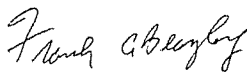


**Peninsula Community Council**  
**December 14, 2009**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Peninsula Community Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Frank A. Beazley, Halifax Regional Police, 490-6500

**DATE:** 24 November 2009

**SUBJECT:** Vandalism Hotline

**ORIGIN**

At the October 5, 2009 Peninsula Community Council Meeting, Councillor Blumenthal spoke about the need for a Vandalism Hotline. As a result, Community Council requested an information report on the feasibility of the Halifax Regional Police establishing a vandalism hotline and whether it can be accommodated in the upcoming budget. Councillors Sloane, Uteck and Watts expressed other concerns as outlined in the background portion of this report.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that status quo be maintained. The number of calls per service for incidents of vandalism do not warrant creating an additional phone line. Another phone line could further confuse the public regarding what number to call for certain offences. Citizens are encouraged to call 911 for all crimes in progress, including vandalism. These calls get answered before all non-emergency calls.

It is further recommended that Integrated Emergency Services create an education package for the public to ensure it is clear when to call 911 and when to call the non-emergency dispatch line (490-5020.)

## **BACKGROUND**

Councillor Blumenthal advised that he was looking for Community Council's support of a proposal to establish a vandalism hotline at the Police Station. The Councillor cited a recent incident of vandalism which, when occurred, was first reported to 911 but the people were told to contact the police non-emergency number instead and, by the time the police responded to the scene, the vandals were gone. Councillor Blumenthal also noted that many residents are afraid to report incidents of vandalism directly to the police for fear of retaliation.

Councillor Sloane noted her support of the idea, adding that fear of retaliation is a factor when it comes to reporting vandalism. Councillor Sloane indicated that the police non-emergency number is not reliable because, when it is too busy, phone calls are sometimes directed as far as Truro, and then transferred back.

Councillor Uteck expressed concern over Councillor Sloane's remark on the non-emergency number and suggested that this should be forwarded to Chief Beazley. She noted that approximately \$13 million was spent on implementing the system.

Councillor Watts also advised that some individuals have told her that they have called the non-emergency number, and it just rang with no one picking up. She added that she would like the report to address the facilitation and staffing of the non-emergency number. Councillor Watts also asked that the report provide clarity around the role of the Community Response Officer, pointing out that, although she has the phone number to reach the community response officer in her district, she is not sure if this is a number that can be handed out to the public.

## **DISCUSSION**

There is a number of concerns outlined in the background portion of this report. They will be addressed in the order they appear.

After reviewing the calls for service regarding incidents of vandalism, the numbers do not support the need for an additional telephone line staffed to answer only vandalism calls. For the first nine months of 2009 there was a total of 320 dispatched calls for property damage on the peninsula. This is an average of 1.2 per day. Calls for property damage are down 27% for the first nine months of this year compared to the same time period last year.

There are a number of other concerns with the creation of such a hotline. We currently have one number for crimes in progress (911) and one number for dispatching units to calls of crime not in progress (490-5020). On average, 911 calls are answered within 7.14 seconds and 490-5020 calls are answered within 14 seconds. A complete breakdown of our current IES office is provided below in a report from the IES Manager.

Creating another phone line would confuse this process. The new line would not provide a faster

response to calls of vandalism because the person staffing it would have to call 911 (creating another step) in order to get a police unit dispatched, creating further delays. Even with the staffing of a hotline there still would not be additional police units to respond to the calls. These calls for service would have to be placed in the same queue they go in now. Officers are dispatched on a priority basis with the most serious calls being answered first.

As outlined in the below report, the 490-5020 non-emergency dispatch line is an HRM function. These calls do not get routed to other centres such as Truro. The 490-5020 non-emergency dispatch line does not continue to ring without being answered. If all call takers are busy a voice message answers, informing the caller they will be placed in a queue. The average answer time of 14 seconds indicates there are minimal delays in processing these calls for service.

In relation to the cell phone numbers for Community Response Officers. While it is fine for the public to have the numbers we do not encourage the use of their cell phones as a point of contact with police for reporting incidents. The Community Response Officers do not work 24/7 and they could easily be tied-up with a meeting or community event. We encourage citizens to call 911 for crimes in progress; 490-5020 for non-emergency dispatch; or 490-5016 for general inquires or to file a report. These calls will ensure we have a record of activity which will better enable us to deploy our resources and thus reduce the number of incidents occurring. There is nothing wrong with following up with the Community Response Officer after the fact as they also review the calls for service in their area on a regular basis.

All crimes in progress can be reported by calling 911. If there are specific incidents when citizens are told to call another line they should contact their Divisional Commander to clarify or correct the situation as necessary.

### **Report from IES Manager**

#### **911 Calls:**

HRM (IES) answers 911 calls within the geographic area of HRM under an MOU with the Province of Nova Scotia, who is responsible for overall administration of the 911 system.

A 911 call may be defined as imminent threat to life and/or property. The Province sets the standards by which Call Takers answer 911 calls and the call has to meet the threshold of the definition to be taken on the 911 system. For example: calls that have occurred "after the fact" will not be taken on 911.

The 911 system has a built in redundancy. Should all call takers in HRM be busy, the 911 call will re-route to Truro RCMP and be handed back to HRM. The system is designed so that 911 calls do not go unanswered.

The following 911 stats are provided for information purposes: Time period is from 1 Jan - 30 Sep 2009:

Total Calls - 65,491 (240 calls per day)  
Number of Calls answered in 10 seconds - 81 percent  
Number of calls answered between 10 and 20 seconds - 17 percent  
Abandon Calls - 2 percent.  
Average answer time for all 911 calls - 7.14 seconds.

In order of answering priority at IES, 911 calls are first.

**5020 Calls:**

IES also answers a non - emergency number, commonly known as the "5020" line. These calls are usually of an administrative nature or require a police unit to be dispatched to a call that is not in progress. The "5020" line is, totally, a municipal function and calls are not routed through Truro or any other Communications Center in the Province. The "5020" line is a generic number and operates on a queue system, the call goes to the available operator. These lines do not continue to ring if all operators are busy, but citizens are advised via a voice message that the system is at capacity and the call will be answered in sequence. Many times the same caller will call, become impatient, hang up and call again. This practice simply adds to the number of lines being busied out and each time that this is done, during busy periods, the caller will go to the bottom of the queue.

For all calls received on 5020, the call taker will ask for the name of caller and the telephone number for a contact as part of their training, however, it is up to the citizen to decide whether they wish to provide this information. Citizens can report an incident and remain anonymous.

The following 5020 stats are provided for information. Time period is from 1 Jan - 30 Sep 2009:

Total 5020 calls - 203272 (745 per day)  
Answered within 10 seconds - 79 percent  
Answered within 10 - 20 seconds - 14 percent  
Answered greater than 20 seconds - 5 percent  
Abandon - 2 percent  
Average answer time all calls - 14 seconds.

In order of priority, the 5020 line is subordinate to the 911 lines.

**Staffing:**

IES has a staff complement of 85 persons.

- 1 Police Superintendent
- 1 Operations Manager
- 1 Administration Manager
- 1 Administrative Assistant
- 1 City Watch Administrator.

8 Supervisors  
60 Full Time Staff  
12 Part Time Staff.

The staff is broken down, evenly into 4 Watches, are unionized by MAPP and follow the Police Patrol Schedule. Part Time staff have hours adjusted to cover peak hours and vacations.

IES staffs the following positions 24/7:

1 Supervisor  
2 Fire Dispatchers  
5 Police Dispatchers (2 dedicated to Halifax Detachment RCMP)  
1 CPIC Operator  
5 Call Taking positions.

It should be noted that the IES call takers answer both 911 and 5020 lines. If a Call Taker is on a 5020 line with a citizen and the 911 line rings, he/she is to advise the citizen that they have to be put on hold to answer a 911 calls. It should also be noted that it is not uncommon to take emergency calls on the 5020 line and would not be appropriate to put the caller on hold, thus the call would bounce to the next available terminal. Additionally, higher priority calls such as MVA's, Robberies, Assaults, Structure Fires and other calls in progress generate higher than normal call volume to 911.

### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budget implications as a result of this report.

### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN**

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by : Superintendent Don Spicer 490-6166