



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

REPORT TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE BOARD

REPORT DATE: June 27, 2019
COMMITTEE MEETING DATE: July 18, 2019
BOARD REPORT # 1907C01

Regular

TO: **Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee**

FROM: Drazen Manojlovic, Director, Planning, Research and Audit Section

SUBJECT: Service or Policy Complaint #2019-007, Service Received from the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) Related to the Reporting of a Missing Person

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee ('Committee') concludes its review of the complaint based on information outlined in the report, and given that corrective practices and procedures have been adopted by the VPD in response to the complaint.

SUMMARY:

On February 28, 2019, the complainant attended the VPD headquarters at 2120 Cambie Street to report that his adult daughter was missing. VPD patrol officers were dispatched to investigate but did not locate the daughter and a missing person report was submitted. The daughter was also 'flagged' as being 'missing' in the police database. Shortly thereafter, in a case of human error, a member of the Information Management Section (IMS) mistakenly removed the missing entry. This 'clerical' error was discovered several days later and the Missing Persons Unit (MPU) took over the investigation and notified the complainant of this error. The daughter was later found deceased and it was determined by the Coroner that the death, a suspected overdose, occurred days prior to the complainant first reporting his daughter as missing.

As a result of his overall experience the complainant made a complaint, raising two main issues (note: this report will also discuss the human, clerical error referenced above):

1. *"...the insensitive and unprofessional manner in which I was treated..."*
2. *"Secondly, the service model used by the VPD ...is seriously flawed and needs to be reviewed."*

With regard to the first issue, the complainant described a negative interaction involving a civilian staff member from the VPD's Public Service Counter (PSC). The staff member followed the correct procedure; however, during her interview with an IMS Manager, she showed genuine concern about how the complainant felt as a result of their interaction, and that she could not have

done more to assist the complainant. IMS has enrolled all Public Service Unit (PSU) staff in the City of Vancouver's Exceptional Customer Service Training Course.

With regard to the issue of the VPD's "service model", the VPD relies on E-Comm to receive calls for police service and dispatch resources, including when a person would like to report the incident at the PSC. This is an efficient method to provide emergency services for the community. Unfortunately, there are currently resourcing issues at E-Comm that have caused significant delays in answering non-emergency calls. Nonetheless, improved signage at the PSC and information pamphlets have been implemented to better communicate the process for requesting police attendance when reporting certain incidents, and to explain to members of the public what matters can be handled directly by PSC and E-Comm staff. In addition, the VPD is currently exploring the viability of stationing an officer at the PSC to investigate incidents reported by the public at the PSC.

Lastly, with regard to the clerical error, the civilian staff member acknowledged removing the missing entry by mistake and took full responsibility for this human error. As a result, additional controls and oversight have been established for both the individual staff member and general administrative procedure involving a missing person report.

The VPD acknowledges the complainant's negative experience during the reporting of this incident. An IMS Manager has apologized to the complainant and the VPD takes this opportunity to also apologize. The VPD sincerely offers our deepest condolences to the complainant and his family for their loss.

While the unintentional mistakes of VPD staff were not causal or contributory to the sudden death, this incident highlighted the potential for human errors to occur in the routing of a missing person file. To prevent similar situations from occurring, several corrective measures have been put into place. As such, the VPD recommends that the Committee concludes its review of the complaint based on information outlined in the report, and given that corrective practices and procedures have been adopted by the VPD.

RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION:

PSU Operations Manual

BACKGROUND:

On February 28, 2019, the complainant along with his adult daughter's boyfriend attended VPD headquarters at 2120 Cambie Street to report his daughter was missing. On the same day, the staff at the single room occupancy (SRO) hotel where the daughter resided also reported her as missing. As a result, the daughter was flagged as missing in the police database.

The complainant attended the VPD PSC and spoke to a staff member. The PSC staff member advised the complainant to contact the VPD non-emergency line to E-Comm to report a missing person. The complainant used his cell phone to make the phone call but was unsuccessful in getting through. The complainant re-attended the PSC and was advised to try using the VPD non-emergency line. Unfortunately, the complainant was still unable to reach an E-Comm call taker.

The complainant stated in his complaint that he attended the PSC a third time and was told to stop an officer. Also, the complainant stated that the PSC staff member was possibly being "ironic or sarcastic" during the third interaction. The video from the security camera was

inconsistent with the complainant's recollection of events – the video shows the complainant attending the PSC twice instead of three times.

Nevertheless, the complainant did stop a patrol supervisor and patrol officers were assigned to investigate. The patrol officers attended the daughter's SRO (on the day she was reported missing) and spoke to the staff who had also made the concurrent missing person call for service. The daughter was not located by patrol officers and a detailed missing person report was submitted. Shortly after the submission of the report and the flagging of the daughter in the police database as missing was done, a member of the VPD Transcription and CPIC Support Unit (TCSU), in an example of human error, removed the missing flag from the police database.

On March 3, 2019, the complainant contacted E-Comm to inquire about any updates on his daughter. The E-Comm call taker advised the complainant that his daughter was no longer flagged as missing. As a result, the complainant believed his daughter had been located.

On March 5, 2019, the staff at the SRO again contacted E-Comm to report that the daughter was still missing since the first report made on February 28th. VPD officers were assigned to investigate and discovered the TCSU error. Immediately, the MPU was notified of the error and began their investigation. The daughter's boyfriend was contacted and advised of this error. The boyfriend then told the complainant, who in turn contacted a detective in the MPU; however, further investigation by the MPU did not result in the location of the daughter.

On March 10, 2019, staff at the daughter's SRO contacted E-Comm to report a suspicious circumstance in one of their other units (not the missing daughter's unit). VPD officers attended and discovered the missing daughter deceased inside. The BC Coroners Service determined that the daughter was deceased on or about February 25, 2019, from a suspected overdose, three days prior to the first missing person report.

As a result of the interactions between the complainant and the VPD, an OPCC Complaint Form was filled out by the complainant and received by the VPD on March 19, 2019. The OPCC was forwarded a copy of the complaint and sent the Vancouver Police Board a Service or Policy letter dated March 25, 2019.

DISCUSSION:

Issue #1 - The Interaction between the Complainant and PSC Staff Member

Upon receiving this complaint, IMS immediately investigated the incident. The IMS manager responsible for the PSC did the following:

- Reviewed video from security cameras
- Interviewed seven PSC staff members (including the subject of the complaint) who worked on that day
- Reviewed the Public Service Unit *Operations Manual*

The IMS Manager's report stated, in part, the following:

“According to video, [PSC staff member] worked at the triage desk and spoke with [complainant] on two occasions. [PSC staff member] recalls [complainant] as it was the first time she had a customer who wanted to report a missing person. She remembered telling [complainant] that he needed to contact the non-emergency number using the phone in the

lobby, in order to report his daughter missing so they could dispatch a police officer to investigate and take the report.”

The IMS Manager further reported that the PSC member who interacted with the complainant was very upset during her interview, specifically because the complainant felt that she was unprofessional to him and she prided herself on assisting people. The IMS Manager and two co-workers reported that she has an excellent reputation for assisting the public during the course of her duties. The PSC member showed genuine concern about how the complainant felt as a result of their interaction, and that she could not have done more to assist the complainant.

The IMS Manager reviewed the PSU *Operations Manual* and noted that the procedure was followed correctly:

“Missing Persons

If a person:

- a. wants to report a Missing Person, please refer person to non-emergency line
- b. requires information about an outstanding missing person file, refer him/her to Missing Person Coordinator at 604-717-2530 or 2531
- c. is the missing person and is active on CPIC, contact E-Comm”

The IMS Manager also noted:

“The volume of customers that attend the Vancouver Police Department’s Public Service Unit is high. In 2018, the 2120 Cambie Public Service Unit served just over 25,000 customers in person (or 68 per day). This number does not reflect the additional support provided to VPD staff and/or additional behind the scenes administrative work that takes place. While it is remarkable that that this is the first OPCC complaint received for the Public Service Unit, we must remain diligent and ensure a commitment to the training, staffing, and equipment requirements that meets the needs of a high volume business.”

Furthermore, the IMS Manager recommended the following as a result of this complaint:

1. THAT, all PSU current and new employees be required to take an Exceptional Customer Service Course presented by the City of Vancouver City Learn;
2. THAT, all PSU current and new employees be required to take Crisis Intervention De-Escalation training, presented by the Vancouver Police Force Options Unit, once per year;
3. THAT, the PSU *Procedure Manual* is updated to include that all Missing Person Reports be referred to 911;
4. THAT, the non-emergency/911 and teletype terminal (TTY) telephone be relocated to wicket five at the PSU so customers can use it in a more private setting;
5. THAT, all customers who are referred to the non-emergency/911 and TTY telephone receive support from a designated staff member to ensure they get the service they require;
6. THAT, we continue to explore with E-Comm the opportunity to have a dedicated information line so that our customers and/or staff are not on hold for extended periods of time.

These recommendations were accepted by the Director of IMS and are currently being completed or have been already completed.

Issue #2 – VPD’s Service Model of Reporting an Incident at the PSC

Regarding the VPD service model for reporting incidents at the PSC, there are provisions within the PSU *Operations Manual* to reach out immediately to police officers if the incident reported is an emergency or a serious call. For example, if there are immediate safety concerns, PSC staff will ensure that the person requesting police services remain in a safe environment, such as staying inside the police building, even after it is closed to the public. However, in this particular incident, when reporting a missing person, the procedure to call the non-emergency line received by E-Comm was followed by PSC staff.

By referring the person to call E-Comm to report an incident, it allows E-Comm to prioritize the call accordingly and assign members from the correct District. E-Comm staff can also then provide the person with an estimate as to how long it might be for police attendance, which is a function of how busy it is at that time. The PSC does not have access or information on available policing resources. Unfortunately due to recent resourcing issues at E-Comm, there have been delays in answering non-emergency calls. E-Comm is aware of this problem and has assured the VPD that they are focused on resolving this concern.

Improved signage at the PSC and information pamphlets have been implemented to better communicate the process for requesting police attendance when reporting certain incidents, and to explain to members of the public what matters can be handled directly by PSC and E-Comm staff. In addition, the VPD is currently exploring the viability of stationing an officer at the PSC to investigate incidents reported by the public at the PSC.

Issue #3 – The Human Error in Removing the Missing Person from Police Databases

A second IMS manager responsible for the TCSU investigated the incident involving the missing flag being mistakenly removed. The manager’s report included, in part, the following:

“On February 28, 2019, [TCSU staff member] was assigned to CPIC and removed [daughter]’s missing person CPIC entry. The entry was removed approximately four hours after E-COMM added the entry.

...

[TCSU staff member] was unable to provide an explanation as to why she removed the missing person entry... [TCSU staff member] understood the gravity of her mistake and took full responsibility for her error.

...

To address [complainant]’s complaint and to help mitigate the risk of improper handling of Missing Persons CPIC entries, all TCSU staff have been reminded of the correct process. Staff were advised by email and in person of the correct procedures. In addition to this, TCSU now follows a new procedure where the Missing Person removal is verified by a co-worker.”

CONCLUSION:

The VPD acknowledges the complainant’s negative experience with the VPD. Unintentional mistakes were made during this process and the VPD respectfully apologizes to the complainant. The VPD also sincerely offers our deepest condolences to the complainant and his family for their loss.

The VPD has made changes to existing practices as a result of this complaint; therefore, it is recommended that the Committee concludes its review of the complaint based on information

outlined in the report, and given that corrective practices and procedures have been adopted by the VPD in response to the complaint.

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Submitting Executive Member:

A/DCC Martin Bruce Date: July 2, 2019