supportive environment."

A fifteen-year VPD member with a health problem who was assigned to the TRT offered the following observations on the unit:

> "TRT is a good way to use the resources. It frees up the patrol officers to handle the more important calls. TRT Mobile units have recently been added to the model, which allows "mobile" TRT officers [officers capable of going out into the field] to respond in-person to calls. TRT sets up appointments for callers for police service…. TRT can help relieve police officers of calls that would otherwise take hours to do. TRT can cover those calls from start to finish in some cases – calls that would have taken patrol officers off the road for hours. We can write up the report/GO, route the file to the Criminal Harassment Unit, then the police officer there reads the call, sees that so much has already been done, and they just do the follow-up and take the call to the next level. So it's very efficient. We can have statements prepared for the officers, we can get the victim/complainant very prepared by asking them to prepare their statements – it's quicker and faster for everyone. It's very efficient and people are happy. It makes callers feel good that they can speak with a police officer. TRT is a win-win for everyone involved."

Among the less positive features of the TRT identified by some TRT officers were occasional boredom and the desire to be working "on the street." One TRT officer did

note, however, that the six-month rotation worked exceptionally well, with six months being a sufficient length of time for new TRT members to learn the job, gain experience, and then move on to take that knowledge to the street.

Observations on Dispatch in Red Deer

Commenting on the difficulties being experienced in Red Deer due to dispatch service arrangements, a VPD Sergeant noted,

> "Every issue that Red Deer is experiencing we have had here. The police have to change their service provider: the Red Deer RCMP need to go to the OCC and explain how they want the process done."

One VPD Constable noted that a critical difference between the VPD and the Red Deer RCMP, for example, is that 60% of VPD patrol cars are staffed by two officers. These cars are sent to more serious cases such as domestic disputes. The RCMP, in contrast, would have to send two patrol units to deal with one domestic dispute, which affects patrol deployment and the efficient use of patrol resources.

This VPD Constable further observed that creating a new call centre in the Red Deer detachment would not necessarily solve the problems that are being experienced by the OCC. Rather, in his view, the Southern Alberta OCC should continue to provide police dispatch service for the City of Red Deer, but a TRT unit should be created in the OCC. A key issue in this regard is the amount of leverage that the City of Red Deer would have in attempting to have the Southern Alberta OCC alter its dispatch policy and practices to accommodate the needs of the City of Red Deer.

There was a consensus among the VPD officers interviewed for this study that it is imperative that the Southern Alberta OCC develop alternatives for dispatching calls for service. As one VPD Sergeant put it:

> "If the RCMP officers in Red Deer are feeling overwhelmed, it means that there is a mis-management of calls at the OCC. The mis-management of calls is extremely labour intensive – it can waste lots of time and money."

One VPD Sergeant stated that it was understandable why the Southern Alberta OCC developed its current policy to dispatch all calls for service received, since VPD experienced similar issues in the past:

> "E-Comm has been burned in the past with cases that have gone wrong [due to operators not creating files when they should have, or operators making operational police decisions]. If call screening is used, there has to be a clear and defined process for that."

This VPD Sergeant explained that E-Comm operators do not screen calls that require police decision-making. Call screening is handled by police officers working in the TRT.

Indeed, prior to the creation of the TRT, many of the same problems that the City of Red Deer RCMP are currently facing were being experienced by the VPD:

> "Before, we were facing all the same issues that Red Deer is facing. VPD officers were screaming too! They were screaming 'E-Comm has got to screen the calls!' And many Patrol Constables on the road were also saying 'This can be handled by phone.' These issues are being addressed now through TRT, which is not only screening the calls, but also evenly distributing the workload throughout the week so that the lower priority calls are dealt with during less busy times. You need call management, not just call screening. We can't turn away legitimate calls, and we can't overwork the police officers by sending them to report-type calls when they're busy with high priority calls on weekend evenings at 10 p.m."

It was pointed out by the Sergeant that police resources (e.g., TRT staff) should be allocated to the Southern Alberta OCC to manage calls. Someone at the OCC, a Sergeant in charge of a TRT for instance, must have the authority to make decisions regarding call management and call screening. The Sergeant also noted that:

> "When the calls 'go bad' – and they will because that's the nature of the business… there will be calls that go "off the rails" or slip through the cracks or a file not being opened when it should have been – they [call-takers and dispatchers] have to know that they will have the support of their organization – that they will be supported. We get about 1 'bad call' a week here [e.g., goes off the rails or slips through the cracks]. We don't look at it as a disciplinary issue – we look at the process. We ask, 'how could the process be improved?'"

Another VPD Officer agreed:

> "The flow at the Red Deer OCC has to be dictated by the customer: the RCMP. The RCMP's requests to have procedures changed at the OCC need to be honoured."

One VPD Sergeant made a number of important observations about the management of calls and the importance of accountability in this process:

> "Call management can have a lot to do with how departments are perceived. Citizens don't like to get a complete 100% brush-off, but we also can't say that 'we'll attend all events' because there are not enough resources. So, if we can't help a caller, we will always refer them to someone or some agency that can…They are now referring a lot of calls to the Community Police Office (CPO)."

It was suggested by the same VPD Sergeant that the OCC in Red Deer must develop the capacity to cancel calls without assigning them:

"A TRT or Road Sergeant can make that decision. Constables are not allowed to make that decision because they do the work (it's not fair to have Constables make those decisions, because they are supposed to work under supervision, not provide the supervision). [TRT or Road] Sergeants can make those decisions because they have no interest in whether a call is cancelled or not (because canceling calls may mean less work to Constables). Actually, canceling a call creates more work for the Sergeant because all the reasons why the call is being canceled have to be noted in the GO."

The VPD made a presentation on the TRT model in Kelowna, because the Southeast District OCC was also experiencing problems in call management due to a large number of non-emergency calls for police service. At the time, the Kelowna RCMP were attending the scene of every call, which was not effective. For example, the RCMP received a call from a local ski area that a person had lost their skis. So, an officer was sent all the way up the mountain to see for himself that the person's skis were not there. It was realized that this type of practice is a waste of time and resources. Since then, the Kelowna OCC has set up a TRT as part of its call management model. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

The Southeast District RCMP OCC in Kelowna, British Columbia

RCMP OCCs in British Columbia

There are currently six provincially-funded OCCs in British Columbia. These centres are staffed with civilian members who are paid through the provincial policing line rather than by the municipalities. Beginning in 1998, there were a number of amalgamations that resulted in the closing of several small (municipal) OCCs throughout the province, and various other challenges. In addition, a number of RCMP detachments have their own "in-house" (municipal) OCC, paid for by the municipality.

The manner in which the provincial OCCs handle calls for service varies and depends upon the different arrangements for the detachments being served. In the PRIME records system, a General Occurrence (GO) report is always created. In terms of prioritizing calls, the commercial dispatch protocol ("off-the-shelf" flip-charts that tell the operators what to ask the callers, and then determine how the calls should be prioritized) are not used in the OCCs, as these were viewed as more applicable to Fire and Ambulance. Rather, call prioritization and dispatch for the police are done on the basis of training and experience, and also with the aid of PRIME. OCC business processes determine how the low priority calls are dealt with (i.e., whether or not the call is actually dispatched as well). Specifically, whether a call should be dispatched is up to the detachment that will be servicing the call – there are differential police responses for the different detachments, i.e. in some detachments, officers attend every call, while in others, officer workload precludes a member response to all calls for service.

There is one sworn member who works at the Southeast District OCC and functions as the OCC Commander. It was felt that having a sworn member as the leader of the OCC, as opposed to a civilian, would be most beneficial due to the sworn member's connections, understanding, and experience. This officer oversees the OCC and coordinates efforts for more resources, training and funding, etcetera. This is the one central management position that takes ownership of all the issues.

Every OCC has a 911 component. The 911 operators downstream the calls as appropriate to police, fire or ambulance. Police calls are handled at the OCC. The ambulance calls are routed to Kamloops and the calls for Fire are handled on a regional basis as well. All the call routing is done by software; the extensive use of cell phones poses a huge challenge, as it is difficult to trace the caller's identify and location. The OCC also contains a break-out room for critical incident management.

Significantly, most OCCs in British Columbia do not have a call screener ("Report Agent") like the Southeast District OCC. In Kelowna, OCC staff are cross-trained as call-takers and dispatchers. It has only been over the last 2 years that the Southeast District OCC has had 911 operators at the "front-end" (in their building).

Figure 7 illustrates the management structure of the OCCs in British Columbia.

Figure 7: Governance and Oversight of British Columbia OCCs
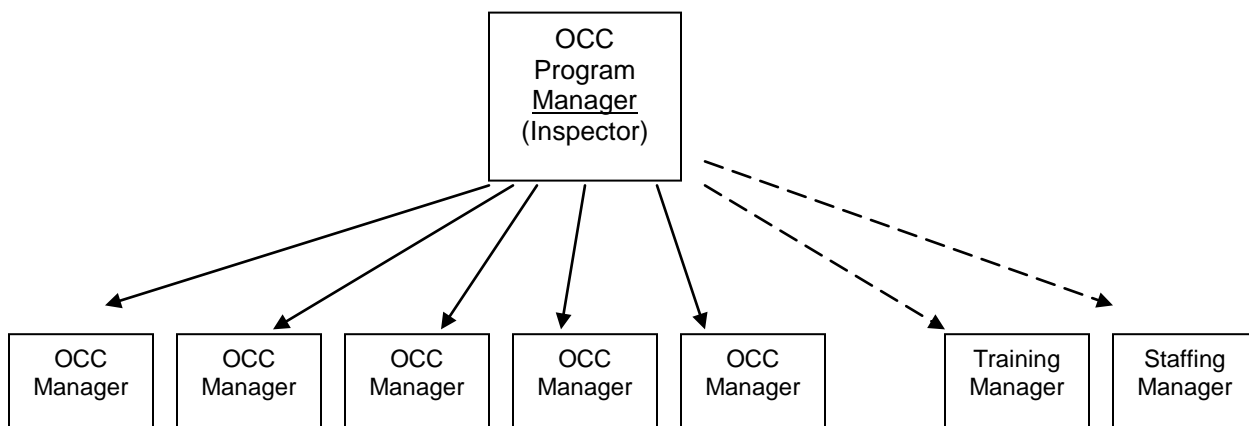
Legend
Solid Line – denotes a direct relationship.
Broken Line – denotes a functional relationship; this is not a "direct-report" relationship, but for all intents and purposes, a functional reporting relationship exists here nonetheless.

It should be noted that the provincial OCCs and municipal OCCs in British Columbia have different organizational structures (compare Figure 8 and Figure 9).

Figure 8: Organizational Structure of Provincial OCCs in British Columbia (e.g., Kelowna and Prince George)
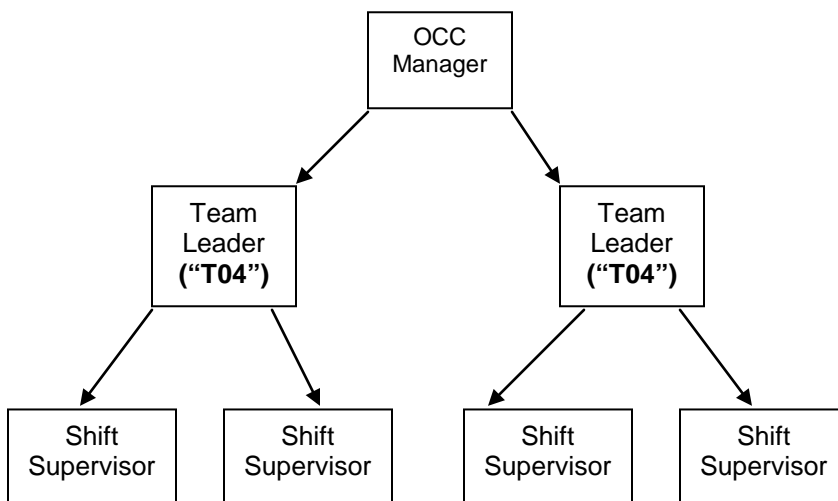
At the larger (provincial) OCC, the OCC Manager is equivalent to an officer, such as a Staff Sergeant. The Team Leader is a middle manager.

Figure 9: Organizational Structure of Municipal OCCs in British Columbia (e.g., Courtenay and Surrey)
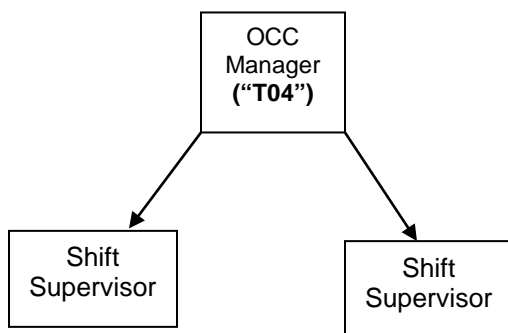
At municipal OCCs, the OCC Manager is equivalent to a provincial OCC Team Leader – the job classification is the same for those two positions – "T04." The creation of these positions (i.e., Team Leader as a "T04," which is equivalent to a manager rank at the small OCCs) is a best practice.

The Southeast District OCC

A site visit was made to the Southeast District (Provincial RCMP) OCC in Kelowna, British Columbia. In addition, information on the Southeast District OCC's business practices was extracted from materials provided by the Southeast District Deputy Leader of RMS Renewal PRIME BC.

The OCC in Kelowna serves 600,000 residents and 49 RCMP detachments in the Southeast District of British Columbia, covering an area of 80,000 square miles. The OCC is divided by function; one area is for dispatching, the other for call-taking. All of the radio positions are divided by region. The Kelowna OCC is an amalgamation of six OCCs.

There is an OCC Management Team, which is composed of all the OCC Managers, the person in charge of training, the staffing manager, the OCC Program Manager, and two policy analysts. This management team has a monthly teleconference, and a yearly meeting, plus numerous visits to the OCCs to deal with issues and managers/personnel. This arrangement has facilitated more communication among the OCCs, because previously, the procedures at the six OCCs were different and not standardized.

There are two Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at the Southeast District OCC: one for the larger detachments and one for the smaller, "no call too small" detachments. The SOPs were written in collaboration with police and OCC staff. Any procedural changes in the OCC are considered within a collaborative context. The OCC will do the research, form a working group, share the findings of the working group with the management team, personnel and detachments. There is police collaboration, input and endorsement throughout the process. Depending upon the particular issue at hand, procedural changes can be initiated from a variety of sources, including the police and external/internal clients. The policy and procedure manuals are in sync with the requirements of the police.

The activities at the Southeast District OCC are divided by function rather than by geography. Since all the call-takers and dispatchers are cross-trained, they can all be used to their full capacity. Indeed, cross-trained staff results in greater efficiencies for both the police and the public, because they can handle calls better. At the Southeast District OCC, they are able to follow the call from beginning to end: the operator that answers the call takes the complaint and they may also dispatch it. This is usually the case in the smaller (municipal) OCCs.

They currently have 22 operators assigned to each Watch: two supervisors, two 911 operators, eight dispatchers, and eight call-takers. They are also understaffed by about 30 employees.

Issues in Dispatch at the Southeast District OCC

During the site visit, the Southeast District OCC personnel identified a number of issues and challenges, including staffing. Many of the issues arose with the amalgamation of the OCCs in British Columbia. Recruitment and retention were identified as two key human resource issues. It was noted that it is a lengthy process (up to one year) to hire and train new operators. Operators are trained at the Pacific Region Training Centre (PRTC) in Chilliwack on a seven-week program. This is followed by three or four

months of coaching at the OCC to which they are assigned. With respect to retention, it was noted that the OCCs in British Columbia have an aging workforce, which makes retirements imminent. Operators are also lost when these persons decide against a career in police dispatch.

The working relationship between the police Constables and the dispatchers was described as "very good." It was noted that there are occasions when police members feel that the radio is not answered quickly enough and that the smaller OCCs tend to give the police Constables more personalized/custom service than the larger OCCs.

Background of the Southeast District OCC's TRC Initiative

The situation in Kelowna which precipitated the development of the TRC initiative was very similar to the current situation in Red Deer: RCMP Unit commanders were upset with the way that the staff of the Southeast District OCC were handling calls for service. More specifically, operators were creating files for, and dispatching, every call received in the OCC. This overwhelmed police officers with a huge volume of calls, many of which were of low priority. This was the primary impetus for a review of the dispatch system in Kelowna. A central question was: "What if the OCC could dispatch 30% less calls?" The review was designed to examine concepts for re-engineering, and for enhancing, service delivery and, more specifically, to re-connect the Southeast District OCC to the detachments and to the public. A key consideration was whether a call management system could be devised that could differentiate/triage calls.

In addition to the concerns of RCMP Unit commanders, there were a number of other factors that precipitated the initiative. These included:

- During the previous two years, there had been three OCC amalgamations;

- As a result of the amalgamations, 22 OCC employees quit work to find work elsewhere. The amalgamations forced many employees to move from their small towns to a larger city centre, because that is where the larger OCCs were established. Since many OCC employees were women, and since many of their husbands had good jobs, they decided not to relocate, but quit instead. In total, this loss amounted to losing 200 years of experience;

- The OCCs experienced a hiring freeze, which resulted in staff shortages;

- Staffing shortages due to retirements and people quitting increased workload dramatically and caused stress, and in turn illness and extended absences, which all led to increased staffing shortages. This remains a problem;

- Inability to supervise because they were so busy. They have tried to address this but have only seen short-term wins and long-term failures;

- A disconnect between the call-takers and dispatchers, which was most evident when there was an increase in the call loads and emergency calls;

- Extreme and erratic call volumes (274,000 events per year, and 1,700 events per day);

- Demand loads on the dispatchers, which was exacerbated because of the reluctance of the police officers to use technology (i.e., using their mobile work terminals to run their own queries);

- The inexperience of the call-takers, with one staff member noting:

  > "Many of the call-takers drive in to work with an "N" (New Driver) sticker on the back of their car. They're inexperienced, not only at the application of the law, but they also have few life skills to draw upon – and they are handling serious calls"

- The lengthy process for hiring dispatchers; and,

- The inflexibility of the CIIDS system, which does not allow the workflow to be configured to triage calls. Regardless of the call priority, the call must get dispatched. When dispatchers receive a call, CIIDS requires that a file be created and, in the words of a Southeast District OCC staff member:

  > "they must dispatch it to get it off their screen – it's the 'convenient' way to deal with a call that they don't know what else to do with."

The view was that the Southeast District OCC's inefficiencies made the RCMP detachments they served inefficient as well.

The call-taking process using CIIDS is illustrated in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Call Path Using CIIDS

911 Call Received

CIIDS – Complaint Taker

Dispatch

PC

Reader

PIRS or PROS
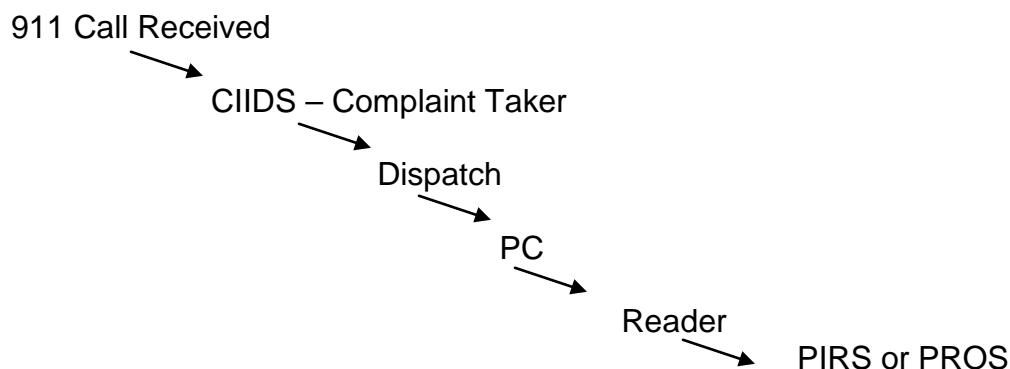
With CIIDS, call-taking and dispatch follow a linear process – once a call gets started on the "conveyor belt," there's no place for it to get off until the end.

The Southeast District OCC's Pilot Telecom Response Centre (TRC) Project

The Kelowna TRC Project Team conducted an environmental scan for 2005-2006 which included an examination of Priority 3 and Priority 4 calls at each RCMP detachment. Priority 1 and Priority 2 calls generally follow a linear path because they are more serious and urgent. In contrast, Priority 3 and Priority 4 calls can have a differential response – many of those calls are requests for a police officer to attend, but they are often routine calls, and so the files ultimately stack. An attempt was made to assess the impact of Priority 3 and Priority 4 calls on workflow. This revealed that the proportion of Priority 1 calls, to Priority 2, 3 and 4 calls was virtually the same for every detachment. The following is the general breakdown of calls for service:

Priority 1 Calls = 2%
Priority 2 Calls = 32%
Priority 3 Calls = 53%
Priority 4 Calls = 15%

This distribution held for most detachments throughout the province, within 1-2 percentage points. The figures also suggested high inter-rater reliability with respect to call prioritization by OCC operators. Priority 3 and 4 calls comprised the bulk of the calls received. For Kelowna, of the approximate 273,720 calls received every year, 180,000 (66%) of them were Priority 3 and 4 calls. If half of those calls were subjected to a differential response path, this would divert approximately 90,000 calls.

According to the staff of the Southeast District OCC, it is important to decide on the core functions of the OCC and satisfy those needs first, before dealing with the other needs. It is also important to recognize that the OCC "can't be everything to everyone." For instance, it was felt that non-emergency calls should go to a different queue than emergency calls. It was also felt that a large stressor for dispatch operators was the number of calls coming in, which could be overwhelming. Diverting the minor, less serious calls would assist in eliminating this stressor. This would also allow the personnel to control the workload, instead of having the workload control the personnel.

Although RCMP policy dictates that a file should be opened for every call, the view of the staff at the Southeast District OCC is that not all calls should be dispatched. In the words of a program manager:

> "Operators have the right to be right, but they don't have the right to be wrong (in determining whether or not to open a file and dispatch). Also, operators are very stressed these days because of their huge workloads. So, we were seeing the operators create files for everything, because that

is the path of least resistance. And this is totally understandable. The question is, once you create a file, what do you do with it?"

This division was the result of consultations with the Detachment Commanders and the realization that, in serving 49 detachments, the Southeast District OCC cannot provide "Ma and Pa" service. The response times to high priority calls were too slow, and there was not enough detail on the files relating to the low priority calls. In the words of one staff member: "At some point, the OCC has to say, "We can't do everything.""

It was also noted that it was difficult for new operators to distinguish between criminal and civil calls, and that there is the question as to whether it is the OCC that should determine whether calls are police related.   As one staff member of the Southeast District OCC noted: "Their [OCC] phones ring all the time, and the police officer on the other end says to the operator, 'Why did you dispatch that?'" It was felt that, since the OCC is paid for by the RCMP, OCC employees believe that they are part of the RCMP. This often results in situations of OCC employees losing perspective and the roles of the Patrol Constable and the OCC dispatcher getting mixed up. An OCC program manager observed:

> "Operators are liaisons. As operators, they are in the business of helping people, but, it would be wrong for an operator to decide not to act on a file. So, the investment we need to sell is, we have two clients (the public and the police), and we need to serve them both…
>
> "A good way to think about this is to say that the OCC is like purgatory – they are neither the public, nor are they the police. However, when an OCC takes a call from the public, they are the police in the public's mind. And when the OCC speaks with the police, they are the public."

This is illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11: The Roles of the OCC Operators
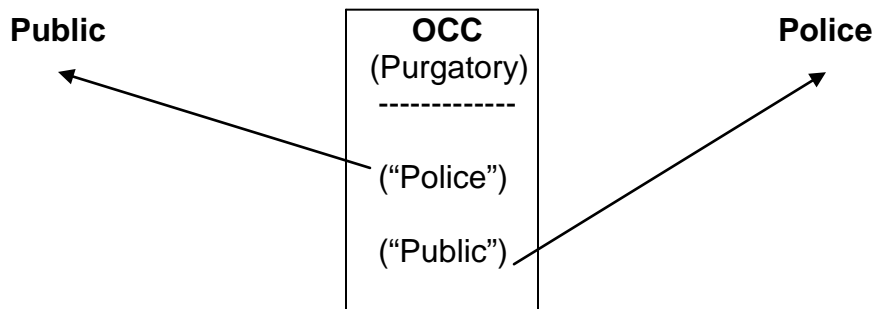
The division of the OCC into a dispatch component and the TRC was viewed as the answer to these dispatch dilemmas. Similarly, the police presence in the OCC was viewed as a necessity because the OCC operators were not trained or in a position to determine what calls to take.

The Southeast District OCC's Telephone Reporting Centre (TRC) Integrated Call
Management System (ICMS)

The TRC in Kelowna is currently being operated on a pilot project basis. It requires the support of both the OCC and police Constables. According to one of the dispatchers, they are currently in the "learning stage":

> "Our plan is holistic, and win-win. In this plan, everyone has a part of the gain. As a dispatcher, we need police officers on the road, because that's how they service the calls. If the police officers are in the office, writing up the trivial stuff, no one gains."

There are currently two former RCMP members working at the TRC in the Southeast District OCC and an additional 2-4 retired RCMP members will be hired in the near future.

The Southeast District OCC's Telephone Reporting Centre (TRC) is modeled on the Telecom Response Team (TRT) that operates at E-COMM in Vancouver, and a similar model operated by the police in London, Ontario.

The focus of the TRC's "Integrated Call Management System" is on Priority 3 and Priority 4 calls for service. The primary objective for these calls is gathering information. The Integrated Call Manager assigns a priority level to these calls and triages calls for service that are received by the OCC. The goal is to eliminate "convenience dispatching" and, in so doing, to assist those parties "downstream" from the dispatch centre.

A key role in the ICMS is played by the Integrated Call Manager. The Integrated Call Manager is a light-duties, or retired, RCMP member. The role of the Integrated Call Manager is to manage the call and decide the path the call will take, and the appropriate level of response for the call. The Integrated Call Manager can also work in the Investigation Unit (e.g., Internet Fraud, etc.). For example, if a caller says that they received an e-mail from Kenya and that they are being invited to pay $5,000 to claim an eventual $1,000,000, and that call is put through the call path, traditionally a police Constable would be dispatched to the residence, only to arrive and say "Sorry, I can't help you." With the TRC, the call would be handled by a police Constable who would be able to make a decision about the call and the most appropriate manner in which to respond.

It was also noted by Southeast District OCC staff that the Integrated Call Manager working in the OCC is also a point of immediate supervision and a mentor for the police Constables. This is particularly helpful for those police Constables who are working in small detachments and who may not have a supervisor working with them. These officers can call the OCC and speak with the Integrated Call Manager for guidance in certain cases. The Integrated Call Manager can also serve this function for police Constables who are out on the road and who require immediate advice, in response to

questions like 'Which road should I go down to set up a containment?' It is also anticipated that the Integrated Call Manager will provide continuity and quality assurance, which is enhanced by the fact that the call manager has police experience. In short, the Integrated Call Manager will be a resource for both personnel at the OCC and police officers on the road.

The duties and activities of the Integrated Call Manager in the Kelowna model can be summarized as follows:

- Serves as call manager and resource manager;
- Conducts telephone investigations;
- Provides supervision;
- Preloads data – starts the GO (General Occurrence file) so that when the police Constable arrives on scene, the file has been opened;
- Organizes appointments and resources – makes appointments with citizens so that someone will be able to help them at the detachment, or makes appointments for police officers to see the citizens at their homes. Booking appointments with clients allows them to distribute workflow more evenly throughout the busy and less busy times of the day and week; and
- Serves as a direct point of contact between the police and the public, because the Integrated Call Manager is a part of the police.

The overall objective of the Integrated Call Manager is to streamline calls for service in a manner so as to maximize the number of single contact reports, i.e. to streamline the calls so as to identify all of those calls that are eligible for TRC service, and then to effectively respond to those calls.

The Goals of the Integrated Call Management System (ICMS)

Staff at the Southeast District OCC identified a number of goals for the ICMS, which is designed to facilitate differential call management. These include:

1. Streamlining workflow to maximize efficiency. This includes finding the shortest path for call response and assigning the appropriate service levels.

2. Capturing data in a timely manner, including timely information-sharing and the elimination of unnecessary burdens on operational resources.

3. Minimizing the waste of resources, in particular the "3 Ds": delay, duplication and disgruntled clients.

4. Organizing the efficient deployment of resources. For example, community residents call the police for a theft from auto, or for a file number, or for insurance purposes. Why should a police Constable attend those calls when there are more efficient ways to respond?

Figure 12 below illustrates the call path using a TRC/Integrated Call Management Model.

Figure 12: The Call Path Using a TRC/Integrated Call Management Model

911 Call Received ("Police, fire or ambulance?")

CAD – "Report Agent"
(~ The Report Agents determine the priority of the calls on the basis of experience, and also with the assistance of the CAD/PRIME system. They have less training than a complaint taker).

Priority 1 & 2 Calls (*about 34% of calls*)   Priority 3 & 4 Calls (*about 66% of calls*)

Conclude

Integrated Call Manager
Queue monitored by the
Integrated Call Manager

~ The Integrated Call Manager
uses both CAD and PRIME

Call/Complaint-Taker

Investigate

Preload Data

Book Appointment

Dispatch

The Integrated Call Manager can provide information and give advice to community residents via the telephone and can also gather information from callers. If the Integrated Call Manager decides that police attendance is required, then he/she can re-route the call to dispatch, with a pre-populated GO, with most of the paperwork completed. This decreases the amount of time the police Constables have to spend on the calls. This also serves to decrease the workload of the police Constables while at the same time increasing the amount of information that is gathered for intelligence purposes. The Integrated Call Manager can also make appointments for callers to come into the detachment, which is an additional way in which intelligence may be gathered.

Workflow: TRC/Integrated Call Manager and CAD

The plan at the Southeast District OCC is to eventually divide the OCC into two components:

1. **The Telecom Response Centre and Front Counter.** This is the informational side of the enterprise and is overseen by the Integrated Call Manager. Having this capacity provides a better opportunity than currently exists to train new employees.   This

component is focused on gathering detailed information for police Constables and, as well, pre-populating General Occurrence reports. It can also serve as an "overflow" pod for dispatch. These activities will allow the higher priority calls to be better addressed. Additionally, from a cost perspective, the "report agents" who work on this side of the OCC can be paid $20 per hour, rather than the $30 per hour that is paid to dispatchers.

2. **The Operational Side (CAD).** It is anticipated that this arrangement in the Southeast District OCC will facilitate better workflow. It was pointed out that there is no issue in managing Priority 1 and 2 calls, because Priority 1 and 2 calls will always, and rightly, go down that linear call path, because they are absolute and the most urgent. The problem is determining how to best manage Priority 3 and 4 calls to overcome the challenges and resource implications of "convenience dispatching." The TRC model is designed to address the problems that have been experienced by the Southeast District OCC, i.e. the inflexibility of CIIDS, the chronic shortage of employees, the high demand loads, and employee stress.

In summary, the Integrated Call Management System that has been introduced on a pilot-project basis at the Southeast District OCC is designed to:

- provide an alternate path for Priority 3 and 4 complaints;
- focus efforts where resources are most vulnerable to additional workload; and,
- share resources.

In turn, it is anticipated that this will:

- bolster the image of the RCMP;
- improve levels of service; and,
- minimize call loads.

The Integrated Call Management System also provides a number of new opportunities, including:

- Internet reporting, which is currently being used by some detachments, but not to full advantage;

- "311" call-line complaint reporting, a non-emergency direct line that reduces duplicate workload;

- Enhance the TRC training environment, with data-entry skills being taught and the potential for another job classification; and

- Reducing costs of dispatch.

The TRC is designed to benefit the community, the dispatchers, and the police. The Southeast District OCC will still receive all calls for service. The question is "How are the calls going to be managed once they are taken?" In the words of one staff member:

"If we continue to do it the old way, we will fail." The provincially-mandated PRIME records management system is viewed as providing the opportunity for the Southeast District OCC to reorganize/re-align the OCC's business practices and to "work smarter, not harder."

Personnel involved in the Southeast District OCC's TRC pilot project identified the important role of the Integrated Call Manager in managing calls for service. A primary concern, and driver, for the Southeast District OCC pilot project was the effective response to calls for service and the importance of devising an effective capacity that was resource-efficient. As one staff member involved in the pilot project stated:

> "Is it appropriate to send a police officer, with a gun, an expensive car, pepper spray, etc., across town to pick up a fraudulent cheque? No! The madness has to stop! They [OCC] will still take the call, but it has to be dealt with differently. When it comes to the responsibility of determining what to do, that's where the Integrated Call Manager will take over."

The combination of the TRC and an Integrated Call Manager results in a "win-win" situation. In the view of the Southeast District OCC staff, it was not good practice to "file load" (i.e., overwhelm the police Constables with files), since they will not be able to attend all of the calls in any event. Given the increasing workload, it is necessary to change the business process in order to deliver the same level of service.

Positive and Less-Positive Features of Dispatch in Kelowna

Among the more positive features of the current arrangements for dispatch in Kelowna, as identified by a staff person, are that technology has allowed for a better delivery of services. In addition, education is allowing for better service to the public and the police. Upgrades to the Southeast District OCC have made it a positive place to work, as additional resources and funding have been provided for the centre. As well, attention has been given to building relationships with external agencies such as fire services.

Among the less positive features of the current arrangements for dispatch is the challenge of ensuring minimum staffing levels. There are health and stress issues among employees and it is difficult to control staffing levels because people quit for their own reasons, and then the employees they leave behind get over-worked and sick as a result (causing more to quit). Moreover, although the Southeast District OCC represents the amalgamation of six OCCs into one, the resources from the previous six have not been put directly into the one.

Key Issues Going Forward

A number of key issues surrounding the operation of the Southeast District OCC were identified that will require attention. These include resources, improving recruitment and retention, clarifying 911 arrangements with the regional districts, considering the efficiencies of the current and other integrations, continually monitoring business processes around PRIME to enhance efficiencies, and continuing to ensure strong teams and good morale. The intent is to use the TRC model in other OCCs. Also, there is an ongoing examination of workload, call volume and complaint patterns in light of staffing levels and resources.

"Words of Wisdom" to Inform the Red Deer Situation

The view was expressed that the Southern Alberta OCC is currently dispatching all calls received for "survival" - there is no other choice since they are using CIIDS, which does not easily facilitate call triaging, and they do not want to get "burned" again.

Southeast District OCC personnel suggested that consideration be given to creating separate SOPs for large and small detachments, and developing a more efficient management structure. In addition, it was suggested that the OCC manager work with the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP, to improve the dispatch process, if this is not already being done. It was also suggested that the Southern Alberta OCC could divide into two units, one for dispatch and the other for TRC (TRT). Further, a police presence is required in the Southern Alberta OCC to assist the OCC operators.

With respect to the differences between the police and telecom staff in Red Deer regarding practices and/or preferences in dispatch/reporting practices, and the question of "whose way takes precedence?," one RCMP Inspector from E Division observed, "It shouldn't get to the point where there's a disagreement – somewhere up the chain-of-command the decision will be made."

The Public Safety Communications Centre in Calgary, Alberta

The Public Safety Communications Centre (PSC) telecom initiative in Calgary began in 2002. It was initially put as a challenge to Fire/EMS (in terms of municipal government relations), since there was friction between Fire and EMS. The then-chief of the Calgary Police Service (CPS) decided to address this situation by integrating the communications centres. Police then became involved, agreed to participate and asked an Inspector at the time to make it happen, but, some Human Resource related issues arose, and the progress on the PSC was stalled. Despite this, the police pursued integration in its truest sense, while maintaining two separate sections – one for Police (call-takers/ dispatchers), and one for Fire/EMS (call-takers/dispatchers).

Calgary's review of the different emergency response telecom models determined that there was no consistent model of practice, or best practice. The view was that the new Calgary dispatch arrangements would be an integrated model in which all dispatchers are on the same floor, in the same room, and fully cross-trained.

Background of the Calgary PSC

In March 2006, the Calgary Police Service's Communications Section physically moved to the City of Calgary's PSC building, with a goal of complete integration by 2008. Prior to that, the CPS maintained its own Communications Section. Although this arrangement was working for the police, there were technology limitations surrounding the non-emergency call-taking/dispatch services. The PSC serves Calgary for policing, as well as several other areas for Fire/EMS.

A business case was developed, which examined best practices, but at the end of the day, the Calgary PSC's integration model will probably end up being the best practice.

Figure 13 illustrates the operation of the Calgary Telecom Centre.

Figure 13: The Calgary Telecom Centre
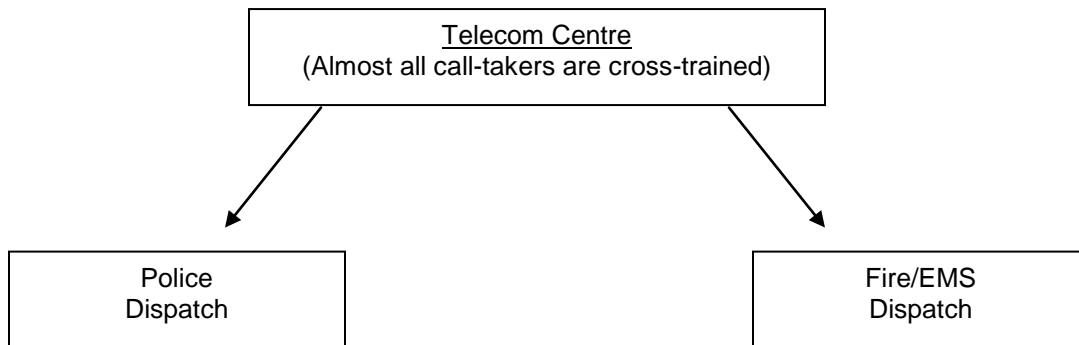
The police component of the PSC serves just the City of Calgary, and as such, the operators are assigned to one of eight districts in the city. The Fire/EMS side of the PSC serves the City of Calgary and surrounding areas.

Oversight/Management

Oversight of the telecom centre is provided by the PSC's Board of Governors, which is comprised of the Police Chief, Fire Chief, EMS Chief and Chief Technology Officer. The chain of command of the telecom centre is illustrated in Figure 14 below.

There are three sworn police members who work at the telecom centre: an Inspector, a Staff Sergeant, and a police Constable. There are no police supervisors, *per se*; instead, civilian supervisors are utilized for call screening. There are no police officers

in the chain of command, since the Calgary Police Service's Communications Section civilianized in 1986.

Figure 14: The Chain of Command at the Calgary PSC

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        ┌─────────────────┐
        │   PSC Manager   │
        └─────────────────┘
                 ▲
        ┌─────────────────┐
        │Operations Manager│
        └─────────────────┘
                 ▲
        ┌─────────────────┐
        │  Shift Manager  │
        └─────────────────┘
                 ▲
        ┌─────────────────┐
        │   Supervisors   │
        │  (Team Leads)   │
        └─────────────────┘
```
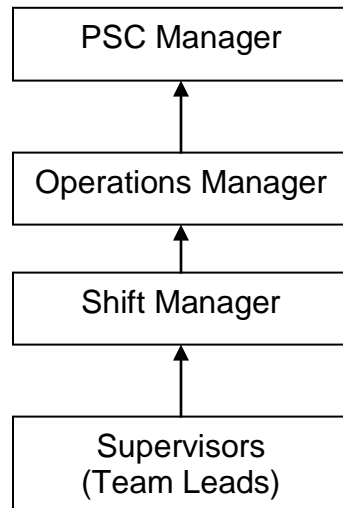
Policy and procedure for the center is set out in the PSC Policy and Procedure Manual, which aligns with the CPS's Communications Section Policy and Procedure Manual. In the CPS Policy and Procedure Manual, numerous sections relate to communications. The PSC takes all of those statements and translates them into its own procedure. This raises the question as to whether the City of Red Deer RCMP have a policy and procedure manual that could be shared with the Southern Alberta OCC and incorporated into their operations.

The development of the new dispatch model in Calgary and the alignment of policies and procedures have involved close collaboration between telecom staff and the police. This appears to be a critical factor in ensuring that dispatch centres operate effectively and efficiently. In Calgary, there is open dialogue between the CPS and the PSC to provide for changes in dispatch and reporting procedure. The CPS views its relationship with the PSC as a *partnership*, since the CPS gives up members and part of its budget to help provide a better service at the PSC. The PSC operators view the emergency service providers and the public as its clients.

The Design of the PSC

The design of the PSC was based on the recommendations/standards from the different agencies that the PSC serves. For example, the police wanted double-locked doors in the building for security. There is also CCTV in the building. Notwithstanding the above, there were some design constraints, since the facility was built in a pre-existing city building. All the electrical wiring for the telecom is run under the floor. There is a total of 50 workstation positions in the centre. The lighting levels are uniform across the floor, in accordance with the Health & Safety regulations for offices. Workstations are

larger than normal and ergonomically designed to accommodate 95% of the population. There are two work surfaces to each desk (similar in design to a piano organ, with one desk surface at the usual level, and another desk surface above that by a few inches and set back by a few inches). The monitors are placed on the higher desk surface, and the keyboard is placed on the lower desk surface. The floor design has the potential to accommodate up to 23 additional work stations. The set-up of a new workstation requires only lifting the floor tiles to access the wiring; the desk, telephone, and computer terminals are set-up overtop.

Information sessions were held with staff to ensure that there was input at every stage of the call centre's development, including the layout of the building, the finishes, carpet choices, desk styles, equipment demands (dual or triple CAD, etc.). A Request For Proposal (RFP) was posted, quotes were obtained, and different styles of desks were built and prototyped. The desks were then tested by the staff, according to various criteria, such as technical specifications and physical comfort, to determine employee preferences.

It was subsequently determined that the employees wanted large work surfaces and independent monitors on the work surfaces. The desk that was selected is fully adjustable for height, which allows employees to raise the desk surfaces with the monitors and keyboards to allow them to work while standing, should they choose to do so.

There are sound detectors in the ceiling tiles that sense and measure noise levels, and emit white noise and frequencies to cancel out noise so that it remains quiet in the room.

The standard dispatch pod has three screens/monitors, a separate computer for e-mail, and a fourth screen for the radio. There are spare workstations for excess capacity and for backup in case a pod breaks down.

The supervisory pod is located in the middle of the room. There are separate supervisors for the Police and for "PSC" (a term that is often used to refer to the Fire/EMS part of the service as well as the name of the organization). There are two Police supervisors at any given time – one for call-taking/evaluating and one for dispatch. For the Police operation, there is a Resource Officer position, which is staffed by an operator who sits at a pod near the rest of the pods, but does not perform call-taking or dispatching. The Resource Officer takes requests from Patrol Constables in the field, including requests for information and CPIC queries. As of November 2007, the tasks of this position were under review to determine whether these functions could be distributed to other operators.

Call-taking and Dispatch

There are three types of dispatch that are carried out at the PSC: Police, Fire and EMS. As of November 2007, there were five persons working in the Fire/EMS dispatch component out of a possible total of eight, and four persons working in police dispatch positions, out of a possible total of eight. Even though the police operators process more calls than Fire/EMS, there are more Fire/EMS operators than police operators. This is because the police operators serve only the Calgary Police Service, while the Fire/EMS operators serve 15 Fire agencies, and 5 EMS agencies – granted, most of these are small departments.

In the middle of the room, there is a large video monitor, about 4 feet by 3 feet, hanging from the ceiling, that can display up to four images on one screen. It monitors the telephone system, allowing a supervisor to view all activity in the room, in terms of the workloads of the operators, in real-time.

Call-takers/evaluators prioritize the calls on the basis of the answers they receive from the callers in response to their questions. Fire/EMS has a structured protocol for handling a call. These personnel use an internationally recognized call evaluation protocol, which is a manual of cue cards, organized by call type, that lists the questions that the operator must ask the caller, and in the order that the questions must be asked. The manual shows what the call priority should be depending on the answers received (e.g., if the person is not breathing, then it is a Priority 1 call). These standards are defendable in court, and signed by the director of EMS. Also, the computer system is programmed to prioritize the call – CAD automatically assigns call priorities depending on the information that is entered. The Call Evaluation Protocol and CAD system are in consonance with each other in terms of the rules used to identify call priorities.

Police operators in Calgary do not have a structured protocol, but rather prioritize the calls on the basis of experience and training, which means that there is a great deal of subjectivity in this process. Police operators do not use a standard, purchased call-taking/dispatching protocol like Fire/EMS because it is expensive. Instead, the Calgary Police Service (CPS) developed a flip-card system – a flip-chart system that is comparable to the Fire/EMS system – with tabs on each page to quickly access the call-taking protocol by call type. However, call prioritization for police calls remains subjective because the cards developed by the CPS do not list what the call priority should be depending on the answers received from the caller.

Police operators have a uniformed member to oversee operations, but this member's role is a resource-allocation function as opposed to call supervision. Operational police management is done by the district Sergeant. The view is that it is not a good idea to integrate the field dispatch functions, because the functions are so different.

In the PSC, calls for service statistics cannot be broken down by Fire versus EMS, because those two services are integrated. In fact, once integration is complete at the

PSC, statistics will not be available on the number of calls for police service either. Management at the PSC explained that this "…is fine, because *the police* are the ones who should decide what services are dispatched." So, in the future, PSC statistics will be kept on the number of units dispatched, and not the calls for service received.

From May 2007 to September 2007, 208,325 emergency calls for service were received, with the breakdown as follows:

- 96,480 were for the police (46%)
- 111,845 were for Fire/EMS (54%).

The non-emergency side is accessed by callers through a seven digit phone number. From May 2007 to September 2007, a total of 272,158 non-emergency calls were received, broken down as follows:

- 218,490 were for the police (80%)
- 51,555 were for fire/EMS (19%).

Risk Factors and Dispatch

Figure 15 sets out the risk levels in call management at telecom centres, by dispatch method.

Figure 15: Risk Levels in Call Management at Telecom Centres, by Dispatch Method

- At this level, the risk is high because dispatch is based on the experience of a call evaluator and dispatcher.

- At this level, the risk is lower because dispatch is done according to a protocol, such as the NAED-EPD (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch – Emergency Police Dispatch).
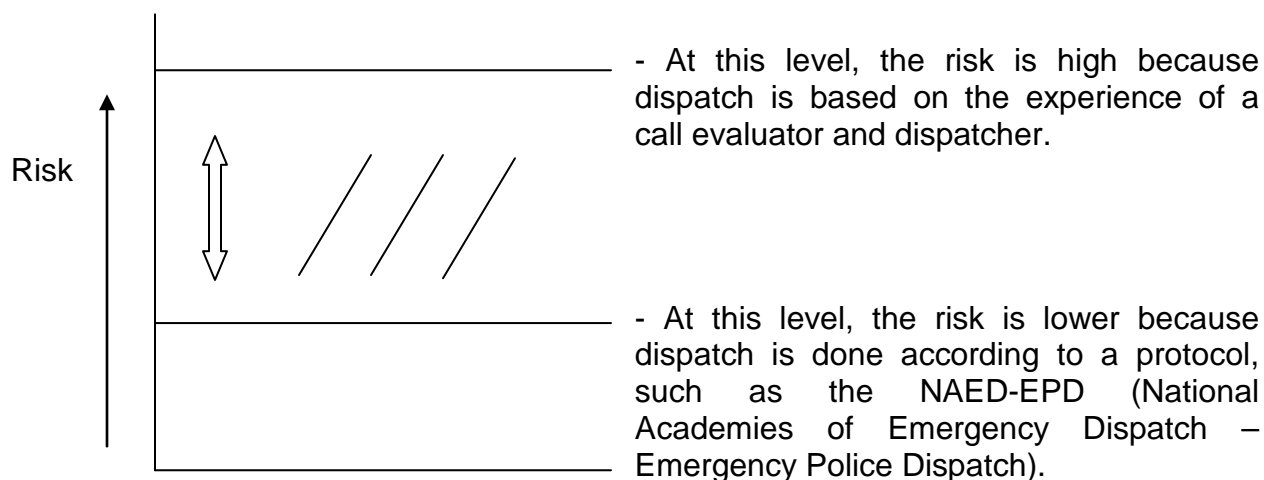
Some risk/responsibility must be assumed at the telecom. To minimize risk, the call-taking and dispatching protocols used must be standardized. Notwithstanding the above, PSC Management explained that they often use the phrase "when in doubt,

send them out" – they figure that it is better to consume some time and have a field unit make a determination, rather than make a mistake.

The Dispatchers

In the telecom centre, one dispatcher may handle as many as two districts, so a dispatcher may handle up to 30 units. This would vary by the time of day. A file is not created on every call for service that is received; the decision to divert a call depends on the nature of the complaint/concern. Of the 800,000 calls for service received per year, only 27% of the police calls get dispatched. There is also the capacity to take reports over the telephone; about 28,000 calls (police reports) are taken per year in this manner.

Patrol cars are not dispatched for all requests for service since there are alternative avenues for service, such as the 311 information line and the Victim Direct Voice Entry system (VDVE). Introduced to Calgary in 2005, the 311 line handles calls regarding city services, such as by-laws, parks and recreation. The VDVE is a voice automated system that collects information from complainants relating to administrative type files, such as lost wallet reports. The VDVE is the closest thing that the PSC has to a permanent TRT since it is used when PSC operators do not have the time to direct-enter a report concerning a call for service that does not require a patrol response. In the near future, the capacity for on-line reporting will also be available.

It was noted that it was important for police services to develop alternative avenues, such as front counters, having civilians handle calls, and on-line reporting. In the words of one Calgary police officer involved in the dispatch centre:

> "If the police are attending calls 80% of the time, they are being worked too hard. Attending calls 60% of the time would be better, and it would allow 40% of the day for other tasks [such as proactive policing]."

Emergency calls are received through 911, and each agency has their own non-emergency number. At one point, non-emergency calls for police service accounted for 80% of all calls for service received, and some true emergency calls were getting "stacked" as a result. To address this issue, the PSC created a dedicated "Police Emergency Queue," which would only handle emergency calls. In addition, they developed an overflow capacity, whereby operators dedicated to answering non-emergency calls may assist in call-taking for emergency calls when necessary. Moreover, if someone calls 911 with a non-emergency, the call-taker will ask them to call the non-emergency line, so as not to "tie up" the 911 line. Interestingly, despite the move toward the integrated "3-in-1" (police, fire, ambulance) dispatch, the Calgary PSC does not have a permanent TRT unit in place; light-duties officers only assume that role in the call centre from time to time.

The dispatchers and "call evaluators" (call-takers) determine the priority of each call, although the policy is established by the police. The police determine the types of calls that are to be classified as Priority 1, 2 or 3. Call prioritization is done by the operators on the basis of their knowledge of the facts of the call and their training.

At present, there are call evaluators and dispatchers on the police side, although many of the employees can perform both roles. The view of the Calgary police is that the two functions must be divided for "big city" policing (one person cannot perform both the call-taking and dispatch functions for one call), because otherwise, staff will get "tied up" on non-emergency calls, which would create a bottleneck that would jeopardize public safety. Moreover, in their view, if one person was performing both functions for one call, it would increase the risk of making a wrong/bad decision, and it would impact response times.

On the Fire/EMS side, however, all of the staff are cross-trained; they can dispatch for Fire/EMS and they can dispatch for police. Perhaps, in 10 years from now, all PSC operators will be able to perform all the jobs.

Significantly, the PSC's policy and procedure manual states the calls that police will attend and the call types for which they will take information.

The Integration Model

The Calgary model is one of integration within Public Safety Communications (PSC). This means that the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP; 911 calls) is Public Safety Communications. All emergency and non-emergency calls for service are processed by a single agent and routed to a specialized functional specialist dispatcher (police/PSC). Call evaluators are trained to process any type of emergency and non-emergency call. Dispatch functions remain specialized in two areas (Police and Fire/EMS). A common technology platform services the needs of each of the three emergency services and facilitates interoperability.

Dispatch Service Arrangements

- 911 calls are answered by the PSAP;
- Police, Fire or EMS call centres may be PSAPs or SSAPs;
- 911 calls are typically transferred to a secondary agency-specific location; and
- Staffing calculations range from 'flintstone' methods to erlang C.

Benefits of Integration

Personnel at the Calgary PSC identified a number of benefits of an integrated model of dispatch. These include:

Efficient Call Processing

Previously, 911 calls were always received at the PSAP and then routed to the appropriate agency – a process that wastes valuable seconds in some cases. With integration, all emergency call processing is handled by one person at the PSC, without transfer, and then routed to the appropriate agency dispatcher.

Economy of Scale

Technology is installed or upgraded at a single point. For example, CAD is currently being upgraded and requires upgrading on the CPS and PSC sides. Thousands of dollars can be saved through a single, as opposed to dual, upgrade. Resources are allocated more evenly. Automated Call Distribution (ACD) keeps track of agent and agency utilization rates, which vary significantly between Police, Fire and EMS. Agent Utilization Rates will even-out over time and reduce staffing requirements.

Frontline Service Enhancement

Dispatch workload analysis will occur, allowing for staffing needs to be tailored to meet workload demands. Currently, there are no accurate measures for estimating dispatcher requirements. Call evaluation and dispatch performance is established through protocol development and delivery (National Academies of Emergency Police Dispatch, 2007). This is a risk reduction strategy.

Enhanced Opportunities for Interoperability

There are six channels on B channel (two Command and four Operational) for joint Incident Management (small, medium and large scale).

Downstream Efficiencies

Functional integration can occur at the frontline service delivery level. This becomes an important contingency if demographics and labour conditions culminate to reduce overall emergency response capacity.

Industry Influence

An integrated Calgary PSC will provide for a much stronger emergency service voice at the National level. Policy making at the national level will be significantly influenced by Calgary, more so than anywhere else in Canada.

Key Issues Going Forward

Similar to other communications centres, the Calgary PSC experiences challenges in recruiting and retaining dispatchers. There is a need for more dispatchers, so as to reduce the stress levels among the current operators and to reduce the costs of overtime. There is also a need to ensure that the various systems can all "speak" to one another.

"Words of Wisdom" to Inform the Red Deer Situation

PSC management offered a number of suggestions with respect to addressing the issues surrounding dispatch for the City of Red Deer. There was a general view that the core and secondary functions of the Southern Alberta OCC need to be identified. Secondary functions, on the other hand, may turn out to be a question of "want" versus "need." The focus should be on creating a world-class system, and not letting other things get in the way.

They also observed that, given the Southern Alberta OCC's present dispatch arrangements, whereby virtually all calls for service are prompting the creation of a file and the dispatch of a patrol unit, it is almost a requirement to send a police Constable to determine what is occurring at the scene. It is difficult for the police to cancel calls once they are created without good reason and without knowing for sure that the call can appropriately be cancelled.

They also observed that creating a dispatch centre in the RCMP detachment in Red Deer (i.e., a municipal OCC) would be very costly and would not make sense given economies of scale. Instead, it was suggested that City of Red Deer RCMP officers be placed in the Southern Alberta OCC:

> "Someone has just got to get tough and say that 'the RCMP needs representation in the OCC,' because how will anyone ever be able to determine whether what the OCC says is 'not do-able' is in fact do-able? Someone needs to challenge the OCC's policy and procedure."

In addition to physical representation in the Southern Alberta OCC, the City of Red Deer RCMP detachment's policy and procedure must be incorporated into the protocol of the OCC. As another interviewee from the Calgary PSC put it:

> "They need a structured protocol that's agreed to by both the OCC and the RCMP… The OCC operators should be following a set protocol. The Red Deer RCMP need to say to the OCC 'These are the calls we'll respond to, and these are the ones we will not respond to.' They need to establish a common understanding. If Red Deer had a TRT, they could even direct-enter the information onto the police RMS software."

They also suggested that the Southern Alberta OCC should look into business process efficiencies, such as Internet reporting, whereby data could go into the RCMP RMS automatically. Public education is another important part of improving the dispatch situation in Red Deer. One interviewee stated that if a public education campaign is too expensive, the City of Red Deer could consider submitting a joint funding application with Calgary to the Provincial Chiefs of Police in Alberta for a province-wide information campaign regarding when to call the police, and what 911 is for.

Options for Police Dispatch for the City of Red Deer

The preceding discussion has examined the current arrangements for police dispatch in the City of Red Deer, as well as initiatives that have been taken by the VPD at E-COMM, the RCMP at the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna, and the Calgary PSC to more effectively manage and respond to calls for service. It also identified a number of areas in which the current policy and procedure of the Southern Alberta OCC does not provide "value for service" or reflect best practices.

If the primary business priority of the Southern Alberta OCC is emergency call management, then there are effective, alternative service delivery methods for the management of non-emergency calls for service.

The current situation in the Southern Alberta OCC, wherein all calls for service are dispatched, is similar to the situation that existed for the VPD and for the Kelowna RCMP prior to the development of their capacities to provide alternative responses to calls for service. In both of these police services, the creation of a telecom response capacity has addressed many of the challenges that previously existed.

Given the nature of dispatch, and that there will be calls that "go bad," the interest of dispatchers at the Southern Alberta OCC in creating a file and dispatching the call to the police as soon as possible is understandable. However, ironically, flooding patrol units with un-prioritized calls and non-emergency calls that could be more effectively handled through a TRT-type arrangement, may result in persons involved in serious incidents being placed at greater risk.

Among the more problematic features of the current dispatch arrangements are the following:

- There is an absence of an evidence-based call management protocol at the Southern Alberta OCC that would streamline the workload for both dispatchers and RCMP officers serving the City of Red Deer, and thereby enhance the ability of the police to respond to emergency calls faster.

- OCC dispatchers create a file and dispatch nearly all calls for service that are received, regardless of the severity of the incident and regardless of whether the call requires a police presence at the scene. The absence of any capacity for call screening and prioritization places an undue burden on police officers who are already challenged by an increase in the levels and severity of crime.

- There is no capacity to pre-screen calls, a function that in many police communication centres is handled by call-takers, who then determine whether the call should be forwarded to a dispatcher.

- There is no mechanism for ongoing communication and discussion of dispatch by representatives from the RCMP, the City of Red Deer, and the Southern Alberta OCC. A "User's Committee" would provide an ongoing forum for the discussion of issues that arise surrounding police dispatch.

- There is no sworn officer presence in the Southern Alberta OCC. The presence of a police officer would assist dispatchers in screening and prioritizing calls for service.

For these, and a variety of other reasons, arrangements for the dispatch of City of Red Deer police officers by the Southern Alberta OCC do not reflect established best practices.

The features of the Southern Alberta OCC dispatch operations have a number of significant outcomes, including:

- A limited ability of the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP to have input into the procedures and protocols of the OCC.

- City of Red Deer police officers are attending low-priority calls that could more effectively be dealt with by a differential police response strategy. The current practice not only overburdens officers with minor incidents, but may also significantly impact the ability of officers to respond to, and investigate, more serious incidents.

- The service demands on Southern Alberta OCC staff and RCMP patrol officers will continue to increase with the growth in population and in the number of calls for service. This will place increasing pressures on OCC staff and RCMP officers, and likely impair their ability to perform at a high level.

An important component of any initiative designed to improve the response to calls from the City of Red Deer, and to ensure that patrol resources are being used as effectively and efficiently as possible, is to educate the community as to what incidents are emergencies, suitable for 911, and the incidents and situations that are not suitable for 911. Although alternative phone numbers exist, citizens find it easier in many instances to dial 911.

There are a three options that can be considered in an attempt to address the endemic problems that surround police dispatch in the City of Red Deer.

OPTION 1: Retaining Dispatch Services for the City of Red Deer in the Southern Alberta OCC, With a Focus on Enhancing Capacities to Improve Dispatch Services

This option would involve retaining the existing structure for the dispatch of police services in the Southern Alberta OCC, while building a number of additional core capacities that would significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the OCC and of the City of Red Deer RCMP, and, as well, enhance the crime prevention and response activities of the police in the community. A primary requirement is the development of a differential response strategy to manage calls for service for the City of Red Deer.

There are a number of initiatives that could be taken to improve the efficiency of the OCC and to bring the SOP of the Southern Alberta OCC into alignment with best practices. Many of these initiatives were suggested by OCC staff, RCMP officers in Red Deer, and by dispatch and program staff, RCMP and municipal police officers interviewed in Vancouver, Kelowna, and Calgary.

The project team recommends Option 1, but with considerable changes to the current arrangements for police dispatch. More specifically, it is recommended that the following initiatives be undertaken:

1. **Clarification of OCC clients.** While the general view of RCMP officers in Red Deer was that the police are the primary clients of the OCC, the OCC staff identified 911 callers as the primary clients. There appears to be an outstanding question as to whether the clients of the OCC are the police, the public, or both. The project team suggests that the clients of the Southern Alberta OCC are both the police and the public.

2. **Identification of the Core Functions of the OCC.** There is a need to define the core functions of the OCC, which might include: 1) call-screening, 2) complaint-taking, 3) dispatch, and, 4) ensuring police officer safety.

Contributing to the currently unclear role of the Southern Alberta OCC is the absence of a business plan for the OCC that sets out goals, objectives, performance measures, and provisions for "report-backs" to the communities served by the OCC. As well, the OCC's capacity to analyze calls for service and dispatch data (i.e., trends and outcomes) could be improved. Since virtually all calls for service are dispatched, there is no analysis of the various priorities of the calls that are received, nor a consideration of a differential response to the lower-priority calls.

3. **Creation of an OCC "Users' Committee."** At present, the City of Red Deer (nor any of the other communities to whom calls for service are dispatched) is not involved in identifying the core, or secondary, functions of the Southern Alberta OCC. This makes it difficult for the municipality to have any input into the policies and procedures of the OCC in terms of improving the efficiency of the OCC's dispatch arrangements for the

City of Red Deer. A Users' Committee would facilitate an ongoing dialogue between the Southern Alberta OCC, the City of Red Deer RCMP, the City of Red Deer, and the other communities served by the Southern Alberta OCC.

4. **Development of a Call Response Policy.** The City of Red Deer RCMP, in consultation with the City of Red Deer, should begin discussions to identify the types of calls for service that will generally receive a patrol response and those calls for service that will be handled via alternative means, such as a TRT. Once it is decided between the City of Red Deer RCMP and the City of Red Deer how the different calls will be handled, the Southern Alberta OCC should modify its SOP to reflect those changes.

5. **Division of emergency and non-emergency calls for service.** This would allow police officers to give high priority to more serious calls while facilitating a timely response to Priority 3 and 4 calls for service.

6. **Division of tasks at the OCC between call-takers and dispatchers.** For the City of Red Deer, this would require hiring an additional person to handle calls for service from the City of Red Deer. In the words of one Southern Alberta OCC staff member:

> "This would streamline the process and make it more efficient… We would need another workstation… for the additional dispatcher for Red Deer City (to split up the call-taking and dispatch functions)."

In addition, a dedicated "information channel" should be added to the radio system to answer queries from RCMP members (i.e., CPIC queries), and free-up the radio "air" for dispatching.

7. **Abandonment of the idea of delivering "Cadillac" service for the City of Red Deer.** The Southern Alberta OCC, in consultation with the City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP, should develop a differential police response capacity for calls for service received from the City of Red Deer. As it is currently operating, the policies and procedures in place at the Southern Alberta OCC do not reflect best practices. There is no capacity to divert less serious non-emergency calls (often classified as Priority 3 and 4 calls). The Taxi Cab Dispatch Model of "one size fits all" that is currently used does not address the specific needs of the City of Red Deer, which accounts for a significant proportion of the calls for service received at the Southern Alberta OCC.

The RCMP and the City of Red Deer should inform the community that it is not possible to have a patrol car response to all calls for police service and that alternative strategies will be developed to address the needs and concerns of citizens. As one Southern Alberta OCC staff member stated: "The police should tell the communities what they are able to handle and what they can't handle and what the public should do with the things that the police can't deal with." Further, there should be an ongoing media campaign to reduce the number of non-emergency calls that are accepted via 911.

8. **Collection of statistical information on City of Red Deer Dispatch.** A mechanism should be established to gather, on an ongoing basis, information on the calls for service from the City of Red Deer, including call patterns; response times of officers to calls for service; the number of officers deployed to calls for service; and the outcomes of calls for service response.

9. **Development of a Telecom Response Team in the OCC.** Discussions between the City of Red Deer and the Southern Alberta OCC should explore the development of a TRT to facilitate the triaging of calls in the OCC and the associated costs. If a TRT is established at the Southern Alberta OCC, it would be dedicated to assisting with the calls for service from the City of Red Deer, and as such, the City of Red Deer, or the Province of Alberta, could fund the cost of that initiative. The cost of the TRT would partly be determined by the number of Red Deer RCMP officers transferred from the City of Red Deer detachment to the OCC. For example, if the TRT would require one Sergeant and two or three Constables at any given time, the City of Red Deer could fund that by hiring new frontline officers to replace the ones transferred to the OCC. Alternatively, retired officers could be hired to staff the TRT. Equipment, desks and supplies would also have to be purchased for the TRT officers. Personnel involved in the development of the TRC in the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna have offered their time and expertise to assist in creating a similar capacity in the Southern Alberta OCC.

It is an established best practice to have a police presence in police dispatch centres, because of the knowledge and experience that police officers bring to such a position. The development of a TRT at E-COMM in Vancouver and at the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna have facilitated effective differential response strategies. More specifically, these initiatives have reduced the number of lower-priority calls dispatched to patrol officers, while at the same time ensuring that there is an effective response to these calls for service.

The establishment of a TRT at the Southern Alberta OCC would also facilitate the direct entering of information into PROS instead of CIIDS. By way of background, CAD software systems (e.g., CIIDS) are set up to make the dispatch process as efficient as possible; RMS systems (e.g., PROS), on the other hand, are for reporting/information-gathering purposes. CIIDS and PROS do "speak" to each other, but not seamlessly. Other software products are more inter-operable and facilitative of a differential police response system than CIIDS and PROS, like Versadex CAD and Versadex PRIME — which are the mandated police dispatch and RMS software programs in British Columbia. Nevertheless, the best practice at dispatch centres is for call-takers and dispatchers to enter information into CAD, not the RMS. A TRT is a best practice that is better suited for the direct-entering of information onto a RMS, because, since TRT staff deal with non-urgent files, they have the time to collect and enter detailed information into the RMS.

10. **Diversion of less serious calls for service.** A Southern Alberta OCC staff member commented: "We could eliminate a good one-third of the workload by diverting

non-police files, because those files tie up a police officer and a dispatcher." It is likely that the City of Red Deer would have to fund the TRT positions in the OCC.

It is the view of the project team that Option 1 and the associated recommendations provides the best, most cost-effective strategy for addressing the current difficulties that surround police dispatch for the City of Red Deer. However, a major caveat is that the operation of the OCC is entirely within the purview of the provincial government and of the RCMP as the contracted provincial police service. As such, there are currently no protocols in place, or framework, within which these recommendations can be considered. The extent to which such protocols could be developed remains to be determined. Certainly, the history of efforts to influence, and alter, the operations of the Southern Alberta OCC to more effectively address City of Red Deer policing requirements would suggest that there are significant obstacles to this occurring.

The adoption of Option 1 will require the City of Red Deer to assume at least some costs associated with enhancing the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP patrol units. This would include the costs associated with having sworn members present in the OCC to screen calls and to staff a TRT. These costs, however, would be more than offset by the increased efficiencies in patrol deployment, and in the response to, and investigation of, more serious incidents. Research studies on the outcomes of TRTs have consistently found that the implementation of differential response strategies do not compromise levels of public satisfaction with the police; in fact, there is evidence to suggest that in an effectively managed differential response strategy, service levels increase, along with public satisfaction.

The adoption of Option 1 would also require the City of Red Deer to initiate discussions with the province and with K Division to alter the policies and procedures relating to the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP.

OPTION 2: Relocating City of Red Deer Police Dispatch Services to the Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre

The Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre currently provides dispatch services for 30 fire departments, a number of ambulance services, and the City of Red Deer. All 911 calls for the City of Red Deer are currently received by the Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre; the calls for Red Deer City RCMP service are forwarded to the Southern Alberta OCC. Approximately 67% of the 911 calls received by the Red Deer Regional 911 Call Centre are for the police.

A senior Fire/EMS officer described the current arrangements for police dispatch in the City of Red Deer as "ineffective," citing the absence of call prioritization and the subsequent ineffective use of patrol resources. In the view of this official, "The major question is whether the current model is in the best interests of the City of Red Deer."

Preliminary discussions with Fire/EMS personnel indicate that it would be possible to relocate police dispatch services for the City of Red Deer to the Red Deer Regional 911

Call Centre. There are plans to move to a new facility, and provisions could be made for police dispatch.

The question then becomes whether it would be possible to fully integrate dispatch services (Police/Fire/EMS). The case study of the Calgary PSC suggests that such an endeavour would be possible. Also, extensive discussions would be required, and it would be imperative to develop a strategic plan, which sets out: the rationale and vision for the project, the effectiveness and efficiencies of co-located dispatch, and the interface between the dispatch services, all while being respectful of boundaries. A business plan would also be needed to demonstrate "value for service" and address union issues. Clear lines of governance would also be needed, along with a defined authority hierarchy, and structures to ensure communication. There would be infrastructure costs for facilities, operating costs, staffing costs, and the existing telephone system would have to be replaced.

As well, it can be anticipated that there would be resistance from some quarters to the proposal to co-locate police dispatch with Fire/EMS dispatch. In the view of a senior Fire/EMS official, the biggest obstacles to tri-services (having dispatchers cross-trained in all three dispatch functions) are the issues of: facilities, governance/management issues, and the fact that Fire/EMS dispatchers are in the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) whereas the OCC dispatchers are not unionized. There may also be some conflict with CUPE (which is the union of the RCMP Watch Clerks). A senior Fire/EMS official observed that it would be best to have essential service workers doing the work.

The costs associated with relocating police dispatch to Fire/EMS would be borne by the City of Red Deer. This includes hiring and training police dispatchers and, as well, the ongoing salary costs.

OPTION 3: Creating a Municipal Police Dispatch Centre for the City of Red Deer

A third option is for the City of Red Deer to support the creation of a municipal OCC for the City of Red Deer RCMP. This would involve removing the City of Red Deer operators from the Southern Alberta OCC, acquiring specialized equipment, and locating police dispatch in the RCMP detachment.

There would be a number of benefits associated with a municipal dispatch centre. These include:

1. **The ability of the City of Red Deer to assume direct control over dispatch services and to be directly involved in the creation of dispatch policies, procedures and protocols.** Currently, there are no formal mechanisms in place for the City of Red Deer to have input into the operations of the OCC and, given past experience, efforts to alter the current "one-size-fits-all" dispatch model are likely to

encounter difficulties. This includes the potential of having a uniformed presence in the municipal OCC and of creating a TRT similar to the initiative in Kelowna.

2. **The City of Red Deer and the City of Red Deer RCMP would have the ability to "customize" the dispatch process, the capacity to divert calls for service, and a capacity to triage, or screen calls for service.** The development of a differential response strategy would be tailored to the specific requirements of the City of Red Deer and could be altered as required. A public education campaign could be launched to inform Red Deer residents about the differential police response strategy.

3. **More efficient use of computing systems.** There are currently two separate computer software programs being used - CIIDS (for call-taking and dispatch) and PROS (for police reporting). The two systems do speak to each other, but not seamlessly. In any event, PROS can be searched separately. This point alone should not be the driving factor for wanting a municipal OCC dedicated to the City of Red Deer.

4. **Independence from the provincial OCC.** Although the City of Red Deer does not currently pay for Southern Alberta OCC dispatch services, neither does the City have any input into the policies and procedures of the OCC. The potential for creating mechanisms to facilitate City input into the Southern Alberta OCC and, more specifically, to effect change in how calls for service for the City of Red Deer are dispatched, is uncertain. Efforts to date to alter OCC dispatch policies and to create a differential call response strategy for the City of Red Deer have been unsuccessful.

There are, however, a number of critical issues that would require close examination by the City of Red Deer in deciding whether to proceed with the development of a municipal police dispatch centre. These include:

1. **Cost.** To establish a municipal police dispatch centre would require the necessary physical plant and technological infrastructure. At a minimum the new centre would require an additional telephone server (approximate cost $80,000); 8-12 terminals/pods; and 12 employees, with three employees working per Watch (squad/shift). If a state-of-the-art and properly funded facility is established, then the total operating cost (including all equipment, salaries, 24-7 operation, etc.) may be in the millions per year.

2. **Capacity.** While a municipal OCC would have sufficient capacity to serve the dispatch needs of the police on a daily basis, in the case of a mass emergency, the centre would not have a capacity similar to that which currently exists in the Southern Alberta OCC. The Southern Alberta OCC currently has 11 operators working each shift, who are able to assist the Red Deer City operator in an overflow capacity, should the calls for service for the City of Red Deer be too many for the Red Deer City operator to handle alone. However, if the City of Red Deer had its own municipal OCC, and a serious, large scale emergency was to occur, it is likely that the Southern Alberta OCC would have to assist. For this reason, protocols would have to be established between the municipal OCC and the Southern Alberta OCC, one of which would be a provision for mutual assistance.

3. **Staffing.** The addition of a municipal OCC would mean that another employer would be competing for qualified applicants in an already challenging labour market – the municipal OCC would be fighting for the same job candidates as the Southern Alberta OCC. One attractive feature for potential applicants is that municipal dispatch positions would be unionized, addressing some of the concerns expressed by staff at the Southern Alberta OCC, which is non-union.

4. **The trend toward amalgamation.**   There is a discernable trend toward the amalgamation of call centres generally, and of police dispatch centres specifically. The rationale for amalgamation is increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However, there are few studies on the extent to which these objectives have been achieved. The original intent of locating all dispatch services at E-Comm in Vancouver, for example, was to have "seamless" dispatch. However, police dispatch services at E-Comm remain segregated by department, i.e. VPD dispatchers dispatch VPD patrol units, Ridge Meadows RCMP dispatchers dispatch officers for that community. Even though the dispatchers are all in the same location (and room), police dispatch is not integrated.

Summary

The scope of work for the examination of dispatch for the City of Red Deer RCMP called for the following to be completed:

      1. Review of the existing dispatch service to determine:
          a. The efficiency of the current process
          b. The cost of the current process
          c. The ability of the current process to facilitate
            communication among the parties involved

      2. Provide options, rationale and costs for service delivery:
          a. That maintains the status quo (recommendations may
            include suggestions for improving the current service)
          b. Through the Emergency Services dispatch
          c. By providing a separate police dispatch system

These tasks were completed within a framework that considered best practices in police dispatch and, as well, the initiatives taken by the Vancouver Police Department at E-Comm in Vancouver, British Columbia; the RCMP at the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna, British Columbia; and the Calgary Police Service at the Public Safety Communications Centre, to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of police dispatch services.

Interviews were conducted with Senior City of Red Deer RCMP officers, RCMP Watch Clerks, municipal and Fire/EMS officials, senior provincial RCMP officers, and Southern Alberta OCC staff. Interviews were also conducted with senior-level dispatchers at E-Comm in Vancouver, members of the VPD TRT unit, civilian and sworn members involved in the TRC initiative in the Southeast District OCC, and with civilian and sworn members of the Calgary Police Service who are involved in police dispatch operations.

Statistical information on the calls for service received by the Southern Alberta OCC was gathered, with particular reference to calls originating from the City of Red Deer. Planning and environmental scan documents for the City of Red Deer were reviewed, as was a previous report on justice and safety completed by a private consulting group.

The findings of this study are highlighted below:

1. A Review of the Existing Dispatch Service to Determine:

a. The Efficiency of the Current Process

The current Southern Alberta OCC policies and procedures for dispatch do not meet the needs of the City of Red Deer nor, in many respects, do they reflect best practices for police dispatch. The policy of dispatching all calls for service overburdens police

officers, hinders the response to, and investigation of, serious crimes, and also has significant human resource implications for OCC staff. A best practice dispatch facility employs a differential response model in which lower priority calls are screened out and managed through alternative means, such as a Telecom Response Team. Both RCMP officers and OCC staff interviewed for the project expressed frustration with the current dispatch arrangements.

b. The Cost of the Current Process

The fiscal cost of the current police dispatch arrangements for the City of Red Deer is nil, as the city does not contribute to the operation of the Southern Alberta OCC. However, there are other, equally significant "cost" implications of the current arrangements for police dispatch. First, the City of Red Deer has no means of communicating with the OCC on an ongoing basis, nor have any previous attempts to influence OCC policy and practice with respect to call dispatch proven to be successful. Secondly, there is a human resource cost, associated with high stress levels, burnout, and the attrition of OCC staff who are required to dispatch all calls for service. Third, line-level patrol officers are being burdened with higher call loads, consisting of emergencies and non-emergencies, that must be prioritized and re-prioritized "on the go," as new calls for service are received. Fourth, the citizens of Red Deer are also suffering unnecessarily as their calls for service are either getting under-prioritized or over-prioritized. Finally, the current arrangements for police dispatch have not provided a framework for the adoption of best practices, such as the development of a TRT in the Southern Alberta OCC.

c. The Ability of the Current Arrangements to Facilitate Communication Among the Parties Involved

The current arrangements are not facilitative of ongoing contact and communication between the Southern Alberta OCC and the municipalities that it serves. Although issue-specific discussions have occurred between the Red Deer City RCMP and the Southern Alberta OCC, these contacts are not formalized nor is there any process by which the deliberations could result in changes to OCC policy and practice. This is partly a function of: a) the role and mandate of the Southern Alberta OCC, which is provincially funded, and b) the role and mandate of the Red Deer City RCMP, a contracted municipal police service. Within the current dispatch arrangements, a "no call to small" model is applied to the City of Red Deer, as well as to the other much smaller, communities that are serviced by the Southern Alberta OCC. If the current process was facilitative of ongoing communication between the parties involved, the necessary structures to facilitate an ongoing dialogue would be in place. Such structures do not currently exist.

2. Provide options, rationale and costs for service delivery

a. that maintains the status quo

This study has found that the status quo arrangements for the dispatch of City of Red Deer RCMP do not reflect best practices and do not meet the needs of a growing community that is experiencing an increase in the severity and complexity of criminality. More specifically, the policy of the Southern Alberta OCC to dispatch all calls for service overburdens patrol officers and compromises the ability of these officers to respond to more serious incidents in a timely and effective manner. There was a shared view among RCMP officers, OCC staff, and others in Red Deer that there is a need to alter the status quo arrangements for police dispatch. The option recommended in this report is that the Red Deer City RCMP dispatch services should remain in the Southern Alberta OCC, but that there be significant changes be made in dispatch policies and procedures with respect to the City of Red Deer. More specifically, it is recommended that the Southern Alberta OCC, with support from the City of Red Deer, and the City of Red Deer RCMP, should develop the capacity to screen and prioritize calls for service and that a Telecom Response Team (TRT), similar to the units operating at E-Comm in Vancouver and at the Southeast District OCC in Kelowna, be created.

b. through emergency services dispatch

Preliminary discussions with a senior Fire/EMS official suggest that this may be a viable option, with the proper strategic planning, and if the City of Red Deer was prepared to assume the costs associated with operating a police dispatch service in the Fire/EMS facility. The challenges of co-locating police dispatch with Fire/EMS were seen as significant, but not insurmountable. A comprehensive strategic plan, premised on extensive discussions among all of the affected parties, would be required to effectively implement this option.

c. by providing a separate police dispatch system

The creation of a separate police dispatch capacity (municipal OCC) in the Red Deer RCMP detachment is, perhaps, the least favourable option. It would be the most costly of the three options and it would be counter to the trend toward the amalgamation of police communications centres. Moreover, it is uncertain whether the requisite facilities and infrastructure to support a police dispatch centre exist at the Red Deer City detachment.

The recommendation of the project team is that Option 1 be fully explored. Should efforts to make the necessary changes to the operating policies and procedures of the OCC be unsuccessful, then it is recommended that Option 2, the co-location of police dispatch with Fire/EMS, be pursued.

The City of Red Deer has, and will, continue to experience high rates of growth. These circumstances will present significant challenges to the City and the RCMP. Regardless of the specific option for police dispatch that is implemented, it is important that the

necessary structures be put into place to ensure that the City of Red Deer has ongoing input into how dispatch services for its police service are operated. This will not only assist in ensuring that the City of Red Deer receives "value for service," but it will also ensure that police resources are being utilized as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Appendix A
Interview Schedules

Red Deer Interview Schedule

The Current Arrangements for Dispatch

1. In your view, what are the *positive* features of the current arrangements for dispatch?

>1.a. What are the *less positive* features of the current arrangements for dispatch?

2. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch are the most *effective*?

>2.a. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch are the most *efficient*?

>2.b. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch are the most *cost-efficient*?

3. Do the current arrangements for dispatch provide for ongoing communication among the various dispatch centres and their personnel, to address any issues that might arise?

4. In your view, what are the relationships between the two dispatch centres?

Response Times to 911 Calls

5. In your view, what are the major factors that affect the response time of patrol units to 911 calls? (i.e., shifting; lack of police personnel; lack of appropriate technology; other resource-related issues)

6. In your view, do the current arrangements for dispatch have any impact on the ability of the RCMP to respond in a timely manner to citizen calls for assistance, for the *City of Red Deer*?

>6.a. Do the current arrangements for dispatch have any impact on the ability of the RCMP to respond in a timely manner to citizen calls for assistance, *for the region*?

7. In your view, is there any "slippage" or delay in responding to 911 calls due to the current arrangements for dispatch?

8. What, if any, changes would you make to the current arrangements for dispatch in order to enhance service?

Policing in Red Deer

9. What do you see as the major challenges confronting policing services in Red Deer?

10. In your view, is dispatch one of the areas that requires attention?

The Dispatch Needs of the City of Red Deer

11. Are the current arrangements for dispatch the best for ***meeting the needs*** of Red Deer and the surrounding communities?

12. Is the City of Red Deer getting the "***best value***" under the current dispatch arrangements?

       12.a. If yes, how so?

13. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch provide the community with the best dispatch ***service*** possible?

14. In your view, what are the primary issues surrounding 911 dispatch in Red Deer?

Human Resource Issues

15. In your view, what are the major ***human resource*** issues?

16. Is the ***retention*** of dispatch personnel an issue?

17. Is ***salary*** a major issue?

       17.a. ***Workload***?

       17.b. ***Morale***?

       17.c. ***Management***?

       17.d. ***Training***?

       17.e. ***Space?***

Relationships between the Two Dispatch Centres

18. What is the nature of the ***contact*** between the Regional 911 Centre and the RCMP Watch Clerks?

18.a. What is the nature of the *relationships* between the Regional 911 Centre and the RCMP Watch Clerks?

19. Is there a need for two call centres?

Going Forward

20. What changes to the existing system for dispatch would you suggest?

21. In your view, what arrangements for dispatch will provide the most "value-added" service for the community?

22. Do you think that Red Deer should create its own dispatch centre?

23. What opportunities do you see for improving the efficiencies of the dispatch system?

24. What do you view as the primary obstacles, if any, to changing the current dispatch system?

25. In your view, what process should be followed in developing the most effective and efficient dispatch system?

25.a. Who should be consulted?

26. Do you have any data that we could access?

27. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss?

Calgary PSC Interview Schedule

Background

1. What is the history of this telecom centre?

2. Did best practice research inform the development of this telecom centre?

3. Are the practices at this telecom centre *best* practices?

4. Can you please draw me a diagram of the current dispatch arrangements at this telecom centre? (i.e., the way calls are streamlined for police, fire, and ambulance)

5. Did this telecom centre or the police ever spear-head a public education campaign on the use (and misuse) of 911?

Calls for Service

6. How many cities does this telecom centre serve?

7. What percentage of calls for service are calls for the police, vs. fire, vs. ambulance?

8. What percentage of calls for service are emergency calls vs. non-emergency calls?

9. What percentage of calls for service are emergency calls for the police?

Oversight/Management

10. Who controls this telecom centre?

11. Who oversees this telecom centre's policy and procedures?

12. What is the chain of command at the telecom centre?

13. How many sworn police representatives work at this telecom centre?

14. What are the duties of the police representatives stationed at this telecom centre?

15. Is this telecom centre staffed with a police supervisor (Inspector or Sergeant) 24/7, for the purpose of call screening?

Policy and Procedure

16. Does this telecom centre have a policy and procedure manual?

16.a. If yes, was the policy and procedure manual created with police oversight?

16.b. Is the policy and procedure manual in sync with what the police require?

17. In practice, do the telecom centre operators follow the policy and procedure manual?

18. By what process are procedural changes implemented at this telecom centre?

18.a. Are procedural changes usually initiated by the police or the telecom centre?

18.b. How are changes to policy and procedure accepted and entrenched into the manual?

19. If there are differences between the police and telecom staff regarding practices and/or preferences in dispatch/reporting, whose way takes precedence? (i.e., the police's way or the dispatcher's way)

20. Who does the telecom centre consider its client to be? (i.e., the public or the various emergency services)

21. May I please have a copy of the standard operating procedure manual?

Call-Taking and Dispatching

22. How many radio channels are allocated for your city and the other jurisdictions?

23. How many PCs does a single dispatcher serve on a shift?

24. When calls are taken by police dispatchers, what software program is used to collect the information? (i.e., CAD, CIIDS, PROS, or PRIME)

24.a. How well does this software interface with the police RMS software?

25. Is a file created for every call for service received?

25.a. If no, on what basis is the decision to divert a call made?

26. Is every file sent to the police for their attention?

27. If multiple calls are received for the same incident, like a traffic accident, how are the calls dealt with? (i.e., is a separate file created for each call, and then linked to one file later? If no, how does an operator determine whether or not to create a file?)

28. Are calls streamlined? (emergency vs. non-emergency calls?)

29. Does this telecom centre answer calls for service relating to bylaws and non-emergencies?

30. Are the telecom operators allowed to differentiate between criminal and civil matters?

31. Who prioritizes the calls, the dispatchers or the police?

      31.a. According to what standard are the calls prioritized?

32. Are urgent calls voiced over the radio, or sent electronically to patrol?

33. How are queued calls managed?

34. Are the telecom operators assigned to take calls from certain jurisdictions (e.g., one operator always taking calls from your city?)

35. How many operators answer calls for your city, and other cities?

36. Are the call-taker and dispatch functions divided among different employees, or does one person perform both functions and carry the call from beginning to end?

37. Are files ever created for "information" type calls (BNE reports, TFA reports) for PCs to follow-up on later, or are such calls dealt with by the Information Management Section of the relevant police force?

38. Under what circumstances would a call be received by the telecom centre but not dispatched to the police? (i.e., where does your telecom centre "draw the line" in taking calls and generating files for the police to follow-up on?)

      38.a. Are files created for calls such as: "I think I see a prostitute on the street," or for vandalism reports, or for tenant/landlord issues?

      38.b. Does the telecom centre's policy and procedure manual state the types of calls that will be responded to, the types of calls that won't be responded to (diverted calls), and of the diverted calls, what steps will be relayed to the caller for him/her to follow?

      38.c. Under what circumstances would a call be cancelled?

      38.d. Under what circumstances would a call be dispatched directly to a specialty unit (e.g. ERT, dog squad, etc.)?

38.e. Under what circumstances would a call be dispatched directly to the Telephone Response Team (TRT)?

38.f. Under what circumstances is a call dispatched directly to the civilian report takers?

39. Are there different standards regarding the types of calls that certain detachments will answer over others? (i.e., will your detachment only respond to Priority 1 and 2 calls, while less busy detachments will respond to everything)?

40. Has your telecom centre considered whether any liability issues would arise from diverting calls?

41. How would you characterize the working relationships between the PCs and the dispatchers?

Training of Dispatchers

42. What kinds of training do the call-takers/dispatchers receive?

42.a. Is the training different for police versus fire versus ambulance dispatchers, or are the dispatchers all cross-trained?

43. Are the operators trained to answer calls from every city?

43.a. Are the operators assigned to a city per shift?

Interfacing Dispatch Data with Police Data

44. Does the RCMP use PROS or PRIME or both?

45. Are the RCMP detachments all using PRIME?

45.a. If yes, when the RCMP used PROS to create the reports, how well did it interface with the software that was used by the dispatcher to take the call initially?

Going Forward

46. Are there any issues with the current dispatch arrangements at the telecom centre?

47. What advice would you give to inform the Red Deer dispatch situation?

Conclusion

48. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Southeast District OCC (Kelowna) Interview Schedule

Background

1. What is the history of this telecom centre?

2. Did best practice research inform the development of this telecom centre?

    2.a. Was an environmental scan conducted before your telecom centre was developed?

3. Are the practices at this telecom centre *best* practices?

4. Can you please draw me a diagram of the current dispatch arrangements at this telecom centre? (i.e., the way calls are streamlined for police, fire, and ambulance)

5. Did this telecom centre or the police ever spear-head a public education campaign on the use (and misuse) of 911?

    5.a. If yes, what prompted that campaign?

Current Arrangements for Dispatch

6. In your view, what are the *positive* features of the current arrangements for dispatch?

    6.a. What are the *less positive* features of the current arrangements for dispatch?

7. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch are the most ***effective***?

    7.a. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch are the most *efficient*?

    7.b. Do you feel that the current arrangements for dispatch are the most *cost-efficient*?

8. Do the current arrangements for dispatch provide for ongoing communication among the various dispatch centres and their personnel, to address any issues that might arise?

Calls for Service

9. How many cities does this telecom centre serve?

10. What percentage of calls for service are calls for the police, vs. fire, vs. ambulance?

11. What percentage of calls for service are emergency calls vs. non-emergency calls?

12. What percentage of calls for service are emergency calls for the police?

Oversight/Management

13. Who controls this telecom centre? (i.e., a committee of telecom staff & police?)

14. Who oversees this telecom centre's policy and procedures?

15. What is the chain of command at the telecom centre?

16. How many sworn police representatives work at this telecom centre?

17. What are the duties of the police representatives stationed at this telecom centre?

18. Is this telecom centre staffed with a police supervisor (Inspector or Sergeant) 24/7, for the purpose of call screening?

Policy and Procedure

19. Does this telecom centre have a policy and procedure manual?

> 19.a. If yes, was the policy and procedure manual created with police oversight?

> 19.b. Is the policy and procedure manual in sync with what the police require?

20. In practice, do the telecom centre operators follow the policy and procedure manual?

21. By what process are procedural changes implemented at this telecom centre?

> 21.a. Are procedural changes usually initiated by the police or the telecom centre?

> 21.b. How are changes to policy and procedure accepted and entrenched into the manual?

22. If there are differences between the police and telecom staff regarding practices and/or preferences in dispatch/reporting, whose way takes precedence? (i.e., the police's way or the dispatcher's way)

23. Who does the telecom centre consider its client to be? (i.e., the public or the various emergency services)

Call-Taking and Dispatching

24. How many radio channels are allocated for your city and the other jurisdictions?

25. How many PCs does a single dispatcher serve on a shift?

26. When calls are taken by police dispatchers, what software program is used to collect the information? (i.e., CAD, CIIDS, PROS, or PRIME)

      26.a. How well does this software interface with the police RMS software?

27. Is a file created for every call for service received?

      27.a. If no, on what basis is the decision to divert a call made?

28. Is every file sent to the police for their attention?

29. If multiple calls are received for the same incident, like a traffic accident, how are the calls dealt with? (i.e., is a separate file created for each call, and then linked to one file later?) If no, how does an operator determine whether or not to create a file?

30. Are calls streamlined? (emergency vs. non-emergency calls?)

31. Does this telecom centre answer calls for service relating to bylaws and non-emergencies?

32. Are the telecom operators allowed to differentiate between criminal and civil matters?

      32.a. If yes, are your operators allowed to divert calls relating to civil matters?

33. Who prioritizes the calls, the dispatchers or the police?

      33a. According to what standard are the calls prioritized?

34. Are urgent calls voiced over the radio, or sent electronically to patrol?

35. How are queued calls managed?

36. Are the telecom operators assigned to take calls from certain jurisdictions (e.g., one operator always taking calls from your city?)

37. How many operators answer calls for your city, and other cities?

38. Are the call-taker and dispatch functions divided among different employees, or does one person perform both functions and carry the call from beginning to end?

39. Are files ever created for "information" type calls (BNE reports, TFA reports) for PCs to follow-up on later, or are such calls dealt with by the Information Management Section of the relevant police force?

40. Under what circumstances would a call be received by the telecom centre but not dispatched to the police? (i.e., where does your telecom centre "draw the line" in taking calls and generating files for the police to follow-up on?)

> 40.a. Are files created for calls such as: "I think I see a prostitute on the street," or for vandalism reports, or for tenant/landlord issues?

> 40.b. Does the telecom centre's policy and procedure manual state the types of calls that will be responded to, the types of calls that won't be responded to (diverted calls), and of the diverted calls, what steps will be relayed to the caller for him/her to follow?

> 40.c. Under what circumstances would a call be cancelled?

> 40.d. Under what circumstances would a call be dispatched directly to a specialty unit (e.g. ERT, dog squad, etc.)?

> 40.e. Under what circumstances would a call be dispatched directly to the Telephone Response Team (TRT)?

> 40.f. Under what circumstances is a call dispatched directly to the civilian report takers?

41. Are there different standards regarding the types of calls that certain detachments will answer over others? (i.e., will your detachment only respond to Priority 1 and 2 calls, while less busy detachments will respond to everything)?

42. In your view, is there any "slippage" or delay in responding to 911 calls due to the current arrangements for dispatch?

43. Has your telecom centre considered whether any liability issues would arise from diverting calls?

44. How would you characterize the working relationships between the PCs and the dispatchers?

45. Would you say that your city is getting the "best value" under the current dispatch arrangements?

> 45.a. If yes, how so?

Training of Dispatchers

46. What kinds of training do the call-takers/dispatchers receive?

> 46.a. Is the training different for police versus fire versus ambulance dispatchers, or are the dispatchers all cross-trained?

47. Are the operators trained to answer calls from every city?

> 47.a. Are the operators assigned to a city per shift?

Human Resource Issues

48. In your view, what are the major human resource issues?

49. Is the recruitment of dispatch personnel an issue?

50. Is the retention of dispatch personnel an issue?

51. Is salary a major issue?

52. Workload?

53. Morale?

54. Management?

55. Training?

56. Space?

57. What is the cost of running your telecom centre?

Interfacing Dispatch Data with Police Data

58. Does the RCMP use PROS or PRIME or both?

59. Are the RCMP detachments in the Lower Mainland all using PRIME now?

> 59.a. If yes, when the RCMP used PROS to create the reports, how well did it interface with the software that was used by the dispatcher to take the call initially?

Going Forward

60. Are there any issues with the current dispatch arrangements at the telecom centre?

61. What changes to the existing system for dispatch would you suggest?

62. What advice would you give to inform the Red Deer dispatch situation?

Conclusion

63. Is there anything that you would like to add?

E-Comm: Vancouver Police Department TRT Interview Schedule

Background

1. What is the history of your telecom centre?

2. Did best practice research inform the development of your telecom centre?

3. Are the practices at your telecom centre *best* practices?

4. Can you please draw me a diagram of the current dispatch arrangements at your telecom centre? (i.e., the way calls are streamlined for police, fire, and ambulance)

5. Did your telecom centre or the police ever spear-head a public education campaign on the use (and misuse) of 911?

> 5a. If yes, what prompted that campaign?

Calls for Service

6. How many cities in the Lower Mainland does your telecom centre serve?

7. What percentage of calls for service are calls for the police, versus fire, versus ambulance?

8. What percentage of calls for service are emergency calls versus non-emergency calls?

9. What percentage of calls for service are emergency calls for the police?

E-Comm Oversight/Management

10. Who controls your telecom centre? (i.e., a committee of telecom centre staff and police?)

11. Who oversees your telecom centre's policy and procedures?

12. What is the chain of command at your telecom centre?

13. How many police representatives work at your telecom centre?

14. What are the duties of the police representatives stationed at your telecom centre?

15. Is your telecom centre staffed with a police supervisor (Inspector or Sergeant) 24/7, for the purpose of call screening?

E-Comm Policy and Procedure

16. Does your telecom centre have a policy and procedure manual?

> 16.a. If yes, was the policy and procedure manual created with police oversight?

> 16.b. Is the policy and procedure manual in sync with what the police require?

17. In practice, do your telecom centre operators follow the policy and procedure manual?

18. By what process are procedural changes implemented at your telecom centre?

> 18.a. Are procedural changes usually initiated by the police or your telecom centre?

> 18.b. How are changes to policy and procedure accepted and entrenched into the manual?

19. If there are differences between the police and telecom staff regarding practices and/or preferences in dispatch/reporting, whose way takes precedence? (i.e., the police's way or the dispatcher's way)

20. Who does your telecom centre consider its client to be? (i.e., the public or the various emergency services)

Call-Taking and Dispatching

21. How many radio channels are allocated for the City of Vancouver (COV) and the other jurisdictions?

22. How many PCs does a single dispatcher serve on a shift?

23. When calls are taken by police dispatchers, what software program is used to collect the information? (i.e., CAD, CIIDS, PROS, or PRIME)

> 23.a. How well does this software interface with the police RMS software?

24. Is a file created for every call for service received?

> 24.a. If no, on what basis is the decision to divert a call made?

25. Is every file sent to the police for their attention?

26. If multiple calls are received for the same incident, like a traffic accident, how are the calls dealt with? (i.e., is a separate file created for each call, and then linked to one file later? If no, how does an operator determine whether or not to create a file?)

27. Are calls streamlined? (emergency vs. non-emergency calls?)

28. Does your telecom centre answer calls for service relating to bylaws and non-emergencies?

29. Are your telecom operators allowed to differentiate between criminal and civil matters?

 29 a. If yes, are your operators allowed to divert calls relating to civil matters?

30. Who prioritizes the calls, the dispatchers or the police?

 30.a. According to what standard are the calls prioritized?

31. Are urgent calls voiced over the radio, or sent electronically to patrol?

32. How are queued calls managed?

33. Are your telecom operators assigned to take calls from certain jurisdictions (e.g., one operator always taking calls from Vancouver?)

34. How many operators answer calls for the COV, and other cities?

35. Are the call-taker and dispatch functions divided among different employees, or does one person perform both functions and carry the call from beginning to end?

36. Are files ever created for "information" type calls (BNE reports, TFA reports) for PCs to follow-up on later, or are such calls dealt with by the Information Management Section of the relevant police force?

37. Under what circumstances would a call be received by your telecom centre but not dispatched to the police? (i.e., where does your telecom centre "draw the line" in taking calls and generating files for the police to follow-up on?)

 37.a. Are files created for calls such as: "I think I see a prostitute on the street," or for vandalism reports, or for tenant/landlord issues?

37.b. Does the your telecom centre's policy and procedure manual state the types of calls that will be responded to, the types of calls that won't be responded to (diverted calls), and of the diverted calls, what steps will be relayed to the caller for him/her to follow?

37.c. Under what circumstances would a call be cancelled?

37.d. Under what circumstances would a call be dispatched directly to a specialty unit (e.g. ERT, dog squad, etc.)?

37.e. Under what circumstances would a call be dispatched directly to the Telephone Response Team (TRT)?

37.f. Under what circumstances is a call dispatched directly to the civilian report takers?

38. Are there different standards regarding the types of calls that certain detachments will answer over others? (i.e., will VPD only respond to Priority 1 and 2 calls, while less busy detachments will respond to everything)?

39. Has your telecom centre considered whether any liability issues would arise from diverting calls?

40. How would you characterize the working relationships between the PCs and the dispatchers?

Training of E-Comm Dispatchers

41. What kinds of training do the call-takers/dispatchers receive?

41.a. Is the training different for police versus fire versus ambulance dispatchers, or are the dispatchers all cross-trained?

42. Are the operators trained to answer calls from every city?

42.a. Are the operators assigned to a city per shift?

Interfacing E-Comm Data with Police Data

43. Does the RCMP use PROS or PRIME or both?

44. Are the RCMP detachments in the Lower Mainland all using PRIME now?

44a. If yes, when the RCMP used PROS to create the reports, how well did it interface with the software that was used by the dispatcher to take the call initially?

Going Forward

45. Are there any issues with the current dispatch arrangements at E-Comm?

46. What advice would you give to inform the Red Deer dispatch situation?

47. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

311: Non-emergency response telephone number.

911: Emergency response telephone number.

Actual Strength: The number of sworn police officers that work for the organization at a given point in time**.**

Authorized Strength: The number of authorized positions for sworn police officers in a given organization.

Calls for Service: telephone calls for emergency response (e.g., police, ambulance, fire) service.

Call-taker: typically the first point of contact; the operator who opens a file, gathers information, classifies the call, enters key information regarding the call onto the file, and determines whether to route the call to the dispatch operator.

CAD: Computer Aided Dispatch. A type of software program used by dispatchers.

CALEA: Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

CIIDS: Computer Integrated Information and Dispatch System. CIIDS is the 'CAD' software used at the Southern Alberta OCC.

COV: City of Vancouver.

CPS: Calgary Police Service.

CSD: Community Services Division.

DARS: District Alternate Response System; a component of the VPD's TRT.

Differential Police Response Strategies: A call management model that employs differential response strategies is characterized by alternate, "non-traditional" strategies that are highly effective in responding to a high call load with a limited number of resources, such as call prioritization, priority queuing, and tailored police responses (level and immediacy) based on call type, which may amount to no response at all. Differential police response strategies represent the "new school" model of police call management.

Dispatcher: the operator who dispatches calls for service to the emergency response unit (e.g., police, fire or ambulance).

ECM: Enhanced Call Management system (i.e., the VPD's TRT).

E-Comm: The Emergency Communications Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia. E-Comm operators receive and dispatch calls for service for several police agencies in the Greater Vancouver region, including the Vancouver Police Department.

Emergency Calls for Service: Priority 1 and 2 calls.

EMS: Emergency Medical Services (i.e., ambulance).

GO: General Occurrence report. A police report in PRIME.

IAFF: International Association of Fire Fighters.

ICMS: Integrated Call Management System (i.e., the Kelowna OCC's TRC).

Interoperability: the ability of the police and other agencies to "talk" to one another and to share information.

Mayor's Report: A report that reveals crime incident statistics.

Member: A sworn, gun-carrying police officer.

NAED: National Academies of Emergency Dispatch.

Non-Emergency Calls for Service: Priority 3 and 4 calls.

OCC: Operational Communications Centre, operated by the RCMP.

OIC: "Officer in charge"; the leader of a given RCMP detachment, usually at the rank of Inspector or Superintendent.

Priority 1 Calls for Police Service: emergencies that require immediate attention by the police. The nature of the incident poses an immediate threat to life that may result in death or grievous bodily harm. Priority 1 calls include in-progress assaults and armed robberies.

Priority 2 Calls for Police Service: urgent situations that require immediate attention by the police. The nature of the incident may or may not pose a serious threat to life. Priority 2 calls include in-progress break and enters, in progress frauds, and 911 hang-ups.

Priority 3 Calls for Police Service: Non-emergency, routine calls; everyday occurrences that require police attention. Priority 3 calls include suspicious circumstances/persons/vehicles, missing persons and sudden deaths.

Priority 4 Calls for Police Service: Non-emergency, low priority, information type calls required for recording purposes only. Priority 4 calls include thefts and mischiefs.

PRIME: Police Records Information Management Environment. The RMS used by police forces in British Columbia.

PROS: Police Reporting and Occurrence System. The RCMP's relatively new Records Management System (RMS).

PSAP: Primary Service Answering Point (e.g., Regional 911 Call Centre in Red Deer, Alberta). These are located throughout the Province of Alberta. Its operators are the first to answer 911 calls ("police, fire or ambulance?")

PSC: Public Safety Communications Centre, located in Calgary, Alberta.

SOP: Standard Operating Policy/Procedure.

SSAP: Secondary Service Answering Point (e.g., Southern Alberta OCC). SSAP operators answer calls for police service, as routed to them by the PSAP operators, or as received directly by callers who called their direct service line.

Taxi Cab Dispatch Model: police cars are assigned to calls for service in the same way that taxi cabs are assigned to customers: according to a "first-come, first-served queuing model" which assumes that all calls are of equal importance and seriousness and that all calls require the same priority of response. The "old school" model of police dispatch.

TRC: Telecom Response Centre. It is currently being operated on a pilot project basis at the Kelowna OCC, and is staffed by retired police members. It is modeled after the VPD's TRT.

TRT: Telecom Response Team. This is a team of uniformed officers, situated in the communications centre, who respond to calls for service via the telephone. These units handle primarily Priority 3 and 4 calls of a less serious nature, thus sparing the need to dispatch a patrol car to the scene. The Vancouver Police Department operates a TRT and, as of 2007, the OCC in Kelowna was operating a TRT (TRC) on a pilot project basis.

RCMP: Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

RMS: Records Management System. A software program designed to store police files, such as general occurrence reports, and other information.

Value for Service: operationalized in this report to mean a delivery model that is cost effective, reflects best practices, and maximizes the use, and impact of available police resources.

VDVE: Victim Direct Voice Entry system; a voice automated call intake system used by the Calgary PSC. The system collects information from complainants relating to administrative type files, such as lost wallet reports, and routes the files to clerks for their attention. It is used when PSC operators do not have the time to direct-enter a report concerning a call for service that does not require a patrol response.

VPD: Vancouver Police Department.

Watch Clerk: With two on-duty at any given time, these City employees provide clerical support to the Red Deer City RCMP officers by, among other things, reading general occurrence police reports for quality control purposes, scoring the reports for Statistics Canada purposes, locating warrants for their execution, and conducting Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) queries. Watch Clerks also receive calls for police service from the public, they dispatch any emergency calls received, they handle non-emergency calls, and they tie up the loose ends with files (e.g., diary date the files, fill in missing information, link entities, etc.).

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