



COMMITTEE REPORT

NO: P017

COMMITTEE DATE: Dec 7, 2015

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

TO: Mayor & Council

DATE: Nov 27, 2015

FROM: Bill Fordy, Chief Superintendent
Officer in Charge, Surrey RCMP

FILE:

SUBJECT: Enhancing public safety with communication technology

RECOMMENDATION

The Surrey RCMP recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Endorse the development of a police app as a component part of the MySurrey App.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Detachment's efforts in applying new communication technologies to enhance service delivery and support community engagement and mobilization, and ultimately maintain public safety.

BACKGROUND

The Surrey RCMP is committed to communicating with the public and providing them with timely, accurate information. It is important for the police to maintain ongoing and effective communications, to assist with community engagement and mobilization efforts and maintain police-citizen trust. It is also important to the community, who consistently demonstrate an appetite for more information regarding police programs, services and activities as well as police response to crime and other public safety issues within and across the City of Surrey.

The Surrey RCMP has made extensive use of more traditional approaches to communication such as media releases and the Detachment website (www.surrey.rcmp.ca) to supplement person-to-person interaction and interpersonal outreach activities. In 2012, the Detachment launched its social media presence with the establishment of Twitter and Facebook accounts, and has seen steady growth in its social media following since that time. While this demonstrates the public are keen to embrace new ways to interact with the police, these new communication tools are intended to complement the more traditional tools rather than replace them.

Over the last five years we have seen significant advances in technology and a significant shift in the use of technology by government and law enforcement agencies to connect with their constituents and stakeholders. The increased use and reliance on technology and electronic means of communications is best illustrated by the explosive growth in smart phones and other

mobile devices, and a corresponding uptake in the use of social media and mobile apps to both access and share information (anywhere, anytime).

In fact, evidence suggests that the dynamic is shifting in terms of how the public consume and share information. Statistics show that 2014 marked the first time that people used smart phone and tablet apps more than personal computers (PCs) to access the Internet. The Surrey RCMP has also seen this trend. In 2010, over 95% of Detachment website traffic was from a desktop computer. This number has been decreasing steadily ever since and so far in 2015 mobile devices and tablets account for 50% of website visits. This increasing use of “mobile” devices (as opposed to landlines) is also evident in our Communications Centre; in 2014 mobile devices accounted for 63% of the 911 calls received. The fact that NextGen 911 will include text message reporting capability is also reflective of this trend.

The City of Surrey has acknowledged this growing shift and has responded with various service delivery innovations that utilize communications technology to engage citizens through easy and convenient electronic services.

DISCUSSION

Email Fan-out System

In September 2014, the City of Surrey launched an electronic ‘News & Updates’ system to provide subscribers with relevant information and notifications from the City of Surrey. This email marketing platform allows users to choose from a number of “channels” or categories, depending on the topics that interest them most. Subscribers receive regular updates in their email inboxes, based on the categories they have selected. Currently there are 19 subscription categories offered by the City as E-Connect newsletters and the system has over 29,000 subscribers.

The Surrey RCMP and the City of Surrey regularly hear feedback from Surrey residents and business owners that they would like more information specifically relating to crime and improving safety in their communities. The City will be expanding its E-newsletter offerings to include categories specific to the Surrey RCMP, allowing members of the public to receive information from the Surrey RCMP directly to their email.

The Surrey RCMP will offer four categories for email subscription:

1. Surrey RCMP News Releases (as released);
2. Surrey RCMP Events (monthly);
3. Crime Stats (quarterly); and
4. Officer in Charge Message (bi-annually).

In addition to these four categories, the Surrey RCMP will also be working in partnership with the City of Surrey on a Public Safety e-newsletter, which will include content from Bylaws, Fire Services, the Crime Reduction office, and the Surrey RCMP.

All content for the Surrey RCMP’s four categories of Public E-Communications will be provided by the Surrey RCMP and will be offered in English and French, as per Treasury Board requirements. Subscriptions will be open to anyone with an email address, but will be targeted to Surrey residents, Surrey community groups, and Surrey business owners. This new

communications channel has been approved by RCMP Departmental Security, Legal, and the Official Languages Branch.

The City will launch the new Surrey RCMP categories once the Enterprise version has been installed (anticipated early in 2016). The Enterprise version will allow subscribers to select their language preference (English and French will be offered for the four Surrey RCMP categories) and provide their postal code for future e-communications where it will be advantageous to segment communications by geographical area.

By sharing the City's e-communications platform, Surrey citizens will be able to select all of the e-communications they would like to receive from the City and the Surrey RCMP from one central area on the City of Surrey website, thereby driving more traffic to the City of Surrey website and more subscribers to City of Surrey's e-newsletters.

Mobile Police App

The City of Surrey has launched a number of mobile applications compatible for use on smart phone and tablet devices that have been very well received by the community (e.g., Rethink Waste, COSMOS, Surrey Request and Surrey Libraries apps). The City has also developed the MySurrey App, a one-stop-shop app that brings all the different mobile applications published by the City together into one platform to make it easier for Surrey residents to access a variety of City information from their mobile device.

Policing is changing, and as the environment continues to become more complex, police must respond with new strategies to enhance police service delivery and collaborative crime reduction efforts. With the increased reliance on and use of mobile technologies by the public, many police agencies are turning to mobile applications to help safeguard the community and assist public safety officials with community outreach, engagement and mobilization. In Canada, police apps have been implemented extensively in Ontario, in both Calgary and Edmonton, as well as in a few BC jurisdictions (Victoria, New Westminster, West Vancouver, and Transit Police).

The Surrey RCMP has identified the potential value of a police app with respect to staying connected to residents and community stakeholders, and doing so in more real time (i.e., when and where contact or information is needed). As such, the Detachment researched and reviewed police agency apps from across North America and reached out to the various vendors of these applications. A number of quotes have been solicited from service providers. Senior officers and managers from the Detachment also received a demonstration from a leading developer that has experience working with numerous Canadian police agencies. A representative from the City IT department also attended this demonstration.

Most police apps facilitate community engagement and mobilization functionality through various features, including crime reporting, crime mapping, crime prevention tips, news alerts and social media feeds. As per the quotes/estimates received from a host of vendors, costs typically include a one-time development cost and annual maintenance costs. Total costs vary depending on number of features and degree of integration within the app (as opposed to simply re-directing to web), as well as the level of customization requested by the police agency (e.g., the development of new or specialized features).

In terms of next steps, Surrey RCMP Support Services will be working with City Purchasing on advancing procurement with the preferred vendor. A project team will be established to develop

the specific app features (and look and feel) and ensure compatibility and integration with existing communication efforts and technologies in use at the Detachment. The team will also work to ensure a seamless integration with the MySurrey App, with an anticipated launch of the new police app component early in 2016.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

These communication technologies assist in achieving the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly the following action items:

- SC11: Public Safety and Security; and
- SC17: Crime Reduction Strategy.

OTHER STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

These new initiatives complement other City and RCMP efforts to encourage social engagement and connectivity and embody service delivery innovation (e.g., the SMART Surrey Strategy, CitySpeaks, MySurrey app, Open Data, etc) that demonstrate an increasing mobile and inter-connected world. These efforts were recognized at the Union of BC Municipalities annual convention earlier in the year, as the City of Surrey received an award for its MySurrey and Surrey Request apps in the Community Connection category. This category recognizes local governments that excel in their use of civic engagement practices and social media tools to involve their citizens in dialogue.

CONCLUSION

Citizens of Surrey have made it known that they want more access to information on crime and policing activities that affect their communities. The new communication technology tools (Public E-Communications and Police App) will provide more options for Surrey residents to be informed on crime prevention, local crime issues, and Surrey RCMP programs, services and initiatives to enhance public safety and work with the community to report and prevent crime. In addition, the increased availability of information will demonstrate the Surrey RCMP's transparency and promote public trust in the city's police force.

Overall, these new communications tools will provide Surrey residents and business owners with a more convenient and timely way to receive information about local crime and public safety issues, crime prevention and Surrey RCMP events and initiatives. These tools will provide additional ways for citizens to stay informed on the work of the Surrey RCMP, and complement our website, social media, and community meetings. Further, we anticipate these tools will support stronger linkages with the community, more informed citizens, investigational assistance from the public, and increased reporting of crime and nuisance issues.



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