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CRITICAL INCIDENT REVIEW – OIS RESPONSE REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In August 2024, in response to community concerns, the Mayor of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) directed the Municipal Attorney to retain an external police practices consultant to conduct a critical incident review and supervise an investigation of an officer-involved shooting (OIS) of a sixteen-year-old female, Easter Leafa, by officers with the Anchorage Police Department (APD). The Municipal Attorney subsequently contracted with Mr. Christopher Darcy of Fairfax Consulting Group, LLC (FCG) to perform this task. Mr. Christopher Darcy and two APD Detectives completed the investigation on November 15, 2024, and provided internal affairs findings to the MOA and the APD Chief of Police.

The response recommendations report is based on Fairfax Consulting Group's review of this particular critical incident. It is designed to present and illustrate preliminary recommendations for enhancing Anchorage Police Department policies, standardized operating procedures, and training. Understanding that the Anchorage Police Department is committed to engaging a broader and more holistic review of its policies and practices in the coming months, this report focused on this particular set of facts and circumstances. The recommendations determined from the review of this incident and the lessons learned will provide the basis for future improvements in APD policy, culture, practices, and transparency.

Recommendations

Information gathering

Recommendation 1: Enhance policy to ensure (1) call takers and dispatchers receive regular training on information gathering requirements and (2) call taking and dispatch are included in the scope of after-action or investigative review process on critical incidents.

Leadership and supervision – Sergeants and Lieutenants

Recommendation 2: Enhance APD’s supervision policy, making it more straightforward and comprehensive regarding sergeants’ and lieutenants’ expectations regarding critical incident response.

Recommendation 3: Enhance training to identify the specific actions that Sergeants and Lieutenants are expected to perform from the time of call assignment throughout the event’s conclusion. The policy should cover various topics, including de-escalation options, intervention, roles and responsibilities, and creating an array of force options.

Command and Control

Recommendation 4: Enhance command and control policy and training to include a protocol for responding to incidents involving the threatened use of violence by individuals in possession of a deadly weapon. The policy change is intended to ensure supervisors react to a potential critical incident in a timely manner and are proactive in managing the encounter.

The policy improvements should consist of a process initiated by dispatch that ensures timely notification of a supervisor by requiring supervisors to announce their acknowledgment and/or self-dispatch to the call. If a sergeant is unavailable, dispatch will contact another sergeant or lieutenant to respond if possible. Supervisors should manage the utilization of tactics, supervise the incident, and determine the use of a shotgun, rifle, arrest team, less lethal option, or other tools/resources such as the APD Crisis Intervention Team.

The policy enhancement should include factors such as requiring verbal acknowledgment from supervisors assigned to high-risk calls, planning a response before arrival, assigning roles and responsibilities, coordinating the deployment of force options, deployment of less-lethal options, crisis intervention options, tactics for slowing the momentum, creating distance, and using cover, distance, and time as a tactic.

De-escalation and Response to Resistance

Recommendation 5: Enhance existing policy and training to include officers' and supervisors' responsibilities. This policy should consist of dispatch, patrol, supervision, and other units that may become involved. Every potential violent confrontation cannot always be de-escalated, but officers can impact many situations' direction, severity, and outcome based on their decision-making and tactics.

Development of Force Options

Recommendation 6: Enhance existing policy and training regarding appropriate force options, including an array of less lethal options, and the effective deployment by a team of officers. The training should clarify officer placement and effective communication in critical incidents.

Contact/Cover

Recommendation 7: Enhance Reality Based Training (RBT) to incorporate additional scenarios that reinforce the principles of contact officer and cover officer. Develop this concept in conjunction with a de-escalation response protocol.

Cultural Competence

Recommendations 8: Explore and implement meaningful ways to improve knowledge on effectively communicating with a diverse community. The policy should include specific steps to improve officers' abilities to communicate without placing any additional threat of harm on officers and empower them, when feasible, to determine if limiting factors could influence communication with a suspect. Factors to be considered are language and cultural differences, medical impairments, behavioral health issues, etc.

Post-incident procedures

Recommendation 9: Enhance policy and update practices for interacting with families and witnesses after officer-involved shootings and enhance policy and officer training on best managing the investigation by improving trauma-informed communication with families of those involved in critical incidents.

Equipment Concerns

Recommendation 10: Create a policy that defines when it is appropriate to use weapon-mounted lights to avoid a situation in which an officer inadvertently and unintentionally points a firearm at a human being. Weapon-mounted lights should not be used as a replacement for a flashlight.

Administrative Concerns

Recommendation 11: Review supervisor notification systems and procedures relating to officer weapons qualifications requirements.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CD' followed by a stylized flourish.

Christopher Darcy
CEO, Fairfax Consulting Group

December 6, 2024