



SASKATOON POLICE SERVICE

“PUBLIC AGENDA”

TO: Jo Custead, Chairperson
Board of Police Commissioners

FROM: Troy Cooper
Office of the Chief

DATE: 2021 March 29

SUBJECT: Community Focused Safety – Partnership with SCIS

FILE #: 15,039

ISSUE:

The purpose of this report is to provide a response to the Board of Police Commissioners on a desired state of collaborative response between the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) and Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service (SCIS).

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be received.

STRATEGIC THEMES:

This report is aligned with all of the themes within the Saskatoon Police Service’s Strategic Plan as it aims to:

- Reduce Crime and improve Community Safety;
- Ensure Our People are well trained, professional and safe;
- Leverage community and government partnerships to deploy the most effective and efficient responses possible;
- Improve communication and transparency with the public; and
- Utilize innovation through deployment of technology and innovative approaches to community safety.

BACKGROUND:

In response to both global and local calls for police to examine their role in addressing public safety, the SPS has had ongoing engagement with the community to better understand what our role should be in this shared responsibility.

One key partner, SCIS, provides 24/7/365 telephone, office, and mobile response in the community for individuals and families in a crisis/emergency situation. A crisis may involve mental health and suicide prevention, interpersonal violence, child abuse/neglect, and assistance for vulnerable persons.

At a June 2020 joint meeting of the Board of Police Commissioners and the City of Saskatoon's Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) the following was resolved:

That a report be prepared for the Board of Police Commissioners and City Council outlining a desired state of collaborative response between SPS and SCIS with a comment on available resources and how to best meet community need. That this be prepared collaboratively between SPS, SCIS, and appropriate Civic Administration.

In response, the SPS and SCIS met in October of 2020 to explore opportunities to strengthen an already long standing collaborative relationship between the two agencies. To understand the scope and extent of what an increased collaboration might look like it was extremely important to conduct some research into police calls for service in order to determine what types of calls might be able to be handled by an agency like SCIS. This research would assist SCIS to determine if they had any capacity to expand their current offerings in the community.

This relationship has been in place since 1980 when SCIS formed as a not-for-profit organization in Saskatoon. This partnership has included monitoring crisis workers at calls in the community via the City of Saskatoon's radio network, assisting each other at calls for service, and in 2014, the formation of the province's first Police and Crisis Team (PACT).

Each year the City of Saskatoon has provided an operating grant to SCIS including \$197,100 and there has been discussion both at GPC and at the Board of Police Commissioners meeting about who would be best suited to administer this grant.

After meeting with SCIS, the Service met with representatives from the City of Saskatoon's Recreation and Community Development Division and all three parties concurred that the yearly grant funding would be suitably transferred from the City of Saskatoon to the Saskatoon Police Service's future operating budgets pending GPC approval.

A December 7, 2020 report to the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners recommended the Saskatoon Police Service administer the yearly grant for SCIS and this is supported by Rita Field who simply wanted to express the need for long-term sustainable funding for SCIS.

“PUBLIC AGENDA”

On February 16, 2021, the GPC acknowledged receipt of the December 7, 2020 report but requested the Board provide a follow up report to the Committee. More specifically:

The report is to address the desired state of collaborative crisis response between the Saskatoon Police Service and Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service, and any progress made on achieving that outcome.

DISCUSSION:

The research was conducted by Sergeant Jodi Earl from the Vulnerable Persons Unit and Mitchell Nemeth from the Planning and Research Unit. The research project involved an examination of calls for service that are sometimes characterized as Quality of Life calls and included the following Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) Calls for Service.

- See Complainant
- Public Intoxication
- Unknown Problem
- Disturbances
- Mental Health
- Attempted Suicide
- Attempted Suicide in Progress

Three months of Calls for Service in the above noted categories were examined and the months examined were July 2019, August 2019, and January 2020. These months were chosen as they represented pre-COVID data and would likely be more representative of non COVID times. In total, 6,758 Calls for Service were examined meeting the above criteria in the selected three-month period.

All of these calls were examined through the lens of the SCIS mandate and potential level of threat. Only the initial call information was reviewed because, hypothetically, this is the only information available to Communications staff who would have to determine whether to dispatch police or SCIS.

The following threat assessment criteria was also used in determining whether SCIS could be dispatched:

- Are weapons present?
- Is there a threat to the subject and/or others in the area?
- Has a criminal act occurred?
- Was there any mention of a “psychotic break”, “breakdown”, “yelling at staff”, etc?
- Are people intoxicated?
- Is the call outside the purview of SCIS (ie: providing crisis-related services to the residents of Saskatoon?)

“PUBLIC AGENDA”

If “Yes” was answered to any of the above, it was decided that police and not SCIS would be dispatched. This process was followed for each of the 6,758 calls reviewed.

The reviewers also worked collaboratively to ensure there was consistency during the decision making process. The number of calls reviewed by each contributor (Sergeant Earl and Mitchell Nemeth) is provided in the table below:

Month	Earl reviewed	Nemeth reviewed	Total
July 2019	1,189	1,248	2,437
August 2019	1,195	1,167	2,362
January 2020	930	1,029	1,959
Total	3,314	3,444	6,758

Key Findings

Calls that could be dispatched to SCIS; by initial call code	Jul-19	Aug-19	Jan-20	Total over 3 months	TOTAL SPS CFS over 3 months	% of total dispatched to SCIS
ATTEMPTED SUICIDE	31	17	22	70	152	46%
ATTEMPTED SUICIDE - IN PROGRESS	65	38	42	145	438	33%
DISTURBANCE	5		1	6	2,694	0%
DRUNKENESS	2			2	1,211	0%
MENTAL HEALTH	4	9	8	21	162	13%
SEE COMPLAINANT	18	8	11	37	1,009	4%
UNKNOWN PROBLEM	5	3	1	9	1,092	1%
Total	130	75	85	290	6,758	4%

- Based on the three months of data reviewed and the prescribed threat assessment procedure, *between 75 and 130 calls per month could be diverted to SCIS. (50-100 attempted suicide calls)*
- Attempted Suicide and Attempted Suicides in Progress calls for service consistently had the highest of proportion of calls that could be diverted to SCIS.
 - 46% of attempted suicide and 33% of attempted suicide in progress over the three months analyzed could be diverted to SCIS.
 - Further broken-down by month, this equates to 96 (July 2019), 55 (August 2019) and 64 (January 2020) attempted suicides and attempted suicides in progress calls per month.
- The remaining call codes (disturbance, public intoxication, mental health, see complainant and unknown problem) consistently had a smaller number of calls that could be diverted to SCIS.

“PUBLIC AGENDA”

- 13% of mental health calls, 4% of see complainant calls and 1% of unknown problem calls during the three months analyzed could be diverted to SCIS, respectively.
- Essentially none of the disturbance or intoxication calls could be diverted to SCIS.

Unfortunately, beyond the scope of this limited research, there is very little national and international level research available on this topic. Two recent publications paint a very real picture of the amount of times the police will still be required to respond to Persons with Mental Illness (PMI's).

The first report titled “*Our Community in Need*”¹ released by the Vancouver Police in November of 2020 included an analysis of 265,000 annual calls for service in Vancouver. The VPD learned that 13,592 calls for service had a mental health component:

- 84% of these calls necessitated a police attendance
- 26% of these calls came from health or care professionals

The second report completed in March of 2021 by Canadian researchers sponsored by the Royal Society of Canada published a report titled, “*The Limits of Our Knowledge: Tracking the Size and Scope of Police Involvement with Persons with Mental Illness*”² (PMI's) found the following:

- Data accuracy in tracking PMI's needs to improve
- Data sharing between health and Police needs to improve
- Need to study the nature of PMI's within police databases
- Research collaborations are important
- More research is required to understand the issues related to police mental health responses with Indigenous communities

Based on the available research including our own, the SPS and SCIS are committed to the following:

1. SPS will work with SCIS to develop a risk matrix for diversion of some calls to SCIS
2. SPS will divert lower risk attempted suicide calls to SCIS
3. SPS will further explore enhanced mental health tracking within CAD

¹ Retrieved from <https://vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/reports-policies/our-community-in-need.pdf>

² Huey, L., Ferguson, L., Vaughan, A.D., *The Limits of Our Knowledge: Tracking the Size and Scope of Police Involvement with Persons with Mental Illness*. Royal Society of Canada. 2021

“PUBLIC AGENDA”

CONCLUSION:


The challenge for many communities, including the City of Saskatoon, is that there are only a limited number of funded entities who offer 24/7 support services in the community and when these services are not available, the default agency is almost always the police, who in the vast majority of cases, respond compassionately and appropriately.

Based on the available research both locally and nationally, the pervasiveness of mental health embedded in many police calls for service is grossly underestimated. Despite this, the will of the Saskatoon Police Service for positive change has never been stronger.

In Saskatoon this includes diversion of attempted suicide calls to the SCIS's Mobile Crisis Service and the expansion of the number of Police and Crisis Teams (PACT).

Written by: **Mitch Yuzdepski**
Deputy Chief, Support Services

Contributors: **Sergeant Jodi Earl, Vulnerable Persons Unit**
Mitchell Nemeth, Research Coordinator

Approved by: 
Troy Cooper
Chief of Police

Dated: April 1, 2021