



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Ed Reiskin
City Administrator

FROM: Susan Manheimer
Interim Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Informational Report on the Alameda
Grand Jury Report on the Oakland
911 Communications Center

DATE: September 2, 2020

City Administrator Approval 

Date: Sep 4, 2020

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City of Oakland (City) Council Receive The Oakland Police Department's (OPD) Informational Report On the Content of the Alameda County Grand Jury Report and City Response.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 15, 2020, the Alameda County Grand Jury issued a report titled "Oakland 911 Communications Center – A Center in Crisis". The investigation was initiated based on complaints about delays in answering emergency calls, and OPD's failure to meeting State of California (State) call answering standards.

The Grand Jury Report makes nine findings, and eight recommendations that include adding staff, streamlining the City hiring process, updating technology, and removing some duties that are currently performed by dispatch supervisors. The City agrees with the broader finding – that the calls are not being answered to State standards. Some of the findings and recommendations are based on dated information, some have been implemented and others need context to explain why they cannot be completed or adopted.

BACKGROUND

Based on citizen concerns, the Grand Jury conducted its investigation of the Oakland 911 Emergency Communications Center (ECC) and met with OPD, the City's Human Resource Department and Information Technology Departments to gather information for its report. The Grand Jury gathered information in late 2019 and early 2020 for its report.

Item: _____
City Council
September 15, 2020

The Nine Grand Jury Findings

1. Finding 20-16: Oakland's communications center fails to meet the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) standard of answering 95 percent of all emergency calls within 15 seconds, jeopardizing public safety.¹
2. Finding 20-17: The communications center continues to operate under-staffed and has not conducted a dispatcher recruitment since June 2018, placing an unacceptable burden on dispatchers working excessive overtime hours.
3. Finding 20-18: The amount of overtime paid to dispatchers in 2019 reached \$2 million. This amount of money could be used to fund up to 15 permanent dispatcher positions.
4. Finding 20-19: Delays in completing the new Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) project are due, in part, to lack of available staff dedicated to provide project management and comprehensive configuration input to the vendor.
5. Finding 20-20: The responsibilities to manage Public Records Act requests and staff the OPD's complaint line creates an unacceptable burden on an understaffed communications center and diverts staff away from answering emergency calls.
6. Finding 20-21: The communications center's failure to establish a call-answering policy or standard contributes to a lack of accountability to the Oakland community.
7. Finding 20-22: The communications center's recorded messages that callers are greeted with when call takers are busy unnecessarily increases the number of abandoned calls.
8. Finding 20-23: Hiring of communications center staff has lagged because of an overly complicated hiring process.
9. Finding 20-24: The recruitment of dispatchers is set as an unacceptably low priority by OPD.

The Eight Grand Jury recommendations:

1. Recommendation 20-14: The City must establish a call-answering policy for the communications center to meet the CalOES requirement to answer 95 percent of all incoming 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds.
2. Recommendation 20-15: The City must conduct dispatcher recruitments on a continuous basis until dispatcher vacancies are filled.
3. Recommendation 20-16: The City must modify human resource and department policies to accept regional or allied agency dispatch testing scores to meet pre-employment requirements.
4. Recommendation 20-17: The City must increase the authorized and budgeted number of dispatchers and supervisors to meet State call answering standards as recommended by the city's consultant.
5. Recommendation 20-18: The City must publish on the City's website quarterly communications center performance data relating to emergency call processing.
6. Recommendation 20-19: The OPD must assign the responsibilities of managing Public Records Act requests and staffing of the OPD complaint line to another division as recommended by the 2019 consultant's report.

¹ Although it does not change the content of this report, the current CALOES standard is 90 percent within 15 seconds, and 95 percent within 20 seconds.

7. Recommendation 20-20: The OPD must assign a Senior Dispatcher or Supervisor full-time to work on the CAD configuration until the CAD system is operational.
8. Recommendation 20-21: The OPD must change the outgoing recorded message to one that informs 9-1-1 callers that all available dispatchers are busy answering other 9-1-1 calls, when callers are on hold.

Some of the recommendations address improvements had been underway for some time and have been addressed and others are in progress. The City's response to each of the findings and recommendations specifically in the accompanying chart, see **Attachment A**.

Communications Equipment and Technology:

In 2019, OPD 911 Emergency Communications Center (ECC) responded to over 700,000 incoming requests each year which include emergency calls for police and fire, non-emergency calls and administrative calls. There has been a 24% increase in call volume in the past five years.

The communications infrastructure is an integrated set of tools that include a telephone system, the radio system, and the CAD system. Each system needs to function at all times for the ECC to be able perform its emergency call taking and dispatching functions. Until recent years, the technology at the ECC has been out of date and fraught with operational problems. Despite best efforts from the City's Information Technology Department (ITD) and equipment vendors, the aging equipment experienced frequent failures. In the months since the Grand Jury visited the ECC, the troubled phone system was replaced, and the new CAD system is being configured and will be operational in the upcoming year.

Telephones

The phone system that answers and distributes the incoming calls was overdue for replacement, failed often and was the source of many of the recent dispatch issues. The system was upgraded in late 2019 and was not in place at the time the Grand Jury did its investigation of dispatch answering issues and met with Communications staff. This upgrade increased incoming call capacity and reduced equipment down time. Since the date of the phone upgrade, the percentage of calls answered within 15 seconds has improved compared to the previous year. In a few months, a new enhancement will route abandoned 911 calls back into the 911 queue so call takers do not have to spend time dialing back abandoned calls, further improving wait times.

Radios

OPD operates on a 700/800 MHz trunked radio system operated by EBRCSA Radios and backbone equipment are maintained by EBRCSA through the County of Alameda Radio Shop with assistance from ITD. None of the technology issues identified in the Grand Jury report or Federal Engineering related to the radios system which functions well.

Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)

The existing CAD system is outdated and lacks many features common in today's modern CAD systems. In 2015 the City issued an RFP for a new CAD system and in 2016 the contract was awarded to Motorola to build out a completely new CAD and Records Management System (RMS). Work on the new system began in 2018. ITD estimates that the new CAD system will

be operational in 2021. To help speed the implementation and provide additional quality assurance, ITD contracted with additional resources to assist with the configuration of the CAD system to ensure that it is optimally configured and deployed.

The City will continue to monitor the call response quality and time as additional technical improvements are implemented.

Staffing:

Current staffing

The current staffing of the Communications Center is not sufficient to meet the call volume. The Grand Jury report made findings that mirror those made previously by the City Auditor, specifically that the Communications Center is not appropriately staffed for the volume of calls. In addition, as it relates to supervisory staffing, the Grand Jury found that the Supervisors are required to perform ancillary duties that further exacerbate their ability to oversee this workload.

As of August 7, 2020, OPD had 62 dispatchers and operators (11 vacancies) and 7 supervisors (0 vacancies).

2018 Staffing Study

In 2018 OPD contracted for a staffing and operational study. Based on the analysis by the contractor, to get closer to the State call answering standard and a more manageable span of control, that OPD increase the authorized staffing to 90 Dispatchers and 15 Shift Supervisors.

Newly implemented hiring processes

Based on the consultant report, in 2019 OPD proposed a new testing process and expanded testing opportunities that would help to bring in a larger number of candidates and a regularly refreshed eligible list. The City's Department of Human Resources Management (HRM) has adopted several of these changes and implemented them into the hiring process for dispatchers that opened on August 24. These changes include a shorter hiring process, continuous testing and expanding the dates and locations of testing opportunities. OPD has streamlined its background process so once applicants have completed their testing and have been recommended for hire, the final job offer can be made sooner than in previous recruitments. The City Administration and City Council have both supported budget for competitive salaries and additional dispatch personnel. These changes, along with recent changes in the hiring environment that are favorable to employers, give the City a very optimistic view of the upcoming dispatch recruitment.

OPD does not agree with the Grand Jury's comment about the prioritization of dispatch hiring. The Grand Jury received information about the ranking of dispatch hiring on a particular date in early 2020, without getting information about what factors led to the prioritization on that date. HRM is generally able to conduct approximately five OPD recruitment processes at one time, even though there are usually ten or more OPD job classifications needing recruitments. The prioritization of any job classification is adjusted regularly on the list given to HRM. At the moment, in time when the Grand Jury met with HRM, dispatcher hiring was #9, because there were still candidates on the previous eligible list being processed and HRM was in the process of selecting a new dispatcher test. The recruitment could not open until that process was completed. It does not represent the urgency that OPD has placed for some time on filling these

positions. If dispatcher hiring had remained at the top of the list, no testing could occur until the new test was acquired. One of the other important recruitments in the queue would have been stalled. While OPD was waiting for HRM to complete the new test acquisition other recruitments were activated. Once the new testing arrangement was confirmed, dispatchers went back to the top of the list, where they are today while the current recruitment is underway.

In addition to the staffing recommended for dispatchers and supervisors, the staffing study recommended additional administrative staff, a training program manager and an in-house technology manager.

Operations:

Ancillary Supervisor Duties

The Grand Jury report identified additional duties required of the ECC staff that affect operations. These ancillary duties required of supervisors including complaint intake, public disclosure requests and daily maintenance of the Pursuit Log and Use of Force logs created an added burden on the dispatch supervisors who already have a strained workload and large span of control. OPD's executive team is exploring alternative resources to manage these functions.

Training Resources

The Oakland Police Department has an assigned a supervisor to oversee and revamp the training process and is having the centralized OPD training staff assist with some elements of the training program to reduce the extra burden on the Communications Training Officers, who provide training as an ancillary duty to their already extended work hours.

FISCAL IMPACT

This report is for informational purposes only and does not have a direct fiscal impact or cost. However, decisions to fund additional positions beyond levels approved in the Policy Budget will require additional funding through a budget process.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

OPD is actively recruiting candidates for the position of Police Communication Dispatcher. OPD's recruiting and Public Information Units have started outreach and public involvement strategies for the continuous recruitments that began in August.

Staff continues to seek input from community members. Staff is also researching targeted marketing strategies that will assist in ensuring the public is aware of opportunities within the organization.

COORDINATION

This report was reviewed by OPD's Communications Division Manager, the City's Department of Human Resources Management Department and the Information Technology Department.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: There are no economic opportunities associated with this report.

Environmental: There are no environmental opportunities associated with this report.

Social Equity: This report provides valuable information to the residents and visitors of Oakland regarding OPD's response to emergencies.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Staff Recommends That The City of Oakland (City) Council Receive The Oakland Police Department's (OPD) Informational Report On the Content of the Alameda County Grand Jury Report and City Response.

For questions regarding this report, please Lt. Mark Rhoden at (510) 238-3029.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachment (1)

Attachment A: Finding and Recommendations

FINDINGS:

ATTACHMENT A

	Finding	Agree/ Disagree	Details/Comments
1.	Finding 20-16: Oakland’s communications center fails to meet the CalOES Standard of answering 95% of all emergency calls within 15 seconds, jeopardizing public safety.	Agree	Note – the CALOES standard is 90% of calls within 15 seconds, 95% of calls within 20 seconds.
2.	Finding-20-17: The communications center continues to operate under-staffed and has not conducted a dispatcher recruitment since June 2018, placing an unacceptable burden on dispatchers working excessive overtime hours.	Agree	
3.	Finding 20-18: The amount of overtime paid to dispatchers in 2019 reached \$2 million. This amount of money could be used to fund up to 15 permanent dispatcher positions.	Disagree in part	Each dispatcher costs approximately \$160,000 and the OT cost would fund 13 dispatchers.
4.	Finding 20-19: Delays in completing the new CAD project are due, in part, to lack of available staff dedicated to provide project management and comprehensive configuration input to the vendor.	Agree in part	The project management for the CAD project is provided through City IT and the vendor. OPD provides subject matter experts (SME) on items requested by the project managers. OPD has not been able to provide consistent SME participation to assist with input for CAD configuration. The employees designated for this task often are called back to supervise dispatchers on the floor because of limited supervisor staffing. In July, the City contracted with Federal Engineering for additional project management and subject matter expert help and focus on the CAD configuration process. As of September 1, all of OPD’s configuration tasks are up to date.
5.	Finding 20-20: The responsibilities to manage Public Records Acts requests and staff the Oakland Police Department’s complaint line creates an unacceptable burden on an understaffed communications center and diverts staff away from answering emergency calls.	Agree	OPD executive management is exploring other options for reassigning personnel to the ECC to assist with public records requests and to move the complaint intake to the patrol desk or other OPD resources.
6.	Finding 20-21: The communications center’s failure to establish a call-answering policy or standard contributes to a lack of accountability to the Oakland community.	Disagree	Although the City does not have a written document outlining the expectations for answering calls, the City understands and strives to achieve the state-mandated call answering standard.

	2019—2020 Alameda County Grand Jury Final Report		OPD has adopted an Information Bulletin explicitly stating that the Communication Center goal is to meet the state call answering standard.
7.	Finding 20-22: The communications center’s recorded messages that callers are greeted with when call takers are busy unnecessarily increases the number of abandoned calls.	Neither agree or disagree	See recommendation 8. The language in the recorded message has been changed.
8.	Finding 20-23: Hiring of communications center staff has lagged because of an overly complicated hiring process.	Agree	The City’s Department of Human Resources Management has implemented an expedited and streamlined hiring process for dispatchers and added external resources for testing.
9.	Finding 20-24: The recruitment of dispatchers is set as an unacceptably low priority by OPD.	Disagree	<p>OPD is limited to five recruitment priorities that are managed by the City’s HR department even though there are generally up to 10 job classifications that need to be filled. Until recently, HRM would not allow a new recruitment for dispatchers to begin until all names on the current list were exhausted.</p> <p>The prioritization of any job classification is adjusted regularly on the list given to HRM. At the moment in time when the Grand Jury met with HRM, it was #9, because there were still a few names on the eligible list and HRM was in the process of selecting a new dispatcher test and putting together an exam plan. The recruitment could not open until that process was completed. If it had remained at the top of the list, one of the other important recruitments would have been stalled so it was put as a lower priority until HRM completed their test acquisition and exam plan. Once the new testing arrangement was confirmed, dispatchers went back to the top of the list.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

	Recommendation	Lead Dept.	Details
1.	Recommendation 20-14: The City of Oakland must establish a call-answering policy for the communications center to meet the CalOES requirement to answer 95% of all incoming 9-1-1 calls within fifteen seconds.	OPD	This recommendation is being implemented. OPD issued an Information Bulletin affirmatively stating that the CalOES standard is the OPD standard. The goal has always been the state standard, but OPD did not have a document adopting that as its standard.
2.	Recommendation 20-15: The City of Oakland must conduct dispatcher recruitments on a continuous basis until dispatcher vacancies are filled.	HRM & OPD	As of August 2020, the City’s Department of Human Resources Management has the dispatcher and lateral dispatcher job classification as a continuous recruitment. This recruitment opportunity was widely advertised on several sites and on the Department’s social media platforms.

3.	Recommendation 20-16: The City of Oakland must modify human resource and department policies to accept regional or allied agency dispatch testing scores to meet pre-employment requirements.	HRM	As of August 2020, the City's Department of Human Resource Management has entered into an agreement that allows applicants to accept scores from the South Bay Regional Testing Facility. This agreement significantly expands the number of testing opportunities. In addition, to further the benefit of this testing process, the South Bay Regional Testing facility contacted anyone who tested and passed the OPD test within the past 12 months to alert them to this recruitment.
4.	Recommendation 20-17: The City of Oakland must increase the authorized and budgeted number of dispatchers and supervisors to meet state call answering standards as recommended by the city's consultant.	Mayor/ City Council	According to the 2019 OPD Communications staffing report, OPD needs 90 dispatchers/operators, and 15 supervisors to handle the call volume and administrative tasks. As part of the City's Reimaging Policing initiative, OPD is conducting a study of all incoming calls for service. The results of this study will further inform future staffing needs.
5.	Recommendation 20-18: The City of Oakland must publish on the city's website quarterly communications center performance data relating to emergency call processing.	OPD	The performance data has been posted on the OPD website and will be updated quarterly.
6.	Recommendation 20-19: The Oakland Police Department must assign the responsibilities of managing Public Records Act requests and staffing of the OPD complaint line to another division as recommended by the 2019 consultant's report.	OPD	OPD will assign additional resources to ECC to assist with public records requests. When Internal Affairs Division is not open, complaints go to the patrol desk.
7.	Recommendation 20-20: The Oakland Police Department must assign a senior dispatcher or supervisor full-time to work on the CAD configuration until the CAD system is operational.	OPD	Today, CAD configuration is not a full-time job. The configuration was at a different state at the time of the consultant study and Grand Jury investigation. The consultant hired by ITD to help with the configuration is the same consultant who did the staffing study in 2019. This consultant's initial assessment is that OPD is currently up to date on its configuration tasks. The project management team reports out weekly and will alert OPD about the amount of resources needed to complete the configuration and testing.
8.	Recommendation 20-21: The Oakland Police Department must change the outgoing recorded message to one that informs 9-1-1 callers that all available dispatchers are busy answering other 9-1-1 calls, when callers are on hold.	OPD	OPD has changed the recording. The recorded line has been changed to say: "You have reached 911 for the city of Oakland. All operators/call takers are handling other emergencies. Please do not hang up. The next available call taker will assist you."