March 24, 2022

Mayor Bowman
Members of Council

VIA online form submission.

Re.: Item No. 7 – Winnipeg Police Funding Model

Dear Mayor and Members of Council

The Police Accountability Coalition (PAC), comprised of over 100 community based organizations, presented to the Executive Policy Committee last week on the same subject. We were pleased with the then unanimous vote in favour of keeping the current funding model for the Winnipeg Police Service. It is the better of the options the public with which the public was presented. The current model has its own problems but none of the other models promise any improvement other than to provide some additional 'arms-length' cover to Mayors and Councils, the Winnipeg Police Service as well as the applicable unions that serve the service.

The models, as presented, all seem to pre-suppose that the police budget must rise. It would seem that the concept of 'sustainability' for this exercise was just to decide by how much. Sustainability must have more to do with our ability to pay but more importantly, to get what we are paying for. There is a lack of evidence demonstrating a clear link between increased police spending and public safety. If our goal is to build safer communities for all, there are proven methods to address the root causes of crime such as poverty. The more we invest in policing, the less we will have to invest in what does work.

Our main concern over the methodology is that no context was given regarding the effectiveness of policing to increase public safety. An examination of the comments of people in favour of increasing the budget ties that opinion to crime rates and fear. However, no broader context was provided such as:

1) Winnipeg already spends the highest percentage of revenues on policing compared to other major Canadian cities and has not seen the benefits of that investment given crime rates

2) The majority of any increase to the police budget will go toward salaries and benefits of already very well paid, comparatively speaking, service members and not to proven public safety initiatives.

Our concerns with the individual alternative models are:

Model 2:

It is an arbitrary increase. Inflation rates should have little to nothing to do on how we create a safer community for all except of course to realize how high inflation rates further harm Winnipeggers who struggle with poverty. We are 'home' to the urban federal riding with the highest rate of child and family poverty in Canada, Winnipeg Centre at 40%. Winnipeg North is at 31%. Both these ridings are also home to a majority of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour and represent areas of the city most over-policed.

Model 3:

Given that 85% of the current police budget is allocated to salaries and benefits, this model will do little to curb the budget. Only 15% will be subject to a set amount and the other 85% will still be up for negotiation through collective bargaining. It seems to promise to curb spending but in our current reality it will not. It could also mean that the police will simply apply more for other funds, such as Proceeds of Crime, to fund non-salary or benefit costs. This would further reduce what community based organizations would have access to for their pro-active, community building, support programs.

Model 4:

We would object to naming it a 'public safety levy' because again there is no evidence that ties increased police spending with increased public safety. As explained in the public forums, an average increase to Winnipeg householders would be minor. However, the average obscures the potential of regressive impacts on financially vulnerable households. Someone who owns a $300,000 home in good shape and with a secure income might be able to afford an increase while someone struggling to hang on to a less expensive home, in need of repair, and with insecure income would be much less able to handle any increase.

Model 5:

This one seemed to offer the most opportunity of the 4 alternatives to decrease the police budget by tying it to revenues. If the city took in less, the police would get less. However, there would not be anything preventing a raise in property taxes using the need to cover increased police spending as the reason. It would also fail to provide the predictability in police funding that was given as one of the reasons the City embarked on this process.

This leaves us with the status quo, or model 1.

It certainly has its issues. The process is supposed to be that the WPS presents its budget to the Winnipeg Police Board. That board is supposed to hold the service accountable for their expenses compared to their effectiveness. However, year after year, the board has approved the budget as presented and gone on to support the service when it comes back for more between fiscal years.

A notable exception was when EPC and Council did not vote to approve the additional request to fund body-worn cameras. At the time, noting that since this budget was already more than $300 million a year, it was suggested that like all organizations facing fiscal management decisions the WPS and Police Board finance new expenditures by finding room within the current police budget.

This option was not presented in the public engagement process at all.

It is then up to Council to give its final approval. In practice, while sometimes there is some discussion, the budget generally passes with only minor adjustments if any. This is because everyone is aware that no politician ever lost an election by claiming to be 'tough on crime.'

Another reason this whole exercise was introduced was the purported need to depoliticize the budget process. There is nothing more inherently and necessarily political in a democracy than how we spend our money. Budgets represent what we choose to invest in and what we do not. Politicians, at least at election time, can be held accountable for the decisions they make. While claiming to be tough on crime has garnered political support among some constituencies, at some point, the larger bill, the damage done to people in poverty, and in Winnipeg that means predominantly Indigenous, Black and other People of Colour, comes due.

75% of the men we incarcerate in Manitoba are Indigenous

80% of the youth we incarcerate are Indigenous

90% of the women we incarcerate are Indigenous.

Neither the WPS nor Manitoba Justice track any other race based data but anyone who visits our jails and prisons will tell you that Black and other People of Colour are over-represented. And that all starts with policing. Who they arrest, for what and then what charges are carried forward by the crown. This approach has resulted in a police budget that is now more than a quarter of our revenues with no admission of responsibility by those who have allowed this to happen. To be specific, we mean those on both sides of the bargaining table.

We need a plan that will allow us to move toward proven methods to improve public safety.

The fire and paramedic budget coupled with the police budget makes up 43% of our revenues. We are not addressing the issues that these responders face:

- To house people better so old and failing housing stock does not burn down around them.

- To invest in supportive community programs that support health and well-being, such as safe consumption sites to decrease paramedic calls

- To move away from police responses to non-police matters such as a community led response to people in mental health crises as opposed to one that remains police led such as the current pilot, ARCC.

- To fully invest in social programs for families and children including accessible recreational facilities

- To fully invest in safe spaces for children and youth to engage in meaningful activities that keep them away from negative social groups during the critical after school hours

- To fully invest in the newcomer welcome and inclusion strategy.

- To fully invest in getting 'smart on crime by getting tough on poverty' by fully investing in the poverty reduction strategy

I would like to end by reiterating the call by the Police Accountability Coalition to reduce funding to policing by at least 10% and to redirect the funds to community building initiatives and effective community-led crisis response approaches

Sincerely,



Kate Kehler,

On Behalf of the Police Accountability Coalition