December 11, 2020

Submission to the City of Winnipeg's Executive Police Committee on the Winnipeg Police Service 2021 Budget

Introduction

The Police Accountability Coalition (PAC) was established to give voice to the need for concrete actions to address long standing community concerns about police accountability and the allocation of resources. The coalition includes Black and Indigenous-led organizations, as well as allies. Our policy brief titled Community-Based Organizations Call for Police Accountability and the Reallocation of Resources has been endorsed by close to 100 organizations..

The Need for Meaningful Community Engagement

The first issue we would like to raise is the budget process itself. Community members do not have opportunities for meaningful input into setting police budgets and policies due to the lack of open and transparent consultation processes. The input of a handful of politically appointed citizen members of the police board that allocates the budget granted by the Winnipeg city council is not a substitute for authentic consultations with the community. While the delegation process provides one avenue for council to hear from the public, the protests over the summer have underlined the urgent need for proactive consultation processes which center the voices of communities that have been disproportionately impacted by engagement with the Winnipeg Police Service. It is essential for the city to commit to a transparent and fulsome engagement process with impacted communities on the steps that are needed to create a better and safer Winnipeg for all.

Aligning the Budget with Community Priorities

The city's own budget engagement report shows that the top priority for people living in Winnipeg was community services. The Winnipeg Police Service received the most feedback of all municipal services. These comments focused mostly on shifting the police budget towards community supports. Instead of aligning the budget with community priories, the police budget was increased last year by 2%. At the same time, Winnipeg Transit is facing a $7.8 million cut to its operating budget and while we are happy to see the increased investment in libraries, at 0.2% of the police budget, it does pale by comparison.

An analysis conducted by CTV News has shown that the City of Winnipeg is spending the highest percentage of the municipal budget on police services when compared to other large Canadian cities. By 2023, the end of this four-year budget cycle, the Winnipeg Police Service will account for 30% of the municipal budget. This is not sustainable. More importantly, it is not proving effective.

Increased investment in the Winnipeg Police Service has not resulted in a reduction in crime. The most recent Winnipeg police annual statistical report shows police responded to 10,878 calls for violent crime, and 51,483 calls for property crimes in 2019. The result is an increase of 4% in violent crime and just under 15% in property crime from 2018. The statistics show property crimes were up last year 48% over the five-year-average, while violent crime was up 17% over the same time frame. There was also a 38% increase in firearms offences. There is an ever growing recognition that investing in social development is essential to addressing the root causes of crime.

Despite their central role in supporting social development, community-based organizations have experienced cuts to funding for the provision of essential services. Securing stable core funding has been an ongoing struggle for decades. Most community-based organizations rely primarily on precarious project-based funding and donations to support community building efforts. All levels of successive governments, not just the City of Winnipeg, have failed to invest in upstream interventions through the social service sector to the same degree that they have invested in policing and incarceration. The social and economic inequity that too many continue to experience has been the result. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for increased investment in service delivery to the most vulnerable community members. However, many organizations have had to limit service delivery due to budget reductions during this precarious time.

It is widely recognized that broader systemic issues such as poverty, addictions, and mental Health, contribute to involvement with the legal system. Profiles of poverty compiled by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg highlight the impact of poverty and systemic discrimination on Indigenous Peoples and newcomers in Winnipeg. However, municipalities and other levels of government have failed to invest the resources required to address these root causes, and have failed in this budget to invest appropriately in key strategies like the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy still under development.

Our Recommendations

The Police Accountability Coalition is here today to make the following five recommendations.

- We call on the City to reduce the police budget by at least 10% for the next fiscal year, and to reallocate those funds to community building initiatives, mental health and addictions care experts trained in nonviolent crisis intervention and de-escalation. We

are also calling for a reversal in the trend towards the increasing militarization of the police, a trend that has contributed to substantial increases in the budget.

- We call on the city to increase investments in community-building programs by reinstating funding to community programs that was cut in the 2020-2024 budget process, as well as the more recent cuts that were made in response to COVID-19.

- We call on the city to work with the community to establish targets and timelines for the measures identified in the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy, with a clear plan detailing how the city will resource this strategy to meet the targets.

- We call on the city to work with the community to establish targets and timelines for the city's Poverty Reduction Strategy, with a clear plan on how the city will resource this strategy and meet the targets.

- We call on the city to create avenues for meaningful and authentic engagement and consultations with community members on budget priorities and Winnipeg Police Service policies. These consultation processes should center the voices of Black and Indigenous communities. We also call on the city to establish a representative community led Task Force to co-create policies to address long standing concerns about police accountability, violence, and systemic discrimination against Indigenous and Black communities

Growing Public Support for the Reallocation of Resources

Increasing the police budget and cutting community programs runs counter to calls to defund the police from the Black Lives Matter movement and other marginalized groups and their allies. This message has garnered widespread support, as evidenced by the approximately 15,000 people who rallied in Winnipeg this past summer in support of this movement.

We know that council is reluctant to reduce the police budget, but council members need to be aware that there is growing support for calls to reallocate resources from the police to address community needs. According to a recent Angus Reid poll, a firm majority (63 per cent) of Canadians across the country would rather see investment in social welfare strategies rather than increasing police presence in high crime areas. Reallocating funding from the police budget to urgently needed community supports is a tangible way that the City of Winnipeg can respond to calls for concrete action to address the over policing of Black and Indigenous communities.

In closing, it is important to note that both our current and our previous police chiefs have emphasized the need for more investment in social development as a means to safer communities. They have both noted that 80 to 90% of calls to police are not for police matters. However, they, just like community-based organizations, are subject to the austerity or the

‘there is just so much to go around’ perspective. If council will not increase the ‘size of the pie’ through such measures as an equitable property tax system, a post-pandemic re-evaluation of business tax rates and other means, then council must spend the funds at your disposal on proven means to achieve a safer city for all. The police are a response to crime, sometimes a necessary one. However, they are not the answer to root causes of crime.

Thank you.