June 13, 2011

To: Public Safety & Education Committee

From: Peter Harris, Central Staff

Re: 2010 Police Performance Report

Introduction

On June 15 the Police Department will brief you on the Department's 2010 Performance Report. This memo is a supplement, with two points.

First, the good news is that almost all major crimes in 2010 declined substantially from 2009 or from the average of 2006-2009 or both; but the bad news is that crime continues to exact a large cost. Based on two recent analyses of the total cost of crime, major crimes in Seattle last year cost the community more than $600 million.

Second, there is some doubt about whether next year's performance report will meet the standards of previous reports and the requirements of Resolution 20996, because the Executive has not yet conducted this year's biennial survey of policing and public safety, which supplies all of the measures of reducing fear of crime and most of the measures of good customer service. The online survey the Mayor sponsored this year is not a substitute.

The rest of this memo discusses these in more detail.

The cost of major crime in 2010

Last year saw the publication of two new research reports on the cost of individual crimes, "The Cost of Crime to Society" by Kathryn McCollister et al., and "Hidden in Plain Sight" by Paul Heaton of RAND.[1] Using somewhat different methods, each estimated the tangible and intangible cost of crimes, including criminal justice system costs and medical, material and pain and suffering costs to victims. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) currently uses the estimates by McCollister et al. to calculate the benefits of crime prevention programs.[2]

The table below applies these estimates to the absolute numbers of major crimes in 2010.

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[1] McCollister, French and Feng, "The Cost of Crime to Society: New Crime-Specific Estimates for Policy and Program Evaluation," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 108:1-2, April 2010; available at NIH Public Access, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2835847/; and Heaton, "Hidden in Plain Sight: What Cost-of-Crime Research Can Tell us About Investing in Police," RAND Occasional Paper, available at www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP279.html.

[2] Aos and Drake, "WSIPP's Benefit-Cost Tool for States: Examining Policy Options in Sentencing and Corrections," WSIPP, August 2010, available at www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=10-08-1201.

Crime	# in 2010	Total cost per McCollister et al.		Total cost per Heaton	
		per offense	total	per offense	total
Homicide	19	$8,983,000	$171,000,000	$8,649,000	$164,000,000
Rape	96	$241,000	$23,000,000	$218,000	$21,000,000
Aggravated Assault	1,973	$107,000	$211,000,000	$87,000	$172,000,000
Robbery	1,429	$42,000	$60,000,000	$67,000	$96,000,000
Burglary	6,449	$6500	$42,000,000	$13,000	$84,000,000
Auto Theft	3,453	$11,000	$37,000,000	$9100	$31,000,000
Larceny	23,284	$3500	$82,000,000	$2100	$50,000,000
Total			$626,000,000		$618,000,000

These cost estimates are not an exact science. The two analyses substantially agree about the cost of homicide and rape, but differ on the cost of the other offenses. With the exception of burglary, however, they agree about the order of costs per offense, and as a result yield similar estimates of the total cost of these crimes in Seattle in 2010.[3]

Note also that both sets of estimates imply that homicide and aggravated assault together account for more than half the total cost of these major crimes. It may make sense to treat these two crimes as a combination, because the line between them can be as small as the caliber of a firearm or the speed of an EMS response.

These estimates may have implications for the direction of the City's crime prevention efforts, both inside and outside of law enforcement. We do not have estimates of the total cost of Part II crimes – that is, for example, simple assault, driving under the influence, drug offenses, fraud, liquor offenses, prostitution, public drunkenness, or vandalism – but if the goal of crime prevention is to reduce harm, then focusing on serious violent crime, including rape and robbery as well as aggravated assault, might be a good place to start. This focus may also fit well with the City's social equity goals, as national victimization surveys routinely show that low-income people are disproportionately the victims of serious violence.

Biennial survey on policing and public safety

Following Resolution 20996, one major dimension of police performance is reducing fear of crime. The three measures of this are the percentage of residents feeling safe walking in their neighborhoods at night, the percentage avoiding certain parts of the city because of fear of crime, and the percentage perceiving that crime has increased in the last two years. Another major dimension is providing good customer service. Four of the six measures of this are the percentage of residents agreeing that the police do a good job of preventing crime, and the percentages of residents satisfied with police action after reporting crimes, reporting non-crime emergencies or being stopped while driving.

[3] The differences on burglary may result from McCollister et al.'s focus on residential burglary and Heaton's focus on all burglaries.

All of these measures come from the biennial survey of policing and public safety that has been conducted three times since 2005. The Mayor's Office has said that it intends to conduct the survey this year, but only after revising the survey in ways not yet defined. So far as I know the survey has not yet been commissioned. In March the Mayor sponsored an online survey developed by students at the Evans School, but this survey is not a substitute for the biennial survey, because its design did not ensure a representative picture of residents' opinions, and because it did not include several of the questions called for the in the performance report.