

Toronto Police Service - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations Better Support for Staff, Improved Information Management and Outcomes

Date: June 14, 2022

To: Toronto Police Services Board

From: Auditor General

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto Police Service (TPS) operates a Communications Centre (call centre) that acts as the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) for the City of Toronto. The communications operators at the call centre answer all emergency 9-1-1 calls across the City. Depending on the emergency response needed, the operators transfer the calls to fire services, ambulance, and/or other agencies, and dispatch police services when needed.

As the 9-1-1 PSAP for the City, the TPS call centre has a crucial role in ensuring the safety and security of the people of Toronto and their properties. It is the first point of contact for those who call for emergency assistance during times of distress. The timeliness of call answering is critical so that people receive the appropriate emergency response needed as soon as possible, as a person's life or safety can often be at risk. The assessment made by communications operators determines the priority level, which impacts the timeliness of emergency response. Also, the decision on whether a call is dispatched or not for police services has a direct impact on the first level of front-line police resourcing required.

Both internal and external factors affect the success of the 9-1-1 PSAP operations. Internally, TPS needs to support the 9-1-1 PSAP operations by ensuring it has the resources and capacity to answer calls in a timely manner. TPS also needs to ensure there are modernized information systems with the data, information and analysis available for regular monitoring and informed decision-making for the 9-1-1 PSAP operations. The information system is also needed for supporting other analytical needs, such as identifying opportunities for alternate response strategies, and informing and developing strategies for public education campaigns.

Externally, the efficiency and interactive communication with the secondary emergency communications centres (e.g., Toronto Fire Services) in answering transferred calls affects the 9-1-1 PSAP operations. The public also plays a key role in the success of the 9-1-1 PSAP operations by calling the 9-1-1 line for emergency situations that require immediate police, fire, and/or ambulance assistance, and using the non-emergency line, online reporting, or other available non-police alternatives for other situations.

This report contains 26 recommendations to the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB) in the following five key areas to further improve TPS's ability to keep Toronto safe.

1. Answering calls
2. Assigning call event types and priority levels
3. Dispatch and response times to emergency events
4. New technology, 9-1-1 levies, and other opportunities
5. Community education and awareness

The implementation of the recommendations for the five key areas will assist all stakeholders to have a 9-1-1 PSAP operations that provides callers with timely call answering and appropriate emergency responses, and a system that supports the public in obtaining their emergency, non-emergency, or alternative response in the future.

This report makes 26 recommendations to the TPSB, and also recommends that the TPSB forward this report and its actions to City Council for information through the City's Audit Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Auditor General recommends that:

1. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to re-evaluate and establish new minimum staffing requirements for Communications Services, ensuring staffing levels are sufficient to achieve TPS's 9-1-1 service level standard, and using improved data and information to include:

a. Consideration of staff absenteeism rates and other detractors/ factors, the underlying causes of not adhering to the current minimum staffing requirements, and aiming to minimize overtime where possible, for the different timeslots. (considering peak and non-peak periods)

b. Re-balancing the workload amongst staff and staffing resources as needed throughout the day to meet operational needs while also enhancing staff's mental health and well-being.

2. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to review the current staffing levels, shift deployment and start hours, and scheduling system for communications operators to ensure the assignment of the actual number of operators at work aligns with its planned minimum staffing requirements (that TPS re-

evaluates as part of Recommendation 1) as required to achieve its service levels and handle its call volume. Depending on the results of TPS's evaluation of minimum staffing requirements, TPS should consider:

- a. Requesting an overall staffing increase of communications operators for TPS Communication Services.
- b. Hiring part-time call takers, particularly to help address peak periods and spike incidents.

3. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to improve TPS's data to understand the time required for communications operators to meet operational needs, by establishing separate time codes to track the time a communications operator:

- a. Spends on processing a previously answered call.
- b. Needs after handling a traumatic call (either at their desk or away from their desk).
- c. Needs to recuperate before being available for the next call.

This will allow TPS to have more information on how certain calls affect the mental health and well-being of its communications operators, and the actual occupancy time needed to handle and complete a call, as well as the processing time.

4. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to analyze TPS's data (using new time tracking codes from Recommendation 3) on the time needed by communications operators to handle traumatic calls, in combination with additional feedback received from staff, and use these insights in developing additional strategies to assist the communications operators in their mental health and well-being. In doing so, TPS should leverage strategies used by other agencies.

5. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS), in consultation with TPS's Corporate Services Command, to determine the feasibility of filling vacancies sooner than the required two-year time lapse for communications operators who are on Injured on Duty assignment (but not replacing the position), to address its operational requirements.

6. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS), in consultation with TPS's Corporate Services Command – Legal Services, and the Toronto Police Association, to evaluate the 'return to work' criteria for those communications operators Injured on Duty, so that either they are only fit to return if that means fit to return to their previous job site, working at the 9-1-1 Communications Centre, or if TPS needs to employ them elsewhere, that TPS is able to hire additional surge positions in the 9-1-1 Communications Centre to address its operational requirements.

7. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service, in consultation with the Toronto Police Association, to explore and develop recruitment strategies to address the shortage in communications operators and challenges in retaining trainees and full-time permanent staff, including:

- a. The feasibility of hiring dedicated call taker/ dispatcher positions, and potential to retain qualified individuals who did not pass dispatcher training as call taker only beyond one year permanently, depending on the results of the pilot program.
- b. Increasing the probation period for communications operators beyond one year permanently, depending on the results of the pilot program that recently began.

8. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS), in consultation with TPS's Corporate Services Command, to identify and provide the necessary human resources and hiring supports to Communications Services, so the communications operators can maximize their time in performing call answering and dispatching services.

9. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service, to review and determine the management information needs of Communications Services and improve the data available, ensuring the data is accurate, collected efficiently, and readily available in a timely manner.

The results of data analysis should be used to inform strategies and action plans to address operational improvements, including but not limited to:

- a. Enabling accurate and robust data analysis of its calls for service, workload, deployment of staffing resources, and communications operators' activities.
- b. Developing strategies for how to improve timeliness of answering 9-1-1 dialed calls.
- c. Identifying further areas of training opportunities for communications operators.
- d. Identifying areas where further call diversion can be made.

10. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to ensure the data and information management needs of Communication Services are included and addressed in TPS's data strategy, Next Generation 9-1-1 implementation related to data analysis, and any future upgrade of TPS's Intergraph Computer Aided Dispatch system, including the need for interconnection between the information systems.

11. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to regularly provide the information on timeliness of transferred 9-1-1 calls to Toronto Paramedic Services, Toronto Fire Services, and other agencies where appropriate, with the view to working together to meet the 9-1-1 emergency call service level standards.

TPS and the other agency(ies) should meet, when needed, to determine if any changes are needed to established protocols to ensure the safety of citizens.

12. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to analyze TPS's call-for-service data to identify callers and locations that repeatedly call 9-1-1 for non-emergency matters (priority 4 to 8), or those who repeatedly call the police non-emergency line for non-police matters.

The results of this analysis should be used to inform a targeted education/awareness program to raise awareness of the proper use of 9-1-1, the police non-emergency line, and the availability of other non-police City resources.

13. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to accelerate the Digital Workflows project and use data analytics to identify other opportunities and technological tools to create efficiency in the call handling process for communications operators, and to further explore other areas for call diversion. In implementing this recommendation, TPS should consider any best practices and leverage any existing tools already used by other agencies.

14. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to use TPS's data to identify callers who are repeatedly making pocket dials, abandoned, and hang-up calls on the 9-1-1 line. TPS should consider a strategy to reduce these types of calls, in consultation with its Corporate Services Command -- Legal Services, and the Toronto Police Services Board, including the feasibility of introducing a fee for this unwanted behaviour that impacts TPS's resources.

15. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to explore technological tools that can assist TPS's communications operators in assigning event types and in prioritizing the urgency of the call for service, to ensure the assessment is consistent with TPS policies and to help reduce stress levels for TPS's communications operators.

16. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service to identify where system upgrades can be made to automate manual processes that must be made by communications operators during the call. Such processes can include but are not limited to:

- a. Adjusting the default priority rating for certain factors on calls.
- b. Selection of call source for 9-1-1 dialed call.
- c. Adjusting the event type and priority rating for certain types of calls based on the amount of time elapsed from when the event started.

17. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to review and update TPS's Call Taker Manual to ensure:

- a. Clarity of all event types and the related procedures.

b. That the event type's default priority rating is consistent with police response expectation and urgency of the type of event.

When reviewing and updating the manual, also consider the following potential changes to specific event types and priority ratings outlined in the report:

- Whether danger to life versus damage to property (in situations where it may be lower priority) could be better distinguished in priority ratings.
- Default priority ratings for events relating to civil matters.
- Further defining 'catch-all' event types (e.g. check address).

18. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service to explore training opportunities for communications operators to further improve their skills, particularly regarding assignment of event type, adjustment of the default priority rating, updating an event based on information on related subsequent call(s), and inclusion of key notes in the event chronology.

19. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to analyze TPS's call answering data to identify the call taker time that impacts the police response time, and evaluate the feasibility to further reduce this time interval in the view to understand and improve the overall response times for citizens, especially for high priority emergency (priority 1 to 3) calls.

20. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service to ensure the clearance of a call-for-service event is communicated in a timely manner by officers, so that the dispatcher is aware of the availability of the officer units to be assigned for other calls for service.

21. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service, in collaboration with Toronto Paramedic Services and Toronto Fire Services, to achieve live-time interconnectivity in communication on 9-1-1 calls and events amongst these entities, both currently, and in the implementation of the Next Generation 9-1-1 solution moving forward. This should include consideration of an interface of the Intergraph Computer Aided Dispatch system to allow for improved communication during 9-1-1 call transfers and events, and to specifically assist with communication where Toronto Police Service are no longer required by Toronto Paramedic Services and/or Toronto Fire Services as applicable, so as to avoid unnecessarily committing police resources.

22. Toronto Police Services Board, in consultation with the Chief, Toronto Police Service and its Corporate Services Command -- Legal Services, to engage with the City and City Council for the collection of the 9-1-1 levy or request a change in legislation with the provincial government, so that a 9-1-1 levy can be collected by the telecommunication service providers and remitted to the Public Safety Answering Point, particularly given the fiscal sustainability issues with the implementation of mandated Next Generation 9-1-1 requirements, and given this is the current practice in most other provinces in Canada.

23. The City Manager, in consultation with Toronto Police Services Board, Toronto Police Service (TPS), and City's Legal Services, to include the following to inform its feasibility review of whether to move the 9-1-1 operations to a non-police City Service:

- a. Fulsome cost/benefit analysis that includes the potential impact to call answer and call response time of police, fire, and ambulance, and the other related functions of the call centre such as audio and data requests including for court proceedings, and maintenance of radio communications.
- b. Cost impact and feasibility with regards to staffing, given the current collective agreement of communications operators.
- c. Legislative feasibility given the current draft and forthcoming legislative requirements related to the delivery of policing and related services, in particular, the involvement of the police service in the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) dispatching function.
- d. Legal risk and who would be responsible for those 9-1-1 calls and/or alternate non-police response where police are not dispatched, and it results in a negative outcome.
- e. Governance model for PSAP with the view to enhance interoperability and coordination of emergency response services delivered.
- f. The goals and outcomes that are intended through a potential move of the 9-1-1 operations, and whether other strategies may be more effective, efficient, and economical to achieve those, such as offering another phone number for non-police response such as 2-1-1, and/or working together with TPS on other strategies, including but not limited to, updating the 9-1-1 communications operators manual, additional training, data and technological supports for communications operators and police officers, and increased public education and awareness.

24. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service, in collaboration with the City, to undertake public education campaigns (including targeted awareness programs) and ongoing public education initiatives to improve public awareness and understanding on distinguishing between the various lines and the proper use of 9-1-1, the non-emergency line (416-808-2222), online police reporting, and other non-police alternative resources, including promotion of 2-1-1 (assistance in connecting people with community and social service resources) and 3-1-1. Assessment should be made to evaluate the effectiveness of these campaigns and initiatives on call behaviours. The campaign and/or initiatives should:

- a. Include strategies to increase public awareness on what to do when the caller dials 9-1-1, including the specific information that needs to be provided to the call taker in order to shorten police response time, how to prevent pocket dials, and what to do when an individual dials 9-1-1 by mistake.
- b. Be multi-lingual.

c. Be refreshed and refocused periodically to address the 9-1-1 call analysis results to reduce unnecessary or avoidable non-emergency related calls to 9-1-1.

25. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS), in collaboration with the City, to consider a shorter and easier to remember number (if possible three digits) for TPS's dedicated non-emergency line.

26. Toronto Police Services Board direct the Chief, Toronto Police Service (TPS) to further improve TPS's website so that it is easy for the public to navigate and to find information on the 9-1-1, non-emergency line (8-2222), and online reporting.

27. Toronto Police Services Board forward this report and its actions to City Council for information through the City's Audit Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

We estimated a potential annual 9-1-1 levy revenue of \$28.8 million (\$144 million over five-year period) using a monthly levy of \$1 per mobile device subscriber in Toronto, contingent on an approved change to legislation in Ontario so that telecommunication service providers can charge and remit to these levies to the PSAP, which is the practice in most other provinces. This potential revenue will increase as Toronto's population and number of mobile phone subscribers continues to increase and if it also applies to landline phone number. This potential funding could assist with implementing the NG9-1-1 requirements and some of the recommendations in this report.

The precise extent of any resources required or non-quantifiable benefits to the safety of people of Toronto and their properties from the improved 9-1-1 PSAP operations and related emergency and alternative responses resulting from implementing the recommendations in this report is not determinable at this time.

DECISION HISTORY

At the request for the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB), the Auditor General completed a risk assessment of TPS to develop a risk-based audit plan. This plan was independently developed by the Auditor General and sets the audit priorities at TPS over the next five years.

The Auditor General's 2021 Audit Plan included an audit of the TPS's 9-1-1 operations with a focus on examining its effectiveness and efficiency.

The Auditor General's 2021 work plan can be found at:
[Agenda Item History - 2020.AU7.5 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

As part of City Council's decisions discussing the Community Crisis Support Service at its February 2, 3, and 5, 2021 meetings, recommendation 10 requested the Auditor

General to prioritize her planned 2021 audit of the Toronto Police Service's 9-1-1 operations. City Council's recommendation 12 directed the City Manager for a review of TPS 9-1-1 operations including an analysis of the feasibility of moving 9-1-1 operations from TPS to a non-police City service. The City Manager's analysis is to be informed by any findings made by the Auditor General in the context of her audits of the TPS.

[Agenda Item History - 2021.EX20.1 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

COMMENTS

A high-level summary of the key audit findings is provided in the Audit at a Glance.

The attached audit report provides the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB) with the detailed audit results and recommendations together with management's response. Management has agreed to all 26 recommendations.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 -
Toronto Police Service – Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations
Better Support for Staff, Improved Information Management and Outcomes