



MEMORANDUM

TO: David McKnight, Dakota County, Enterprise Finance and Information Services Director

FROM: Heidi Hieserich, Dakota 911 - Executive Director

DATE: June 10, 2024

RE: Status Update on Dakota Communications Center Operational Assessment

BACKGROUND

During the May 7th (2024) Dakota County Board work session the Board of Commissioners questioned the status of recommendations identified in an operational and technical assessment completed for the Dakota Communications Center (DCC), now Dakota 911, in 2018. This summary report was prepared to provide the status of those recommendations, as well as related research completed by the Dakota County Office of Performance and Analysis (OPA) in 2019.

REPORT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Operational and Technical Assessment - Completed by Winbourne Consulting, LLC. (2018)

The findings and recommendations from this assessment focused on three key areas: operational efficiencies, stage dispatching, and a technology assessment. The recommendations were shared with DCC Governance in late 2018, with a subsequent status report following in September of 2019. The attached matrix captures a more detailed status of these recommendations.

In summary, the findings and recommendations from the Winbourne Report have been addressed. Many remain an ongoing management function, such as workforce planning.

DCC Research, Phase II – Completed by Dakota County OPA (2019)

The findings of the research completed by County OPA in 2019 were presented to DCC Governance in 2020. The focus of this update is on the research pertaining to the

operational areas of staffing, staged dispatch, and customization of services. There were no recommendations provided with this report.

Staffing: The research found that 911 dispatch center staffing is unique to the individual needs of organization and is based on their approach to call processing and services provided. The report discussed 6 staffing positions that were recommended in the 2018 Winbourne Report and identified similar positions in peer dispatch centers, but few that matched exactly as stand-alone positions.

Since the report, Dakota 911 has added two positions to support operational needs. A quality assurance supervisor was added in 2020 and a training manager was added in 2024.

Universal Staffing Model: The 2018 Winbourne Report recommended moving away from a universal staffing model. The research found that the DCC operates in a similar fashion to peer agencies. Only Ramsey County implemented a two-stage model where dispatchers did not act as call takers. DCC staff's response to this recommendation was that universal staffing provides the DCC with staffing flexibility.

Customization: The OPA research found that all peer dispatch centers engaged offered some level of customization for their municipalities. The customizations varied by dispatch center and most involved manual dispatcher review to determine the appropriate response.

Dakota 911 has standardized emergency response codes and supports customized agency response protocols managed through the computer-aided dispatch system. Customization of non-emergency services is sometimes managed through other resources but has no impact on emergency response times. This balancing act allows Dakota 911 to provide a high level of service to the membership and community.

In summary, the County OPA research found that differences between dispatch centers were frequently present in operations and tailored to meet the needs of their organization. Overall, the feedback gathered indicated the DCC provided quality service.

SUMMARY

The findings and recommendations identified in the Winbourne Report and research reported by the County OPA have either been addressed or remain a function of management that will continue to evolve and adapt to the needs of the operation.

Attachment: 2018 Winbourne Report Recommendations

2018 Winbourne Report Recommendations

	Topic	Agree	Disagree	Comments/Actions (Reported Sept 2019)	2024 Update
OPERATIONAL					
1	Revisit/reset Performance Outcome statements - Not system oriented.		X	Did ask operational groups if there were more statistics they'd like to see. All are satisfied with what is being presented.	
2	Accountability for performance is diluted across multiple positions.	X		QA Supervisory addition will have primary responsibility.	QA supervisor role assigned in 2020. Training Program Manager role created in 2024.
3	Develop Performance Reporting Plan		X	Monthly Stats and Annual report are our reporting plan. Similar to #1.	
4	Clarify accountability as a core value and create a culture of ownership for behavior and results.		X	Everyone is held accountable. Guardian Tracker Performance Program will make this more transparent.	
5	Clarify roles to ensure all relevant responsibilities and accountabilities are well defined.		X	These are well defined through job descriptions and union contracts. Ex Dir Example.	
6	Formally communicate DCC goals and standards for performance to all staff and share progress.	X	X	This has been done at in service training and via the supervisors and emails. Agree there is room for improvement.	No further action reported. It is the current practice of Dakota 911 to share and report on goals and standards with all staff.
7	Employ constructive correction through direct supervisor to employee conversations at the time behaviors are observed.	X		This has been observed from time to time but is not the norm. Supervisors have been urged to take actions when things are observed.	Accountability is a key value and reinforced by the leadership team.
8	Establish new organizational structure.		X	Add 5 management positions. (Two additional Director level and 3 "Officer Level" positions. We have added one QA in response.	In 2024 a Training Manager position was added. Leadership will monitor and make recommendations for change as needed.
9	Allocate ancillary operational responsibilities strategically.	X		The CAD Administrator does not have a term limit. The same will be true for the QA supervisor. Continuity in the position is important.	No further action reported.
10	Develop standard methodology to account for total workload.	X	X	This is very well defined for our core responsibility. Our systems track nearly everything for dispatchers and supervisors work. I don't believe this is needed for the other 5 employees. Since it is a small group it is easier to stay on top of the workload for the positions.	No further action reported.
11	Align DCC staffing to workload, ensuring adequate coverage for peaks.	X		This needs to be looked at but our current staffing model does follow the workload. Cheryl is heading this up right now.	Staff allocation was determined to be appropriate for the staffing levels available, reported in November 2019 to Governance. This is a management function and staff workload is regularly evaluated to support staffing and hiring strategies.

2018 Winbourne Report Recommendations

	Topic	Agree	Disagree	Comments/Actions (Reported Sept 2019)	2024 Update
12	Consider alternative approaches to handling emergency and non-emergency calls and information services.		X	Concern is the universal staffing model i.e., having each employee trained as both a call taker and dispatcher. In our opinion this gives us the most flexibility with staffing. They also suggest moving away from 911 for all.	
13	ID Cultural norms (e.g. Honesty), ID behaviors that won't be tolerated (e.g. Bullying), specify consequences for behaving inconsistent with culture, Consider forms of recognition for those that model the culture.	X	X	This seemed to me to be a simplistic analysis. Honesty, bullying for example are in our policies and procedures and are enforced. We can do better with positive reinforcement and Guardian Tracker is expected to help.	No further reporting found on this. Dakota 911 does not tolerate hostile behaviors. Accountability is valued and reinforced by the leadership.
STAGE DISPATCHING					
14	Retain two stage system.	X		No Change needed. We have emphasized that the call taker can get on the air with in-progress situations.	No change.
15	Examine basic call types and reach agreement on how these calls can be dispatched consistently across all.	X		The vast majority of call types are consistent across the consortium. Others are agency dependent, (e.g. Lockouts). The degree of customization also makes us more valuable so this will always be a balancing act.	No change. The level of customization is minimal and supports non-emergency activity. The most significant operational impact comes from handling warrant confirmations after hours for the County. Dakota 911 maintains the view point that minor customization is a balancing act and allows us to provide a higher level of service to our membership and community.
16	If the decision is to stay with 911 for all, explore other ways to alleviate the burden to 911. Examples, 311, only reporting.		X	This has not been an issue. We do make our call answering times as is.	
TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT					
17	Develop a strong technology plan.		X	We have one but it is a part of CIP. Future planning is important but we are at a unique period with NG911 and determining what will be needed.	
18	Consider study to host CAD in-house.		X	They acknowledge there are distinct advantages to hosting on site versus third party hosting. On premise solutions are not likely to be the norm in the next 5 years but a proven cloud system is not available. This should continue to be a consideration but not in the near term.	

2018 Winbourne Report Recommendations

	Topic	Agree	Disagree	Comments/Actions (Reported Sept 2019)	2024 Update
19	Review best practices with Central Square CAD/Mobile system.		X	This is done through LOGIS & CST. DCC and some of our agencies attend the national user group conference every year to gather additional insight.	
20	Unavailability of the backup CAD Administrator due to scheduling duties.	X		Duties were realigned and scheduling was removed from our back up CAD Administrator's responsibilities.	Resolved.
21	COOP plan improvements and practice.	X		While we have been recognized by the State for our COOP plan it can be improved. We will work with metro PSAPS on a possible back up site. We will plan to practice for a disaster with Ramsey County.	No further updates provided. Improving COOP is a priority for current Dakota 911 leadership and recognized in the 2024 goals and objectives.
22	No formal process for handling new technology projects.		X	We generally are not the main project managers on technology projects. This is generally either one of our vendors or LOGIS. In cases where we are more involved we have opted to have assistance...workstation replacement.	
23	DCC has a basic cyber security plan in place and relies on LOGIS for most of their cyber security.	X		We do meet CJIS standards on cyber security. This can always be improved and will look for additional training for staff on cyber security.	Implementing a cybersecurity plan/program is a strategic priority for Dakota 911.
24	DCC should research a PSAP Abandonment Device.	X		This was completed last week.	This device is used to support immediate call forwarding to another PSAP in the event Dakota 911 should need to abandon the PSAP is no longer compatible with the 911 call handling equipment.

2018 Winbourne Report Recommendations

	Topic	Agree	Disagree	Comments/Actions (Reported Sept 2019)	2024 Update
OUT OF SCOPE					
25	Recruitment is not effectively screening out unsuccessful candidates, contributing to the turnover.	X	X	It is difficult to determine whether it was the recruitment or training program that led to turnover. We have made many changes to each. Recruitment: Added validated pre employment test (Criticall), psychological examinations, exit interview and analysis. Changes to the training program have increased classroom time to help get accustomed and a mentor program has also been established. We have similar attrition to other metro PSAPS.	Nothing further reported. This is a continuous focus for most public safety answering points.
26	Career Advancement and Mobility		X	Recommends alternative organization structure for advancement opportunities. Also said the requirement of a Bachelor degree for the Operations Director position is limiting. I agree with this. I think a college degree should be a consideration but not a requirement.	
27	LOGIS changes to make it clear how requests for new features, functionality or repair.		X	We don't see this as an issue. We have a strong relationship with LOGIS and understand how to request each of the subjects mentioned.	
28	Recommend that the governance sub-committee continue their work and bring forth a re-structure recommendation to the Board for review.	X		This is in process.	A proposal for the County to take over management of the operation was unsupported by the County BOD in 2019. Governance efficiencies were since implemented, including reducing the meeting frequency to quarterly.