



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

REPORT TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE BOARD

REPORT DATE: June 6, 2022

COMMITTEE MEETING DATE: June 23, 2022

BOARD REPORT # 2206C04

Regular

TO: Vancouver Police Board

FROM: Acting Staff Sergeant Ali Gailus – Operations Division/District 2

SUBJECT: Service or Policy Complaint # 2022-005 re: Delayed police response for a Commercial Break and Enter in Gastown

RECOMMENDATION

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

SUMMARY:

On February 17, 2022, the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC) received a Service or Policy Complaint relating to the Vancouver Police Department's (VPD) response to an incident that occurred on February 16, 2022. The complainant is the owner of a multi-unit commercial building in Gastown who called the VPD to report a break and enter (BNE) on behalf of one of their tenants (tenant store manager), whose store was broken into on the evening of February 16, 2022. The Service and Policy Complaint sub-committee reviewed the complaint and requested a report back from the Vancouver Police Department VPD.

There are three components to this complaint:

1. The complainant's concern regarding the VPD's response time to the BNE;
2. The complainant's sense of frustration arising from a perceived lack of VPD response in general to BNEs to their building;
3. When the complainant called 911, E-Comm did not take the complainant's information, and instead directed them to call the police non-emergency line, which is also managed by E-Comm.

With respect to the first component of this complaint, a subsequent review determined that due to high call volume, other priority calls, and a shooting in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) during the same time frame of the BNE, requiring the vast majority of District 2's personnel resources, there were no available units to attend the tenant store manager's call, which had been triaged by E-Comm as a lower priority call. The tenant store manager was advised by phone that police

would not be attending that evening to take a report due to other priority events. During that call the tenant store manager stated he understood the delay and would secure the business.

With respect to the second component, the VPD contacted the complainant directly and met them in person to discuss their concerns. The complainant described feeling a sense of frustration at the number of commercial BNEs over the past few years in the Gastown area. The complainant was appreciative of the conversation and acknowledged that they believe the property crime issue in Gastown is a symptom of broader social issues related to substance use and other factors beyond the VPD's control.

With respect to the third component, a subsequent review determined that when the complainant called 911, the complainant was advised to call the non-emergency number as 911 is only for high priority calls. There is no record of the complainant calling the non-emergency line to report the BNE until the following day on February 17, 2022.

The VPD recommends that the Committee conclude its review based on the information outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND:

The complainant states that they called 911 on February 15, 2022 to report a BNE to one of the units in their building but the VPD does not have record of this. It was determined that the complainant made an error on the date in his registered complainant as the BNE occurred on the February 16, 2022.

According to the VPD records, on February 16, 2021, the alarm company advised VPD of the alarm call. As per policy, the alarm call was placed on the call board to be dispatched. The tenant store manager attended the store and called in the BNE to E-Comm after they received a call from the alarm company. The tenant store manager advised E-Comm it was a confirmed BNE, with no suspects on scene and no mention of potential forensic evidence left at the scene (e.g. blood, finger prints).

Police dispatch conducted a general radio broadcast of the BNE and assigned the BNE call to a lower priority as the suspect was no longer on scene. Furthermore, a District 2 Acting Sergeant advised E-Comm dispatch to hold the call in the queue for the Operations Support Unit (OSU) to make an appointment for the Dedicated Alternate Response Section (DARS) to attend the following day during daytime hours.

The Acting Sergeant attempted to call the tenant store manager to advise them of this update, but they were unable to reach them. Police dispatch did reach the tenant store manager to advise that police would not be attending as there were no available units. The tenant store manager told dispatch they understood the delay in police attending and would secure the business for the night until police could attend the following day (February 17, 2022).

In addition to the alarm company calling on February 16, 2022, the complainant also called 911 to report the BNE and was advised to call the police non-emergency line, according to the VPD Computer Aided Dispatch call log. No call was generated at that time through non-emergency and it is unknown if it is because the complainant did not call non-emergency or called non-emergency but was on hold for too long.

On February 17, 2022, the VPD Operational Support Unit called the tenant store manager back in an attempt to book an appointment for a patrol member to attend the scene and collect CCTV footage. The tenant store manager said they were upset that police did not respond the previous night and they did not want any further action taken.

Also on February 17, 2022, the complainant called the police non-emergency line to report the same BNE that occurred the evening before on February 16, 2022 as well as a second BNE to the same commercial building but a different unit. The complainant told E-Comm a torch was used to break the glass and there was over \$20,000 worth of items stolen. The complainant shared their concerns to the E-Comm call taker that they feel the VPD does not attend quickly enough for these BNE investigations and they wanted to know how best to prevent these incidents from happening. The E-Comm call taker suggested contacting a security company and explained their process of triaging calls that are not in progress. The call taker also referred the complainant to the VPD's Professional Standards Section should they wish to make a complaint. However, on February 17, 2022, a VPD patrol member attended the complainant's building.

At that time, the tenant store manager for the original BNE was at their store and provided the details of what was stolen, as well as CCTV footage. While the patrol member was at the scene taking the report from the tenant store manager, the complainant arrived and advised the patrol member that the same suspect was seen on video on February 16, 2022, breaking into another unit in the same building and stealing items.

The patrol member provided the complainant and tenant store manager with directions on how to submit the CCTV footage on-line. The patrol member advised the tenant store manager and complainant that once the CCTV footage was submitted, efforts would be made to obtain video stills of the suspect so an ID poster could be created and disseminated to patrol for identification.

DISCUSSION

This report:

- Summarizes the incident of concern for the complainant on February 16, 2022;
- Reviews the number of Calls For Service (CFS) in District 2 for February 16, 2022;
- Reviews the CFS made by the complainant in the past two years.

On April 9, 2022, the VPD met with the complainant in person to discuss their concerns. The complainant wanted to make a Service or Policy Complaint because they were frustrated with the VPD not attending to take a report on the night of the BNE. The complainant was also frustrated by the perceived frequency that Gastown businesses were experiencing commercial BNEs over the past few years.

The conversation was positive in that the complainant appreciated the circumstances and challenges that the VPD's Beat Enforcement Team and District 2 patrol members manage in the DTES. The complainant explained they experienced other BNEs over the years that did not garner a timely police response. The complainant shared their frustration about the City of Vancouver and their perception of the judicial system. After further discussion, the complainant acknowledged they believed that the complex social issues in the DTES are not simply a policing issue, but a societal issue. The VPD explained how CFS are prioritized and the reasons for a delayed police response (as described above).

The complainant appreciated the connection made by the VPD during this discussion. The VPD has dedicated additional police presence in the area during evening hours to address the complainant's concerns and continued to stop by and liaise with the on-site security guard during evening hours. The complaint was advised that the current District priority is to increase patrols and visibility in the Gastown and Chinatown areas.

On April 25, 2022, the VPD followed up with the complainant via email to thank them for their time and inquire if there were any new concerns. The complainant was once again appreciative of the increased direct communication with the VPD. There were no other CFS since February 16, 2022.

The complaint identified a concern with a perceived lack of response to the complainant's CFS over the past few years. A review of CFS to the complainant's building address shows that four CFS exist that are related to the complainant for CBNE's. All four calls were between 2019 and 2022. All calls had police attendance and a report was written.

In the entire city, the daily average for CFS is approximately 640. In comparing CFS for February 16, 2022 to the other days in February as well as 2019, 2020 and 2021, the average daily number of CFS for District 2 for February 2022 was 175. February 16, 2022 had 186 CFS and February 17, 2022 had 212. CFS indicating that both the day of and day after the complaint were above average. The higher CFS likely contributed to the slower police response time for lower priority calls.

The review also determined that on February 16, 2022, there was a shooting in the DTES approximately one hour before the BNE happened. This shooting required the majority of Beat Enforcement Team and District 2 patrol members to assist with the investigation and crime scene. Additional units were drawn from other Districts as well as specialty units to support the shooting investigation.

VPD spoke with the complainant on the phone again to advise them of the shooting the same time frame as the BNE's, contributing to the delay in police response. The complainant was also reminded of how calls are prioritized based on call type. The complainant appreciated the follow up call and indicated they would continue to call 911 or the non-emergency line should they require police assistance.

CONCLUSION

The complainant's primary concern was the perceived lack of timely response by the VPD to attend to take a BNE report and on-going frustrations with BNE's. As outlined in this report, the contributing factors that led to VPD not being able to attend and take a report the night of the BNE (i.e., a shooting, higher than average CFS), provide a reasonable and sound explanation.

The complainant has a better understanding now of how E-Comm prioritizes CFS, specifically when it comes to alarm and BNE call types when the BNE is completed and the suspect is no longer on scene.

The VPD acknowledges the complainant's frustration in regards to response times; however, resourcing and high call volume have resulted in longer wait time. To combat this, District 2 management continues to make police presence and visibility in the Gastown area a priority. The VPD continues to have a community partnership with the manager of Gastown Security to ensure current trends and concerns are being shared/addressed.

No shortcoming was identified in the level of VPD service or its policies. As such, the VPD recommends that the Committee conclude its review based on the information outlined in this report.

Author: A/Staff Sergeant Ali Gailus _____ Date: June 6, 2022

Submitting Executive Member:

DCC Howard Chow _____ Date: June 8, 2022