Primer for Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study Engagement Sessions

What is the issue?

The Government of Alberta is exploring the creation of an Alberta Provincial Police Service (APPS), as recommended in the Fair Deal Panel. To support this, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General (JSG) has released three documents prepared by PricewaterhouseCooper (PwC) regarding the transition to an APPS. The APPS Transition Study (APPSTS), APPS Current State Report, and APPS Future State Report provide a roadmap for how the province could transition to an APPS from the current policing model which utilizes the RCMP.

What are the next steps?

JSG has announced a plan to engage with municipalities on the transition documents. Information on these sessions was sent directly to municipalities through a letter from Minister Madu on November 16. Engagement will begin in early 2022 and sessions will be held across the province. RMA has learned that issues related to the municipal share of APPS costs will not be addressed in the engagement.

How will RMA support members on this issue?

RMA will provide members with a detailed engagement guide prior to the beginning of the engagement process. RMA also plans to host a pre-engagement virtual townhall session with members to provide an overview of the key aspects of the transition reports, as well as better understand member priorities and questions on this issue. More details on the resource and engagement session will be shared with members in the coming weeks.

What are the key considerations for members?

RMA has reviewed the PwC documents and has identified the following questions for more consideration and clarification from JSG.

Costing

According to the APPSTS, an APPS can deliver a comparable level of policing at a lower cost than the current RCMP contract policing. However, the report does not consider the implications of a loss of federal funding for policing. The report also assumes that the costs for many specialized and administrative services can be reduced through partnerships with the GOA, municipal police, and the private sector, but includes few details in the about the likelihood of those parties agreeing to such arrangements.

The documents identify the complexity of how municipalities currently contribute to policing (small and rural municipalities through the police funding model, municipalities with a population of between 5,000 and 15,000 contribute 70% of costs, and 15,000 and above contribute 90% of costs). However, the proposed model is silent on how municipalities would contribute to an APPS. Would the same population-based tiers remain, would costs be linked to service levels, would everyone pay a similar rate based on population or another indicator?

Level of service

The APPSTS emphasizes the importance of providing a consistent level of service in rural and urban areas. However, the report provides limited information on how levels of service will be determined, how they will differ from levels of service under the current model, and how a higher level of service in rural areas will be accomplished for the same or less cost than the current RCMP model.

Governance and local input

The APPSTS proposes an arm's length governance model with significant local input through police committees and detachment relationships with municipalities. While there is extensive detail on how the "higher end" of the governance model will be structured, the local and municipal role in governance lacks detail. The APPSTS also recommends that an APPS to work with municipalities to develop community safety strategies, based on legislation in Ontario that mandates municipalities to develop similar strategies. While this idea has merit, there are challenges in mandating municipalities to develop strategies due to cost and capacity impacts.

Role of police

The APPSTS places significant focus on community policing, which involves both integrating police into the community and integrating the delivery and administration of police services with other community services such as mental health supports, FCSS, etc. While community policing may have potential benefits, it could also have impacts on vulnerable populations who may begin to equate certain support services with police and be less likely to access them. Additionally, integrating police with other provincial and municipal services could lead to complex administrative relationships.

The APPSTS also recommends integrating nurses and mental health experts into the police service and teaming them with police officers. This idea has potential, but also leads to questions related to how these nurses and mental health professionals would be deployed, and how administration and decision-making will function with an increasing number of different professions existing within a police service.

Training and recruitment

The APPSTS addresses the need for consistent training, including culturally appropriate training for engaging with Indigenous and other diverse communities. However, the APPSTS does not include costing to address this training, instead suggesting this training will be provided at facilities in coordination with the Canadian Armed Forces, the Alberta Motor Association, and existing municipal police services.

The APPSTS does not include any details on how the roughly 4,000 APPS officers will be recruited and trained simultaneously. The future state report includes a recommendation on focusing recruiting efforts on Albertans to serve in their local communities. The future state document also emphasizes the need to train officers in skills that move beyond traditional policing skills and include customer service, problem solving and relationship-building. While these approaches make sense, the issue of training a mass number of new police officers (and how to best recruit officers from the RCMP and other police services) is not discussed in detail.

Have questions?

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