



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

REPORT TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE BOARD

REPORT DATE: March 31, 2021
BOARD MEETING DATE: April 15, 2021
BOARD REPORT # 2104C01
Regular

TO: **Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee**
FROM: Raj Mander, Staff Sergeant, Organized Crime Section, Investigation Division
SUBJECT: Service or Policy Complaint #2020-021 re: VPD Neighbourhood Response Team

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Vancouver Police Board (VPB) Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee (Committee) conclude its review of the complaint based on the information outlined in this report.

SUMMARY:

This Service or Policy Complaint relates to the deployment of the Vancouver Police Department's (VPD) Neighborhood Response Team (NRT) on November 2, 2020. The complainant identified their concerns including but not limited to: a lack of expertise of a third party independent market research and analytics firm retained by the VPD; a contravention of City Council resolutions; a lack of adherence to VPD's stated approach to mental health; a bypass by the VPD of municipal priorities set by City Council and other stakeholders within Vancouver; and the criminalization of people who rely on public space and those addicted to substances.

A review of data and advanced analytics for key performance indicators (KPI) in quarter three in 2020, showed an increase in the most serious assaults, anti-Asian hate crimes, and commercial break and enters in specific areas of Vancouver. Through the use of advanced analytics, crime trends and neighbourhood hot spots were identified in Strathcona, Chinatown, and Yaletown. Public feedback and firsthand reports from front line officers expressed concern from the public on their perceptions of safety. As part of our regular public surveys, the VPD was able to elicit further information from Leger's (an independent market research firm) polling on crime related issues in Vancouver. They were able to more broadly assess perceptions of public safety in Vancouver. In the Leger survey, respondents confirmed high levels of concern with respect to public safety and crime.

Due to the totality of factors referenced above, the NRT was deployed on November 2nd to December 14, 2020 for a period of 42 days to quickly respond to growing neighborhood concerns. During this period, the NRT dealt with 1,408 incidents, and recovered 210 weapons (e.g., bear spray, knives, tasers, etc.). The safety and well-being of those living on the streets was one of the

primary objectives as dozens of sleeping bags and snacks, donated through charities, were distributed. Successful referrals to shelters, hospitals, and mental health clinics were made, and NRT members prevented three potential overdose deaths after encountering individuals in distress.

This program was not a deviation from any internal mandates. This initiative was an added support to the already stretched resources in locations where new demands had arisen.

Based on the information detailed in this report, it is recommended the Committee conclude its review of this complaint.

POLICY/BACKGROUND:

On November 16, 2020, the complainant filed a Service or Policy Complaint with the VPB with respect to the deployment of the NRT on November 2, 2020. The complainant cited ten main areas of concern, including:

- I. The NRT has been deployed to respond to street disorder issues that are not necessarily criminal in nature: disturbances, suspicious circumstances, people trespassing, and mischief;
- II. The deployment of the teams was justified based on an independent survey conducted by a market research and analytics company;
- III. The Mission, Values, and Commitment of this firm (Leger) make no mention of any expertise in criminal justice, human rights, or policy reform;
- IV. The survey results are based on answers provided by 755 respondents, only 48% of whom live in Vancouver, 13% who work or conduct business in Vancouver, 11% who visit the city regularly, and 28% who have *no identified relationship* to the city;
- V. No peer-led, health, advocacy or social service organizations were identified as respondents;
- VI. The Neighbourhood Response Teams have been created based on the results of inadequate polling, despite an emphasis on engagement, outlined by Vancouver City Council, as well as numerous stakeholders in the City. The 2017-2021 Strategic Plan of the VPD outlines the organization's "community focused strategic priorities," which include community engagement.
- VII. The creation of a new team whose purpose directly contravenes City Council's resolutions to decriminalize poverty and instead support community-led safety initiatives;
- VIII. The creation of the Neighbourhood Response Teams undermines the VPD's stated approach to mental health, outlined in the *Vancouver Police Mental Health Strategy*. This Strategy states that the VPD has overarching objectives of client-focus and the recovery model, and the VPD consistently acknowledges that addiction is primarily a health issue, not a criminal justice issue;
- IX. The complainants believe that the deployment of the Neighbourhood Response Team will exacerbate disproportionate and discriminatory policing of people who rely on public space in several Vancouver neighbourhoods;
- X. The VPD has unilaterally established a Neighbourhood Response Team, ignoring the municipal priorities and engagement in civic processes. The *Police Act* explicitly states that the municipal police board must consider the priorities, goals, and objectives of the council of the municipality;

The complainant set out three recommendations as a part of their complaint:

1. The VPD must halt the deployment of the Neighbourhood Response Team;
2. The VPD must disclose all expenditures, policies and practice documents related to the creation/deployment of the Neighbourhood Response Team; and
3. The VPD must supply City Council with all information requested in the Vancouver City Council Motion “Decriminalizing Poverty”: an itemized account of the work done by the Department policing mental health, homelessness, drug use, sex work, and the amount of money spent on it, including the number of tickets issued from enforcing related bylaws as well as the cost of this enforcement.

DISCUSSION:

Background: NRT

Data and analytics for key performance indicators (KPI's) are used by the VPD to make operational decisions on the allocation of resources. By September 30, 2020, Vancouver saw a 878% increase in anti-Asian hate crime incidents, 39% increase in arsons, 14% increase in the most serious assaults, and nearly an 18% increase in commercial break and enters. Through the use of advanced analytics, crime trends and neighbourhood hot spots were identified in Strathcona, Chinatown, and Yaletown. These neighborhoods experienced increases up to 51% in “street disorder” type calls compared to the year prior.

During the same time, public feedback received by the VPD, and firsthand reports from front line officers, indicated people in Vancouver were feeling unsafe. The VPD was receiving dozens of public complaints on a weekly basis with respect to response times for these “lower priority” calls for service. Even though the VPD conducts regular public surveys, the VPD wanted to further understand how individuals, families, and business owners felt about neighbourhood safety. An independent market research firm (Leger) was retained to elicit this polling information on broader crime related issues in Vancouver.

In the Leger survey, 78% of respondents expressed concerns about crime in Vancouver. This grew to 84% for residents of downtown Vancouver and further grew to 94% for respondents who had been a victim of crime in the past year. In the 11-question Leger survey, respondents confirmed high levels of concern with respect to public safety and crime that were earlier expressed in public feedback and anecdotal reports from front line officers.

Due to the totality of factors referenced above, the deployment of a Neighbourhood Response Team (NRT) was approved with two main purposes:

1. The first was a reactive purpose to provide a faster, more prioritized response to existing calls for service. Front line officers often responded to calls that had escalated while they were in the calls for service queue. These call types were often triaged in the early stages and could sit idle for many hours or even days. These call types included those referenced by the complainant such as disturbances, suspicious circumstances, people trespassing, and mischief. They also included calls for open drug use on private property, school property, and playgrounds. Another frequent call type was from people unable to access their businesses and residences.
2. The second was a proactive purpose to address community concerns. Enforcement through new criminal charges was the lowest priority unless the circumstances required it

for the safety of witnesses, victims, or the general public. NRT members were provided with one document, created by the Overdose Outreach Team (OOT), for referrals. NRT members also were provided with a contact list for other service providers including: Veteran Affairs Canada, Housing Sites in District 1, City of Vancouver 211, Coast Mental Health, Catholic Charities Men's Hostel, BC Housing, Metson Shelter, Covenant House, Directions Youth Services, and the Gathering Place.

Results: NRT

The NRT deployed daily with a team of up to six uniformed officers and two special constables from the Community Safety Program on November 2, 2020. NRT deployed for a period of 42 days, ending on December 14, 2020. The assigned members were re-allocated from various teams and units including patrol, neighborhood policing, and the Community Services Section. Overtime was utilized to supplement this team at a cost of \$64,246.12. The majority of policing resources were on-duty personnel.

During this period, the NRT dealt with 1,408 calls for service and recovered 210 weapons including: 118 knives and edged weapons, 27 machete's, 27 canisters of bear spray, 47 other weapons including tasers, and 8 replica firearms. With a community-focussed approach, the number of successful referrals to shelters, hospitals, and mental health clinics outnumbered new criminal charge recommendations by a factor of two. NRT officers could not release some of the persons under arrest if they were found to be breaching court ordered conditions or if they were found to have outstanding warrants of arrest issued by the courts.

NRT members spoke to over 300 people about their safety and well-being without asking for identifying information. During these interactions, NRT members handed out dozens of sleeping bags and snacks donated through charities. Over 150 people were offered referrals to shelters and 15 people successfully obtained shelter spots across the city. The NRT connected four people with hospitals for their outstanding mental health needs, one person to the Overdose Outreach Team, and further connected another four people to a Mental Health Clinic through AOT. NRT members offered these services many times per shift, but more often than not, this assistance was declined.

Through patrols and presence, in the identified areas and laneways, the NRT prevented three potential overdose deaths by immediately calling EHS when a person in distress was encountered. Each of the individuals were administered Naloxone/Narcan by EHS and survived the ordeal. The NRT assisted one intoxicated male with a significant head injury after he was observed falling and hitting his head on the street. EHS was immediately called and members assisted in ensuring the individual was taken to the hospital.

Concerns of the Complainant

In the complaint, the complaint raised concerns that were categorized by the author in to ten areas. In addition to information already supplied, responses to these concerns are included below:

- I. *The NRT has been deployed to respond to street disorder issues that are not necessarily criminal in nature: disturbances, suspicious circumstances, people trespassing, and mischief;*

The NRT responded to calls for service in the same manner as other patrol members across the city. The major difference was, NRT members were more likely to respond to calls from the bottom of the priority queue of holding calls versus the top. The complainant cited four of the call types as being “Not necessarily criminal in nature”. When any police officer responds to a “Cause Disturbance” or a “Mischief”, they have a duty to investigate both as criminal offences. Trespassing, under the *Trespass Act*, is an example of a provincial statute. Police have a duty to investigate a variety of provincial statutes and municipal bylaws reported by the public. Once a member of the public calls the VPD, or a VPD member observes an offence, they cannot simply ignore it.

- II. *The deployment of the teams was justified based on an independent survey conducted by a market research and analytics company;*
- III. *The Mission, Values, and Commitment of this firm (Leger) make no mention of any expertise in criminal justice, human rights, or policy reform;*

The deployment of the NRT was in response to the totality of at least four factors including: a review of data and analytics for key performance indicators (KPI), use of crime analysts to identify crime trends and neighbourhood hot spots, public feedback and firsthand reports from front line officers, and an independent survey to more broadly assess perceptions of public safety in Vancouver. The independent survey was not meant to steer or develop operational policies. Thus, expertise in criminal justice, human rights, or policy reform was not a requirement. The VPD was satisfied in this firm’s ability to capture the public’s broader perceptions of crime.

Leger is the largest Canadian-owned market research and analytics company, with 600 employees in Canada and the United States. Leger is a member of The Canadian Research Insights Council (CRIC). They recently received the (CRIC) Accredited Agency seal for their commitment to upholding the best practices, standards, and ethics in the market research, analytics, and insights industry. Leger is also a member of The European Society for Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR), demonstrating their commitment to following the ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics. Their list of public sector clients include: The Government of Canada, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. Leger’s municipal government clients include the cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, and Vancouver. Their list of educational institutions include the Universities of Alberta, British Columbia, Calgary, Lethbridge, Ottawa, Toronto, Victoria and Waterloo.

- IV. *The survey results are based on answers provided by 755 respondents, only 48% of whom live in Vancouver, 13% who work or conduct business in Vancouver, 11% who visit the city regularly, and 28% who have no identified relationship to the city;*
- V. *No peer-led, health, advocacy or social service organizations were identified as respondents;*
- VI. *The Neighbourhood Response Teams have been created based on the results of inadequate polling, despite an emphasis on engagement, outlined by Vancouver City Council, as well as numerous stakeholders in the City. The 2017-2021 Strategic Plan of the VPD outlines the organization’s “community focused strategic priorities,” which include community engagement.*

The Leger survey was an on-line survey conducted between October 6 to October 14, 2020. A total of 755 respondents who either live, work, or visit Vancouver took part in the survey. The following chart displays this breakdown:

Type of Respondent	%	N
I live in Vancouver	49%	363
I both live and work in Vancouver	27%	211
I work and/or conduct business in Vancouver	13%	95
I visit Vancouver for various activities including shopping, appointments, entertainment, and social activities, among others	11%	84
TOTAL		753

Note: two respondents completed the survey but did not indicate if they lived, worked, or visited Vancouver.

The categories of *'I live in Vancouver'* and *'I both live and work in Vancouver'* are distinct. Therefore, the number of respondents who reside in Vancouver is a sample size of 574 (363 from the *'I live in Vancouver'* category combined with the 211 from the *'I both live and work in Vancouver'* category). Residents of Vancouver represented 76% of the total sample. Similarly, the sample size for people who work in Vancouver is 306 (40% of the total sample). The sample size of 306 was derived from combination of the 211 responses from people who *'both live and work in Vancouver'* and the 95 responses from people who *'work or conduct business in Vancouver'* (but don't live in Vancouver). In Summary:

- The total number respondents who reside in Vancouver (574) represented 76% of the sample size;
- The total number of respondents who work in Vancouver (306) represented 40% of the sample size.

These combinations do not represent a 'double-count' because not all respondents answer all of the questions. For example, a respondent who does not live in Vancouver did not answer questions about crime in the Vancouver neighborhood they live in. Similarly, a respondent who does not work in Vancouver did not answer questions about crime near their workplace.

Focusing on the total sample and the sample of Vancouver residents:

- For the total number of respondents (755), a probability sample would have a margin of error of $\pm 3.6\%$, 19 times out of 20.
- For the number of respondents (574) who live in Vancouver, a probability sample would have a margin of error of $\pm 4.1\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The most important factor in the reliability of public opinion survey results is the degree of population representativeness, and in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity, the survey results are in-line with the 2016 Census proportions for Vancouver. Leger advises that the "results are representative of the city based on these key demographic variables".

VII. *The creation of a new team whose purpose directly contravenes City Council's resolutions to decriminalize poverty and instead support community-led safety initiatives;*

- VIII. *The creation of the Neighbourhood Response Teams undermines the VPD's stated approach to mental health, outlined in the Vancouver Police Mental Health Strategy. This Strategy states that the VPD has overarching objectives of client-focus and the recovery model, and the VPD consistently acknowledges that addiction is primarily a health issue, not a criminal justice issue;*
- IX. *The Complainants belief that the deployment of the Neighbourhood Response Team will exacerbate disproportionate and discriminatory policing of people who rely on public space in several Vancouver neighbourhoods;*

One of the two main purposes of the NRT was to address community concerns. Enforcement through new criminal charges was the lowest priority unless the circumstances required it for the safety of witnesses, victims, or the general public. The number of successful referrals to shelters, hospitals, and mental health clinics outnumbered new criminal charge recommendations by a factor of two. Compassion and police discretion were a major focus of the NRT and the statistics demonstrate that.

- X. *The VPD has unilaterally established a Neighbourhood Response Team, ignoring the municipal priorities and engagement in civic processes. The Police Act explicitly states that the municipal police board must consider the priorities, goals, and objectives of the council of the municipality;*

The deployment of the NRT was a short-term operational response when data, analytics, public feedback, and the use of crime analysts demonstrated a need for the re-allocation of resources. This deployment was aligned with the VPD's Strategic Plan.

Recommendations of the Complainant

The complainant set out three recommendations as a part of their complaint. Responses to those recommendations are included below:

1. *The VPD must halt the deployment of the Neighbourhood Response Team;*

The NRT was last deployed on December 14, 2020. There are no current plans for this team to deploy in the near future, however should a public safety issue arise, this team may be considered for redeployment. This will be an operational decision of the VPD.

2. *The VPD must disclose all expenditures, policies and practice documents related to the creation/deployment of the Neighbourhood Response Team; and*

The NRT deployed daily with a team of up to six uniformed officers and two special constables from the Community Safety Program on November 2nd, 2020. NRT deployed for a period of 42 days, ending on December 14th, 2020. The assigned members were re-allocated from various teams and units including patrol, neighborhood policing, and the Community Services Section. Overtime was utilized to supplement this team at a cost of \$64,246.12. The majority of policing resources were on-duty personnel. The two main purposes and objectives for the team were communicated to the team during briefings have been included in this report. The VPD did not create any new regulations, policies, or procedures related to this deployment. Two documents carried by team members during shifts have been attached to this report. This includes a document, created by the Overdose Outreach Team (OOT), for referrals. This also includes a contact list for other service providers (with private information redacted).

3. *The VPD must supply City Council with all information requested in the Vancouver City Council Motion “Decriminalizing Poverty”: an itemized account of the work done by the Department policing mental health, homelessness, drug use, sex work, and the amount of money spent on it, including the number of tickets issued from enforcing related bylaws as well as the cost of this enforcement.*

This recommendation was addressed by the VPD by the release of the following document last November:

<https://vpd.ca/police/assets/pdf/reports-policies/our-community-in-need.pdf>

CONCLUSION:

Operational deployments and priorities are typically determined through the use of advanced analytics to identify crime trends and neighbourhood hot spots. In this case, the VPD took additional steps to more broadly assess perceptions of public safety while re-assessing operational priorities. The VPD received upwards of 100 letters, emails, notes, and calls of support for the Neighborhood Response Team. The VPD listened to residents and provided additional resources and support to those who previously had to wait hours and days to receive it. This program was not a deviation from any internal mandates. This initiative was an added support to the already stretched resources in locations where new demands had arisen.

Based on the information detailed in this report, it is recommended that the Committee conclude its review of this complaint.

Author: S/Sgt. Raj Mander

Date: March 31, 2021

Submitting Executive Member:

Deputy Chief Howard Chow

Date: April 6, 2021

CONTACT LIST

ORGANIZATION	NAME	PHONE/EMAIL	NOTES
Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)	V1 [REDACTED] Veterans Service Team Manager	V1 [REDACTED]	Mental Health
	V1 [REDACTED] Veterans Service Team Manager	V1 [REDACTED]	Mental Health
	V1 [REDACTED] A/ Veterans Service Team Manager	V1 [REDACTED]	Mental Health (Assigned to Sean Cote's file)
D1 Housing Sites	V1 [REDACTED] Atira, Buchan Hotel	V1 [REDACTED]	Buchan Hotel, 1906 Haro St. Women's Shelter 60 rooms/no pets
	V1 [REDACTED] Onsite Manager Hosteling Int'l	V1 [REDACTED]	Hosteling Int'l 1025 Granville St. 44 rooms/no pets
	V1 [REDACTED] Head office Community Builders	V1 [REDACTED]	Hosteling Int'l 1025 Granville St
	V1 [REDACTED] Onsite Manager Hosteling Int'l 2	V1 [REDACTED]	Hosteling Int'l 2 1114 Burnaby St. 68 rooms/no pets
	V1 [REDACTED] Onsite Manager LUUGAT	V1 [REDACTED]	LUUGAT (formerly the Howard Johnson) 1176 Granville St. 110 rooms/no pets
	V1 [REDACTED] Manager Holiday Inn	V1 [REDACTED]	Holiday Inn 1110 Howe St. 102 rooms/no pets
	V1 [REDACTED] BC Housing	V1 [REDACTED]	BC Housing
CoV 211	Short term Housing Resource	211	Assist with locating shelter bed for the night

CoV Engineering	V1 [Redacted]	V1 [Redacted]	Assist with encampment cleanup
Park Rangers		V1 [Redacted]	Encampment cleanup in City Parks
Coast Mental Health	V1 [Redacted] Program Coordinator	V1 [Redacted]	1225 Seymour St
Catholic Charities Men's Hostel	V1 [Redacted], Director	V1 [Redacted]	828 Cambie St
BC Housing	V1 [Redacted] Access and Assessment Coordinator	V1 [Redacted]	297 E Hastings
Community Builders (Metson Shelter)	V1 [Redacted] Shelter Manager	V1 [Redacted]	1060 Howe St
Covenant House	V1 [Redacted]	V1 [Redacted]	1302 Seymour St
Directions Youth Services	V1 [Redacted] Outreach V1 [Redacted] Shelter	V1 [Redacted]	1138 Burrard St
Overdose Outreach Team	V1 [Redacted] Social Worker	V1 [Redacted]	524 Powell St
The Gathering Place	V1 [Redacted] Manager V1 [Redacted] Outreach Worker V1 [Redacted] Outreach Worker	V1 [Redacted]	609 Helmcken St

Overdose Outreach Team (OOT)

604-360-2874

For any person that appears to be struggling with Substance Use

VISION, MISSION, & PURPOSE

Vision: To promote a sustainable system of care where people can freely access safe substance use care, supports and resources without judgement or prejudice in a timely and equitable manner.

Mission: To streamline access to substance use care and enhance support for people in the VCH region by providing navigation, linkage and services in a respectful manner to keep people engaged and in treatment.

OOT SERVICE DESCRIPTION & DETAILS

Services Include:

- Navigation to appropriate health and social services
- Complex care coordination and planning for clients with barriers to engagement and retention in services
- Support in accessing Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) (e.g., methadone, suboxone, iOAT etc.)
- Overdose prevention education

Hours of operation: 0800 to 1800 hours, Monday to Friday (phones will continue to be answered 1800 to 2000 hours)
Will also answer phones on the Weekend from 0800 to 2000 hours

To make a referral please call (604-360-2874) with as many of the following details as possible:

- Client's name
- Birth date
- Personal Health Care Number (PHN) or PARIS #
- Reason for referral
- Best way to contact client for follow-up (phone, address, hang-out)

Location: The team operates out of 524 Powell Street.

Staffing: Multiple staff per day available by phone (outreach workers, peers support specialists, and social workers) including an after-hours call service until 8:00pm on weekends

Identifying potential clients

If you are concerned about any client following an overdose on opioids or other substance use issues, please call to make a referral.

Example client referral:

- Client who is disconnected from care or not in regular contact with care and has overdosed recently
- Client who is connected to care but has overdosed multiple times
- Client who is at high risk of overdose and is not connected to care