



Ministry of
Justice



Surrey Criminal Justice Recommendations Report

Prepared for
Her Worship Dianne Watts and
the Honourable Suzanne Anton, Attorney General

Prepared by
The Surrey Criminal Justice Task Force

Executive Summary

In February 2014, the previous Surrey mayor, Her Worship Dianne Watts and the Attorney General Suzanne Anton created the Surrey Criminal Justice Task Force. The Task Force was charged with exploring the unique justice needs and challenges in Surrey and making recommendations to address these challenges.

On September 29th and 30th, 2014 the Task Force held a workshop at Surrey City Hall with key representatives from the justice, health and social service sectors. The workshop included presentations from all sectors to set the context and create understanding of both Surrey's challenges and existing remediation initiatives. Participants then explored and defined the problems Surrey faces and identified the most promising opportunities for piloting solutions and delivering services that will address real needs.

Based on the evidence presented at the workshop, the Task Force determined that increased communication and collaboration promised to be a more effective response to the identified challenges than creating a specialized or community court. The Task Force recommends the creation of an integrated services network for administrative offices of justice, health and social services agencies with the potential to directly deliver some services to clients. Local advocacy and coordination, as well as operational requirements including governance, leadership and management, will be necessary for this approach to succeed.

The submission of this report completes the work of the Task Force. However, if the recommendations of this report are accepted, a reconstituted working group led by the City of Surrey, with support from the Province, will be required to move this initiative forward.

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¹ The Provincial Court's participation in the Task Force was informational not recommendatory

Workshop Overview

Discussions between the Ministry of Justice and the City of Surrey led to the creation of a Surrey Criminal Justice Task Force. The Task Force included representation from the City of Surrey, the RCMP, the Provincial Court Judiciary, and from the Ministry of Justice: Court Services, Corrections, Criminal Justice and Justice Services. It was tasked with looking at the unique justice needs and challenges in Surrey and identifying opportunities for addressing them, including a specialized court.

The Task Force planned a two-day workshop on September 29th and 30th, 2014 to explore and define the problem and examine potential opportunities for addressing criminal justice issues in Surrey. The workshop invited participants from City of Surrey, the RCMP, the Provincial Court Judiciary, government agencies, and community groups.

To provide background and context for the participants, the facilitation team conducted interviews with representatives across the justice system prior to the workshop, and brought these users' perspectives into the workshop through stories and visual posters.

The first day of the workshop was dedicated to problem-identification. The workshop began with presentations that provided demographic and statistical pictures of the City of Surrey. The second day highlighted a number of efforts already underway and focused on examining potential opportunities aimed at addressing known challenges in the City of Surrey. Workshop participants considered and discussed these initiatives in light of the shared understanding which was developed through the context setting presentations. Particular attention was placed on viewing challenges through the lens of a variety of justice system partners as well as clients. The workshop participants concluded that the most promising solution was an opportunity to focus on enhancing existing cross-organizational work – community engagement, communication and coordination – rather than to seek wholly new solutions.

Areas of Focus

Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence is an area of significant concern that was discussed at the workshop.

Workshop participants learned that Surrey has the second highest rate of domestic violence prosecutions in British Columbia, with these cases constituting almost twenty-one per cent of the concluded adult and youth criminal cases. Additionally, twenty per cent of provincial family orders with protective conditions that are sent to BC's protection order registry are from Surrey.

At the same time, justice partners are already paying particular attention to domestic violence and reassessing how to re-allocate existing resources to better address this issue. Given the high volume of domestic violence files in the Surrey Provincial Courthouse, Surrey Crown counsel has very recently reallocated some of its existing Crown counsel and staff resources to create a Domestic Violence Unit (DVU). This form of enhanced file ownership is designed to have one Crown counsel responsible for handling a domestic violence file through the "intake" stages of a prosecution, namely, charge assessment/bail/disclosure/disposition or arraignment. In those instances when a trial date is scheduled, another DVU Crown will have conduct of the trial. Should opportunities for new resources become available, further enhancements to

file ownership such as assigning one Crown counsel with conduct of a file from charge assessment through to trial may be considered. Crown file ownership is intended to provide better victim support, earlier resolution of these prosecutions without the necessity of a trial, and improved trial preparation. The DVU team as a whole will continue Surrey Crown's engagement with local stakeholders in recurring highest risk offender meetings.

B.C. Corrections is also looking at ways to address domestic violence. The Relationship Violence Prevention Program is a two part domestic violence program that has been proven to reduce re-offending by fifty per cent and is delivered in all Community Corrections offices and in custody centres housing sentenced inmates. It is also delivered in a number of languages to respond to the needs of various ethnic groups. Workshop participants saw the opportunity to leverage what is working from current programs and practices in addressing this issue in Surrey.

Mental Health

Workshop participants learned that over fifty-six per cent of individuals involved with BC Corrections (Custody and Community Corrections) have a mental health and/or substance misuse diagnosis.

Workshop participants heard about a promising initiative by the Fraser Health Authority supporting Assertive Community Treatment Teams (ACT Teams). Similar ACT Teams are operated by a number of health authorities around the province. They provide flexible, community-based support for adults with serious and persistent mental illness and significant functional impairments who have not connected with, or responded well to, traditional outpatient mental health care and rehabilitation services. Services include comprehensive assessment, treatment, rehabilitation and support activities. The current caseload of ACT clients is approximately one hundred, most of who are seen by the team between two and seven times a week. The work of the ACT Teams has reduced the number of contacts with the hospital emergency room by seventy-five per cent and hospital in-patient days are down about eighty per cent. Additionally, their clients' contact with the courts and the justice system overall has significantly decreased.

Prolific Offenders

About fifty per cent of reported crimes in British Columbia are committed by about ten per cent of offenders (prolific offenders). Although statistics are not available specifically for Surrey it would be safe to assume that these same ratios would be applicable.

The workshop also heard about initiatives such as the Prolific Offender Management (POM) program piloted in 2008 by the Ministry of Justice. The main goal of the program was to reduce crime through rehabilitation or incarceration, where appropriate through tailoring the criminal justice response to the individual offender. The evaluation of the program found that it increased communication and information flow between agencies and over a two year period saw a forty per cent reduction in recidivism. Workshop participants familiar with the program indicated that there were a number of positive outcomes, specific to Surrey, related to the program. However the evaluation was not able to conclusively determine the positive outcomes as necessarily being the result of the POM.

Workshop participants agreed that key components of the POM program that had the most impact, such as streamlining inter-agency communication, should be considered for inclusion in the recommended service consolidation or "integrated network" approach for the City of Surrey.

Promising Local Initiatives

As a result of workshop discussion, it became clear that many of the current Surrey initiatives seek to increase community safety by improving collaboration and communication across service providers. This collaboration often takes place with co-located services, or can occur in models that bring the services to the client. An excellent example of this collaboration is Car 67, which is a partnership between the Surrey RCMP and the Fraser Health Authority (Mental Health and Addiction Services). Car 67 partners a uniformed RCMP member and a clinical nurse specializing in mental health. Together they respond to calls received involving emotional and mental health issues. Although no formal evaluation has yet been undertaken, anecdotal evidence suggests this approach is having a positive impact on this specific client population, while more appropriately allocating police resources.

Additionally, the Surrey RCMP is leading work to establish a hub that brings together agencies that address some of the most significant challenges in Surrey. This hub is modeled on successful work in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and in Scotland. The Surrey RCMP hub will bring key agencies together to provide proactive and preventative case management for young people who are at high risk of coming into conflict with the justice system. The Prince Albert model brings together agencies to hold deliberate, co-operative discussions about five to ten of the highest risk young people to determine and provide the best intervention available, whether this is housing, treatment or parenting support. Initial reports from Prince Albert indicate that a vast majority of youth do not require additional or subsequent support from the hub after the initial assessment and provision of services.

Recommendation: An Integrated Services Network

The result of the Task Force efforts is the recommendation for the creation of an Integrated Services Network (Services Network): a single location for administrative offices of justice, health and social services involved in the co-delivery of programs and services aimed at reducing crime in Surrey.

The workshop participants agreed that an integrated network has the potential to:

- increase the efficiency of sharing resources across agencies,
- provide increased opportunity for inter-agency information sharing through negotiated agreements, and
- begin to unite priorities and create a shared vision.

In addition to functioning as an administrative centre, the Integrated Services Network has the potential to provide front end services to clients as well. This would increase ease of access for clients with complex needs by providing a single physical location.

The initial phase of the Integrated Services Network requires the assignment of an administrative liaison and the establishment of a governing body with representation from participating agencies. The Task Force also discussed a second phase for the creation of neighbourhood networks to provide front-end services using the same agency collaboration model. Eroding physical and conceptual boundaries between different service providers has the potential to deliver higher quality, more holistic service to clients. Establishing a location that is understood by and accessible to clients may increase the likelihood that the front-line staff are able to reach clients who may otherwise be hard to reach, and supports the “no wrong door” approach which reduces the likelihood that clients will be turned away and redirected to other services located elsewhere.

The Task Force recommends that the Integrated Services Network be developed with priority focus on domestic violence, mental health and substance misuse, and prolific offenders. The Integrated Services Network should provide opportunities to work with partner organizations already invested in the remediation of Surrey’s most intractable issues: For example, the Integrated Services Network should have a direct link with the Crown’s new Domestic Violence Unit. With minimal additional resources, this model should be attainable without the requirement of additional or new resource commitments

but should focus on better use of existing resources. Ongoing support for the Integrated Services Network may be achieved through re-allocation of existing resources to better align the investments we are making today.

A key component of a successful Integrated Services Network would be the new role of an administrative liaison. This role would be instrumental in the creation and ongoing operation of the Integrated Services Network. The liaison role would generally be responsible for overall coordination and integration of the Services Network, other duties could include intake and assessment. It is recommended that the specific role and duties of the liaison would be further defined during the development stage of the Integrated Services Network.

It was noted by the Task Force that the former City Hall building in Surrey may be worthy of consideration for an Integrated Services Network due to both its proximity to several justice services and currently available leasable space. However, other factors, such as a geographic location of the clients accessing the Integrated Services Network, should be considered. It was raised, during the workshop, that the former City Hall is not in an area where the intended client population resides, rather that this population tends towards the Whalley or Guildford area and perhaps space could be leased in this area of Surrey.

The Task Force created the opportunity to bring together highly invested leaders from across sectors to share expertise, experience, and a common commitment to improve the lives of people in the City of Surrey. The workshop followed an evidence-based approach to understanding problems, and encouraged the development of a recommendation that is community-driven, innovative and actionable.