NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE
Police Services Board Report

PUBLIC AGENDA

Subject:	Annual Report - Communications and Dispatch Board By-Law 194-2000 - January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020
Report To:	Chair and Members, Niagara Police Services Board
Report Date:	2021-11-04

Recommendation(s)

That the Niagara Police Services Board receives this report for information purposes.

Key Facts

- By-Law 194-2000, a by-law respecting Communications and Dispatch, was enacted as a result of Provincial Adequacy Standards Regulation LE-002.
- This by-law details specific requirements that are reported as follows:

  - a summary of the written procedures concerning communications and dispatch;
  - the status of Service compliance with the said procedures;
  - a copy of the organizational chart of the Communications Unit; and,
  - a summary of the training given to members in the Communications Unit including a summary of the cost associated with the training

- A statistical overview of the Communications Unit in 2020 is included.

Financial Considerations

Not applicable.

Analysis

The following information is in response to section (a) of By-Law 194-2000:

a) "… a summary of the written procedures concerning communications and dispatch…"

The Service's General Orders were prepared and approved to comply with Ontario Regulation 3/99 Adequacy and Effectiveness of Police Services (Provincial Adequacy Standards Regulations). The following General Orders are specific to the Communications Unit and establish the responsibilities for members of the Service with respect to procedures and processes.

General Order 033.10 – Communications Systems:

This General Order provides procedures relating to the use and operation of radio and telephone systems used by members of the Communications Unit and other members of the Service. It includes procedures on the proper determination of call types utilizing the Police Priority Dispatch System in order to ensure the proper police response. The Communications Unit operates in compliance with a mandate to record all operational radio and telephone communications.

Standard Operating Procedures:

The Communications Unit has a series of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) that further govern, in detail, the day-to-day operations of the unit including outlining the information that should be obtained during emergency and non-emergency call taking. The SOP's are generated through an internal process involving the Training Coordinator, Quality Assurance Supervisor, Platoon Supervisors, and approved by Unit Management and are available in written form as a reference to Communicators.

The following information is in response to section (b) of By-Law 194-2000:

b) "… the status of Service compliance with the said procedures…"

The Communications Unit operates in compliance with the provisions of the aforementioned orders, procedures and adequacy standards.

The Communications Unit operations are subject to 24-hour oversight by two Platoon Supervisors who are responsible for monitoring operations in relation to daily activities. These daily activities include ensuring their subordinates adhere to policy and procedure, as well as monitoring incidents to ensure an appropriate and timely response.

The Service continues to utilize a structured call taking system and a quality assurance/ quality improvement program within the NRPS Communications Centre, with products supplied by Priority Dispatch Corp. The Police Priority Dispatch System (PPDS) has two main software systems, ProQA and AQUA.

ProQA Dispatch Software integrates the protocols of the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) with our Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) technologies. It helps Communicators with 'case entry' and 'key questioning'. It assists Communicators in identifying the appropriate 'determinant code' for each case and clearly displays the response configuration specifically assigned to the code by our local authorities. ProQA then guides Communicators in providing all relevant 'post-dispatch' and 'pre-arrival' instructions to members of the public calling the police for assistance, as well as important 'case completion' information.

AQUA Quality Assurance Software automates the entire emergency dispatch case review process. It assists with data entry, compliance scoring, record keeping, reporting and more. With AQUA, the NRPS can measure and document the quality of service being provided to the community and to officers, as well as measure the level of compliance in relation to International Academy of Emergency Dispatch standards.

In 2019, the NRPS Communications Unit achieved the prestigious "ACE" accreditation. This made the NRPS the first police agency in the Province of Ontario to earn such an accreditation. In 2020, the NRPS Communications Unit continued to maintain its "ACE" accreditation status.

The following information is in response to section (c) of By-Law 194-2000:

c) "… a copy of the organizational chart of the communications unit…"

In the reporting period, the Communications Unit reported to the Superintendent of Operational Support through the Inspector of Operational Support. It had an authorized strength of 67, consisting of 1 Staff Sergeant, 8 Platoon Supervisors, 1 Quality Assurance and Accreditation Supervisor, 56 Communicators, and 1 Training Coordinator.

The unit is staffed on a 24-hour/365 day basis[1] by four rotating platoons consisting of two Platoon Supervisors[2] and 14 Communicators.

Communicators are trained to perform the functions of emergency and non-emergency Call-takers and Radio Dispatchers[3] on a rotating basis and at times perform administrative call answering and call-back duties.

A copy of the 2020 (Bottom Up) Organizational Chart is included as Appendix 1. This chart is not intended to display the additional areas of command of the Inspector and Superintendent as the additional areas are unrelated to the Communications Unit. This chart has been erroneously interpreted in the past as depicting a narrow column of supervision.

The following information is in response to section (d) of By-Law 194-2000:

d) "… training given to members in Communications and a summary of the cost associated to training…"

Initial Training:

Training begins at the probationary Communicator level where the candidate undergoes an extensive training and evaluation process that includes:

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[1] In compliance with subsection 5 (6) of O. Reg. 3/99.
[2] In compliance with subsection 6(1)(a) of O. Reg. 3/99.
[3] In compliance with subsection 5(6) of O. Reg. 3/99.

- Job-specific pre-testing which includes typing 45 words per minute, Criti-Call, Select Advantage (Until November 2020). Select Advantage testing was used from January 2020 to October 2020 and was replaced by TalentClick assessments in November 2020
- Pre-screening is also completed on all eligible candidates. This testing includes audiometric testing and psychological assessment for suitability
- Four weeks in-house formal classroom Call-taker training followed by 320-400 hours of on-the-job training under the guidance of a Platoon Trainer/Mentor
- A period of independent work functioning as a Call-taker (typically less than one year)
- One week of in-house formal classroom Radio Dispatch training followed by 320-400 hours of on-the-job training under the guidance of a Platoon Trainer/Mentor
- A series of mandatory progress examinations and appraisals

The selection and training regiment is one of the most complex and demanding within the Service. Historically, the success rate of training to the Dispatcher level has been approximately 55% in this Service and across the Province in similar centres. Candidates most frequently fail during Dispatcher training, after the Service has heavily invested in their development. Training fails for a variety of reasons. Generally, required skills can be developed in a trainee, but inherent suitability often cannot. The most common deficiency is an inability to multi-task to the extreme degree required for success in the Dispatcher role.

In 2020, eleven (11) candidates were selected to participate in Call-taker classroom training. Ten (10) candidates were successful in completing both their classroom and live training period. Of note, the lone unsuccessful candidate had just begun their classroom training when they decided to resign for personal reasons. Also, during this time, four (4) Call-takers entered their Dispatch training period. Three dispatch candidates were successful in passing both their classroom and live training.

The initial training costs are labour related, as the screening, scheduling and proctoring of tests for new candidates is completed by the Training Coordinator. With more than 400 resumes being received in 2020, 143 individuals were invited to participate in the initial testing and 23 individuals came in for retesting. In November 2020, the screening process was moved from Select Advantage testing to TalentClick assessment, a more robust and efficient screening tool. TalentClick allowed for online initial testing of approximately 200 candidates. In 2020, 21 testing sessions were held to identify the best candidates for the Call-taker position. These recruiting efforts resulted in 11 individuals being selected to participate in Call-taker training. That means just over 2% of all applicants were selected to participate in Call-taker training.

The classroom and floor training of a trainee amount to approximately 920 hours which represents a substantial financial investment. Less tangible costs include the time commitment of the trainer/mentor and Training Coordinator while on duty. This is a

considerable training investment in candidates, some of whom are not ultimately successful. Efforts in 2020 have continued to build upon successes in previous years, maintaining a success rate of 90% making it through both classroom and live training. The sole member who did not make it through both classroom and live training in 2020 removed themselves from training when they decided that Communications was not the right fit for them. Additionally, one member decided the same after successfully completing live training.

Ongoing Training:

Within a year of becoming members of the Communications Unit and typically after completion of Call-taker training, Communicators attend the Ontario Police College Advanced Communications Techniques Course at the Ontario Police College. As was the case the previous year, this course was not offered in 2020.

Routine (annual) external training includes the Annual Ontario Police Communicator's Training Conference and the NENA[4] and / or APCO[5] Training Conference(s). These conferences were all cancelled and/or not attended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, NRPS Communicators attend pursuit and domestic violence training, along with other training opportunities that are offered as they become available internally. As an example, in 2020 Communicators attended and received training in:

- Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Training (AODA)
- Occupational Health and Safety Training (OH&S)
- NRPS Blended Supervisor Course

In 2020, no Acting Supervisors or confirmed Supervisors attended the Ontario Police College Supervisor Course due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Unit delivers four hours of in-service training to Communicators annually in a group classroom setting. This was delivered on two dates to the Communications Unit members in January 2020. Topics covered included compassion fatigue, PTSD and new technology changes coming with NG9-1-1. The costs associated with this training are labor costs for the time spent in class.

The Communications Unit training spending for 2020 was $14,188.72. The anticipated budget was $70,791.89.

The $56,603.17 that was anticipated, but not utilized, was directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the courses and conferences that were planned were not attended

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[4] NENA = National Emergency Number Association.
[5] APCO = Association of Public Safety Communications Operators.

because the majority were scheduled after the beginning of the pandemic. Pandemic restrictions continued for the remainder of the year.

Funds utilized in 2020 are detailed as follows:

NENA Group Membership	$700.00
Priority Dispatch EPD Training (11 members)	$7,442.19
Priority Dispatch PPDS Recertification (53 members)	$3361.53
ENP Designations (2 members)	$1,200.00
TalentClick	$735.00
Webinar/Miscellaneous Training	$750.00
Total	$14,188.72

Communications Summary and Statistical Overview:

The Niagara Regional Police Service Communications System includes a voice radio system utilizing both mobile and portable radios[6], dispatch consoles, a Computer Aided Dispatch System which includes a Mobile Workstation Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) System, a 911 Emergency telephone system with interconnections to other emergency services agencies, an emergency automatic call distribution system, a non-emergency complaints and administrative telephone system and an audio recording and instant play back system (NICE).

NRPS telecommunications systems are supported by regularly tested alternate power sources consisting of a combination of back up batteries (uninterrupted power sources-UPS) and generators. The voice radio system runs its own fault detection system, which is monitored and analyzed by the Service's radio technicians. The system was also engineered with duplicate channels across the Region for redundancy, offering additional back up.

In the event of a primary 911 system failure, an in-house 911 back up telephone system is in place to provide continued service. In the event both systems fail or if an evacuation of the Communications Unit is required, a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Contingency Plan is in place. Bell Canada will be notified to reroute calls to the St. Catharines Fire Department pending the activation of the Communications Unit back-up site. This back-up site was housed within the former Communications Unit at #1 District in St. Catharines until that building was decommissioned on March 9th, 2021. The Interim Backup Centre opened that same day and is housed within #3 District in Welland. Once operational, the back-up site gives the Communications Unit the ability to perform all functions of emergency and non-emergency call taking and dispatch.

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[6] In accordance with subsection 6 (1)(b) of O. Reg. 3/99.

Calls for Police Service:

Police calls for service originate from several sources including 911 calls, calls received through the police service non-emergency number, text to 911 service (for pre-registered members of the deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired community), in-person reporting or "walk-ins", as well as officer generated, or officer discovered incidents.

Telephone calls to the Communications Centre are either 911 calls or telephone calls delivered via non-emergency lines. Non-emergency telephone calls to the Communications Centre in 2020 numbered 210,342. When combined with the 911 call volume (as outlined below), the total telephone call volume was 389,679 calls in 2020. The total call volume dropped by 9,293 calls from the previous year, a 2.4% decrease in total calls. This drop over the previous year is believed to have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public health restrictions put in place by the Province. In 2020, there were 56 texts to 911 incidents received to the Communications Centre.

Calls for Service generated in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System for the Niagara Regional Police Service were relatively stable from 2013 to 2016, however, there had been a spike in calls for service beginning in 2017. This increase remained consistent through 2019. In 2020, there were 126,047 Calls for Service generated. Once more, the 4.4% decrease in Calls for Service is believed to have been a result of the public health restrictions put in place by the Province to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The statistics shown in the following chart are compiled by systems solely within the NRPS.

CAD Entries for Police Calls for Service

Year	Calls for Service
2016	116,158
2017	125,348
2018	127,694
2019	131,834
2020	126,047

911 Calls:

By contract with the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the NRPS Communications Unit is the Niagara Region's Primary Public Safety Answering Point (P-PSAP). 911 calls are either transferred to the other emergency services defined as Secondary Public Safety Answering Points (S-PSAPs) or retained to be processed as police calls for service by the Communications Unit then functioning as a Secondary PSAP. Secondary PSAP agencies have their own communications and dispatch operations.

Bell Canada is the authorized provider of 911 emergency infrastructure and services to Ontario municipalities. As part of their function, Bell captures statistics related to primary

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and secondary PSAPs. In respect of 911 calls, Bell Canada counts calls in the system prior to the demarcation point with the NRPS. The data collection performed by Bell Canada is automated and objective.

One complexity of 911 call delivery is due to what is described as "unanswered calls," "dropped calls," or "abandoned calls." These are calls that are detected by Bell but are not successfully delivered to the P-PSAP or are delivered but at the instant of disconnection or abandonment by the caller. Since the Bell system detects the calls, it records data referred to as ANI/ALI[7] which is identifying information used by the P-PSAP to perform follow-up to determine if there is a problem at the origin of the call. Therefore, despite the characterization as "unanswered", the calls are still handled by NRPS 911 operators who use the data provided by Bell to attempt follow-up investigation and call-backs.

In many cases, the resources committed to these follow-ups exceeds that of a normal 911 call, which is why they are statistically attributed to the NRPS P-PSAP. Utilizing Bell Canada's data, the five year period is reflected below.

Bell 911 Call Stats

Year	Call Stats
2016	142,591
2017	154,737
2018	165,443
2019	176,752
2020	179,337

911 Call Distribution:

All 911 calls received by the Service are processed to completion within the NRPS Communications Unit or transferred (down streamed) to other emergency response agencies including: Niagara Parks Police; Ontario Provincial Police; Niagara EMS; Hamilton EMS; and the two municipal fire service dispatch centres.

Distribution of 911 Calls	2018	2019	2020
NRPS Calls Kept	79,517	87,116	88,370
Niagara EMS	53,049	52,532	53,610
St. Catharines Fire[8]	4,806	4,798	4,863
Niagara Falls Fire	1,024	1,051	1,057
Niagara Parks Police	106	111	155

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[7] ANI: Automatic Number information, ALI: Automatic Location Information
[8] St. Catharines Fire provides dispatch services for every municipality in the Niagara Region except Niagara Falls (self-dispatched) and Fort Erie (Tilsonburg).

Distribution of 911 Calls	2018	2019	2020
OPP Orillia	7,087	7,255	6,187
Other-SPSAPS	225	294	363
Non-PSAP Agency	477	437	443
Dropped Calls	19,152	23,158	24,289
TOTALS 911 CALLS	**165,443**	**176,752**	**179,337**

Dropped Calls Handled: as indicated, these calls require investigation and handling by the Primary PSAP. The calls are not tracked by Bell past the point of lost connection, so they are attributed to the NRPS operated P-PSAP despite any eventual disposition. Calls are never attributed to more than one agency.

It should be noted that the Niagara Regional Police Service may still respond to the 911 calls that are transferred to other agencies. Upon receipt of a 911 call and in accordance with the Primary Agency Policy Agreement[9], the Service 911 Call-taker determines the emergency agency most urgently required and transfers the call to that agency for response. The Call-taker may still create a police call for service to initiate police response. For example, in the case of a motor vehicle accident with injuries, the call would be transferred to the Niagara EMS Communications Centre for primary processing and is represented as a Niagara EMS call for statistical purposes, however, police would respond as well. Conversely, some of the calls processed through to completion by NRPS staff could result in notification to and response by, other emergency service agencies.

Statistically, 911 calls are credited to the agency to which the call is directed although it may require a multiple agency response.

Community/Inter-Agency Protocols:

The operation of the Communications Unit is further governed by:

❑ A 911 agreement between the Regional Municipality of Niagara and the Police Services Board[10];
❑ 911 Operating Policies and Procedures[11] between the Police Service and other area emergency services;
❑ Regional and Municipal Emergency Measures Plans;
❑ Private Agency (i.e., Ontario Power Generation) Emergency Response Plans

These processes cover multi-agency notification and response agreements or protocols and lay out plans for major disasters. In addition, contact is maintained between

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[9] A call processing policy agreement between the Region of Niagara, Niagara Regional Police Service, Ministry of Health, City of St. Catharines, and the City of Niagara Falls in defining and establishing the identification of the "Primary Agency".
[10] The Joint Powers Agreement.
[11] Such as the Primary Agency Policy Agreement.

emergency service providers operating within the Region, by way of quarterly 911 advisory committee meetings or informal contact on matters of mutual interest or concern.

This report is submitted to the Board for review and consideration of information relating to Communications and Dispatch in the Regional Municipality of Niagara.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not Applicable.

Relationship to Police Service/Board Strategic Priorities

To comply with the provisions of the Police Service's Board by-laws and to maintain compliance with Provincial Adequacy Standards.

Relevant Policy Considerations

Ontario Reg. 3/99, *"Adequacy and Effectiveness of Police Services"*
Niagara Region Police Services Board By-Law 194-2000
General Order 033.10 – Communications Systems
General Order 094.06 – Communications Master Logger

Other Pertinent Reports

Not Applicable.

This report was prepared by Chris Sirie, Staff Sergeant, Operational Support in consultation with Darrin Forbes, Inspector, Operational Support, reviewed by James Mackay, Superintendent, Operational Support and Projects and recommended by Bill Fordy, Deputy Chief of Police, Support Services.

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Chief of Police

Appendices

Appendix 1   Communications Unit Organizational Chart

Appendix 1 - Communications Unit Organizational Chart

Superintendent
Operational Support

Inspector
Operational Support

Staff Sergeant
Communications Unit

Quality Assurance Supervisor & Training Coordinator

A Platoon
(2) Supervisors

B Platoon
(2) Supervisors

C Platoon
(2) Supervisors

D Platoon
(2) Supervisors

(3) 911 Operators

(3) 911 Operators

(3) 911 Operators

(3) 911 Operators

(11) Communicators

(11) Communicators

(11) Communicators

(11) Communicators

These personnel cross trained in dispatching and call-taking