



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

SPECIAL COMMITTEE: POLICE & COMMUNITY

CITY COUNCIL
City Hall, 215 SE 7th Street, Suite 255
Topeka, KS 66603-3914
Tel: 785-368-3710
Fax: 785-368-3958
www.topeka.org

Date: February 19, 2021

Time: 1:00pm

Location: 1st floor conference room; Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison (virtual attendance was available as well)

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller, Sylvia Ortiz (Chair), Michael Padilla

City staff present: City Manager Brent Trout, Mary Feighny (Deputy City Attorney), Interim Chief Bryan Wheelles (TPD), CPT Colleen Stuart, LT Matt Danielson, SGT Josh Klamm

1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Ortiz called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. Committee members introduced themselves.

2) Approve minutes from January 26, 2021 meeting

Committee member Padilla made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee member Hiller seconded the motion. Motion approved 3:0.

3) Meet Gracie, TPD's Therapy Dog

LT Matt Danielson introduced Gracie. She is still in training, but will serve the department as a therapy dog. Her role will be to help with investigations as a way to help a witness or victim feel comfortable and able to open up to the officers. She will also serve to help with officer wellness. LT Danielson is her handler, and she accompanies him where he goes. Once she has completed training, she may be able to accompany other officers on assignments. People with further questions can reach out to Gretchen Spiker, TPD's Public Relations Specialist, at gspiker@topeka.org or 785-368-9542 or may email LT Danielson at mdanielson@topeka.org.

4) Presentation - Strengthening Police & Community Partnership (SPCP) Survey Results [Video 10:35 minute mark]

[Presentation information will be available to view on the Committee's webpage at: <https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/police-community>]

CPT Colleen Stuart, TPD, and Chrissy Russell, Health Clinician and coordinator for the TPD crisis co-responders with the CIT program, spoke about the community survey results. Ms. Russell served as the community lead on the SPCP, as the intention was to be a true police and community partnership.

Presentation Highlights:

- The survey template was created by the Department of Justice.
- Meant to measure and collect info about criminal victimization, residents' views about crime, and their willingness to report crime to the police.
- Allows law enforcement to find effective approaches toward crime and the allocation of agency resources.
- Provides a view on what is important to the citizen and their expectations of their police force.
- Over 1,100 citizens responded, with submissions being from all zip codes in Topeka with thirty additional coming from outside of the city limits.
- High percentage of respondents chose "to a great extent" or "a lot" with regard to questions about Relationships with the Community.
- Top three issues listed as greatest problems within community: gun violence, drug abuse, burglaries/thefts (auto)
- Percentage of change between feeling safe while alone outside during the day dropped into less safe categories by combined 37.2% with the same question regarding safety at night.
- "To great extent" received highest percentages on questions regarding Procedural Justice, Trust, Respect and Fairness.
- "Somewhat" received the highest percentages in questions regarding crime prevention measures.
- "To a great extent" received the highest percent with question asking about overall satisfaction of performance.
- Regarding Traffic issues, 96.5% of respondents have had 0-2 traffic related contacts with TPD in the past 12 months. This included issues such as citations, warnings, or vehicle crashes.
- 68.9% of respondents noted they had zero times in the past 12 months of contacting TPD with a 911 emergency call. Of the remaining 31% of respondents who had contacted TPD with an emergency call, 16.6% noted "very satisfied", 8.6% "satisfied" and the remaining 5.8% splitting "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied", "dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" options.
- Of the respondents, 49% stated they had contacted TPD with non-emergency calls zero times within the past twelve months. 38.4% responded one to two

times, with higher numbers of calls declining. 25% who had contacted TPD for non-emergency calls felt “very satisfied” with interaction, 12% “satisfied”, 9% “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”, remaining 9.5% split between “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied”.

- Of the top three written comments by respondents: 130 noted community policing increases positive interactions within the community. 120 noted higher wages, more officers, and faster response time would improve the department. 101 stated “proactive policing- Specialized units designed to target specific crime such as bike unit, drug unit, and violent crime unit” would help to improve the department.

Questions/Comments:

- Was it possible to correlate answers to zip codes? On the Google form, there is an option to pull that information, however it was not done in preparation for this presentation.
- The department also did a great job with trying to reduce burglary/theft with the Lock It, Remove It, Lose It program. There are stickers and signs in a lot of locations, do you think people have started to become desensitized after seeing them? Would it make a difference to remove them for a short time and then reintroduce the campaign again? Using social media is helpful in continuing to remind the public, and placing new information in front of them.
- Committee member Hiller would like to see a grass-roots conversation to educate, as no reply or acknowledgment reinforces feelings of distrust or not being heard. Chief Wheelles agreed and appreciated hearing from two committee members with two very different perspectives on the Lock It, Remove It, Lose It program. Chairwoman Ortiz noted everyone in the community has a part to play in making the place we live safer.
- Did respondents declare Community Policing as a positive interaction? As opposed to pro-active policing? Gretchen Spiker, TPD PR Specialist, noted that many of the survey questions were an essay format, and respondents noted more than one thing. The goal was to not misinterpret, but rather report exactly what was said. Committee member Hiller and SPCP members conversed further about the importance of having designated Community Policing unit(s). Committee member Padilla added perspective to comments made regarding how police chiefs feel toward community policing, to state that it extends much further than the Chief. The ideals of community policing are better served by having it as a department-wide philosophy rather than a unit of a few officers. Chairwoman Ortiz stated agreement to both points brought up by

the other committee members. She stated that from a community standpoint, she has heard people want to have an officer to speak to who they know will be able track their neighborhood information and share it within the department.

Chief Wheelles stated his priority currently is crime reduction, both property and personal. The community outreach opportunities coincides with the crime reduction strategies. There is overlap and both are important.

- Committee member Hiller inquired if the TellTPD@topeka.org email was still being received by anyone? She stated without a response or acknowledgement from the department helps to ease feelings of distrust or not feeling heard.
- Committee member Hiller stated she had heard the SPCP had disbanded and asked Chief Wheelles to clarify the status. Chief Wheelles stated the group was composed by volunteer community members in a partnership with the police department, as a community-driven initiative. The group recently felt they had completed the goal by conducting, reviewing and presenting the survey. At this time, the group could begin again, but is not currently planning to continue meeting regularly.

5) Discussion: Deployment of Officers for Special Needs Populations [Video 1:11:25 minute mark]

Chief Wheelles presented information on how officers are deployed and work with special needs populations of the community. [*This presentation can be found on the committee's webpage*]

a. Unsheltered

The Behavioral Health Unit work regularly with the unsheltered population. The police department partners with other resources through Valeo, Topeka Rescue Mission (TRM), and Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) to provide outreach operations throughout the year. A Topeka Fire Department paramedic and a nurse from Stormont Vail also accompany the unit when they visit the unsheltered populations, and follow-up if medical concerns arise. The unit also participates in the Shawnee County Homeless Task Force and Capital City Homeless Outreach.

b. Intellectually or Developmentally Disabled

Chairwoman Ortiz and Chief Wheelles introduced the Stay Calm initiative. Chief Wheelles stated he would be able to bring the program forward in a future meeting to address questions further.

There are a number of agencies who partner with TPD to provide training and expertise regarding working with individuals with developmental disability.

c. Mental or Behavioral Crisis

Committee member Hiller inquired about specific programs or training to assist with hoarders. Chief Wheelles stated that was a very specific type of case, and that there was no current policy or training aimed specifically for hoarding. Ms. Russell stated, to her knowledge, the TPD had experienced challenges with connecting with the hoarding taskforce and was not sure if the taskforce was active currently. Chief Wheelles appreciated the topic being brought up and noted Property Maintenance would also be important to involve in that training.

Chief Wheelles read through policy 4.27.2 - Behavioral Health Unit/CIT Trained Officers, KSA 59-2953 & policy 4.27.4 - Behavioral Health Crisis.

Committee member Padilla asked for clarification as to if the Behavioral Health Crisis policy 4.27.4, as to if the policy was only meant for individuals over the age of 18, or for juveniles with intellectual/developmental disabilities as well. Chief Wheelles responded that the first section, related to committing a crime where an arrest is authorized by law, could be applicable toward juveniles. Both potentially could be applied toward a juvenile, however there will likely be a parental aspect to the situation that would be required to be addressed.

Policy 4.2.5 - Use of Force (De-escalation) demonstrates that the de-escalation piece is intertwined in most policies and situations. Ms. Russell stated that in her experience with the CIT program, the officers prefer to de-escalate a situation. If including a crisis co-responder helps to do that, the officer wants to use that tool. Ms. Russell also emphasized that the crisis co-responders use any opportunity during conversations with officers to impart more insight into CIT and serving the citizens with mental or behavioral health issues, and the officers take those opportunities to ask questions. There is a level of comfortability and trust between the officers and co-responders that also allows for the co-responder to offer feedback, and the officers have been receptive to that.

d. Non-English Speaking / Deaf or Hard of Hearing

TPD Policy 4.73.1 - Limited English Proficiency and Deaf/Hard of Hearing was reviewed. Officers have a small handbook "Signs of the Law" to assist when communicating with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Policy 4.73.3(B) - Topeka Police Department's Commitment to Provide Meaningful Access, was read. On the implementation piece to following the policy, tools such as the Language Line, to assist officers with communicating. Many of the officers are bilingual and have basic or proficient skills with the Spanish language. When officers encounter less common languages, the Language Line is used. This is a phone number that accesses a language bank which offer a wide variety of interpretive services. There have also been times when resources from Washburn University have been used, by partnering with some of the students or faculty within the international program.

e. Victims of Human Trafficking

Committee member Hiller noted an increase of conversation regarding human trafficking, and inquired if the increase has been from people being more aware of what human trafficking is, or are the cases increasing? There is more data that has become available as the various task forces have gotten better at identifying the signs, and better at handling the victimology piece of it, so it seems to be more prevalent. It is no longer a taboo or hidden subject that is not spoken about, it has come into the public spotlight. Trafficking cases are also handled in a more holistic manner now than they were years ago. All of these pieces provide more tangible data.

f. Victims of Domestic Abuse

Internal resources include TPD's Special Victims Unit, training within the academy, the Crime Victims Assistance Unit, and a Domestic Violence Lethality Form which provides officers with an assessment tool.

External resources include partnership and training with the YWCA's Center for Safety & Empowerment, and the District Attorney's Office of Victims Assistance.

6) Other Items [video 1:50:00 minute mark]

Chairwoman Ortiz noted that the committee had received inquiries regarding the timing of these committee meetings. Questions for the committee can be emailed to the Council's office assistant, Liz Toyne at etoyne@topeka.org and will be shared with the committee members. At this point in time, the committee is continuing to work through the research portion of gathering information. Once that process has concluded, they will begin hosting public input sessions. Past meeting minutes, video recordings, and supplemental information can be found on the committee's webpage at <https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/police-community>.

7) Set next meeting agenda and date

Chairwoman Ortiz will be coordinating the agenda and next meeting date with the City Council Assistant. To receive notice of future meetings when they are posted to the City of Topeka's Public Calendar, please complete the information found on the E-Notify program at: <https://www.topeka.org/e-notify/>

Citizens wanting to speak on the items may contact the committee. Questions or comments should be sent to the Liz Toyne, City Council Assistant, at etoyne@topeka.org .

8) Adjourn

Chairwoman Ortiz adjourned the meeting at 2:55pm.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/ooiDVLhH32g>