

Alberta's Roundtable on the Future of Policing SUMMARY



Introduction

The Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security Ministry hosted a Roundtable on the Future of Policing in Red Deer, from March 20 – 23, 2007. The purpose of this Roundtable was to provide a forum for discussion on experiences, successes, challenges and concerns facing policing and law enforcement with a view to developing principles and themes to guide the future direction of policing in Alberta.

Roundtable participants spent two full days discussing the role of law enforcement in a democratic society, the continuum of policing, challenges pertaining to police and various policing models used around the world that could work in Alberta.

The themes and principles listed below will help shape the Ministry's vision for public safety and security and will guide our direction over the next 5 to 10 years. Many of these themes and principles apply equally to most of the agencies involved in providing law enforcement and public safety services in Alberta.

This paper is being shared publicly to allow all stakeholders, including the general public, to comment on the themes and principles that were derived from the discussions.

Themes and Principles

A number of themes or principles came out of the discussions from the Roundtable. The three themes identified in the 2001 visioning session continue to be relevant in the 2007 Roundtable on the Future of Policing. The main themes identified at that session and this Roundtable are provincial leadership, equitable policing and civilian oversight.

1) *Provincial Leadership*

It is important that the Province provide leadership in the development and direction of policing. This stems from both the constitutional responsibility of the province and the necessity to coordinate the widely varying needs and services of the different communities within the Province. All the remaining themes require Provincial

leadership for effective development. Provincial leadership can be expressed in a variety of methods including legislation, standards, model policies, coordination of initiatives, direct delivery of certain services or projects, research, planning, and inter-ministerial and inter-governmental cooperation.

2) *Equitable Policing*

Equitable policing refers to both levels of service and to funding of policing. All Albertans are entitled to high quality police services with access to all training, technology, and standardized services. Because different areas of the province have different policing needs and abilities to pay, it must be remembered that “equitable” does not mean “equal”.

3) *Civilian Oversight and Governance*

The importance of civilian oversight and governance of policing continues to be an important theme. The delicate balance between the independence and authority of law enforcement on one hand, and their accountability to the public and the civilian authority, on the other, is a vital part of our democratic society. It is important that oversight and governing bodies have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the training to provide effective oversight and governance. It is also important that the province provide an effective superstructure for oversight and governance through legislation, standards, and model policies.

Building on those three themes, the 2007 Roundtable had a more operational focus that developed the following major themes:

4) *A Public Safety Network*

Public safety can most effectively be ensured by integrating the goals, methods and services of a wide variety of agencies and services. This network has several dimensions:

- *Functional*: a network of the various public order agencies such as police, security industry, special constables/peace officers, bylaw enforcement, government enforcement (e.g. Fish and Wildlife) etc. including coordinated activities and the sharing of information (data or knowledge).;
- *Inter-Disciplinary*: a network among various disciplines and approaches to social problems such as maintaining order, crime prevention, social development, mental health, social services, addiction treatment, housing;
- *Geographical*: police and other public safety and security agencies from different geographical jurisdictions must work together – inter-municipal, inter-provincial, inter-national
- *Technology and Services*: more of a tool or method than an dimension, this refers to developing a network of technology based services such as

intelligence and other data, communications, and technical (specialized) services (forensic, identification ...)

This “network” must work in an integrated fashion in order to ensure seamless service providing all Albertans a safe and secure environment. Several disciplines (the police, crime prevention, mental health agencies, education and social services) need to clearly define their roles and work together in developing a framework to address such issues as mental health, protection of persons at risk, and dealing with conditions causing crime.

This theme will require extensive Provincial Leadership. Various government agencies must be brought together to develop common goals and methods. The province needs to provide the superstructure of legislation and standards to allow the various public safety and enforcement agencies to work together. Common goals and processes will need to be developed, along with a clear definition of the varying roles of the different agencies. The Province will also need to play a major role in the organization and delivery of integrated operations, both tactically and strategically.

5) An Attitude of Flexibility and Innovation

The participants of the 2007 Roundtable clearly identified the need for the various enforcement, policing, and security agencies to embrace a corporate culture of flexibility and innovation. Not only is crime changing, but so are society’s expectations of the criminal justice system. Equally important is the need for our public safety agencies to explore and adopt internal change, in terms of both function and ideology. This applies not only to the organizations themselves, but also to the individual police officer, security guard, or peace officer. Leadership in this theme needs to come as much from the grassroots as from the official leaders.

6) Strategic Planning and Research

There was general agreement on the importance of research and the need for internal strategic planning, as well as longer term strategic research and evaluation done externally. Many felt that existing research needs to be used more effectively and discussed the possibility of partnering with educational institutions for research.

Strategic planning, especially when it comes to informing those who oversee and fund public service agencies, must be based on methodologically sound research. Methodologically sound research should also be applied to operational and tactical planning.

While the Province should undertake long range strategic research and planning in the general context of policing and public safety and its applicability to the province as a whole, individual agencies and municipalities must also make a commitment to planning and research at their level. This planning and research needs to be conducted

wherever possible in a coordinated and integrated fashion allowing agencies to work together to deal with challenges they have in common.

7) Professionalism of Policing and Related Agents and Agencies.

This theme arose largely in the context of discussions about recruitment but was found flow through many other topics including public confidence in policing, strategic planning, adapting to changing needs and expectations, and developing community relationships. Participants were clear that police and related agencies must work towards enhancing the professionalism of the law enforcement and public safety field. Professionalism must be promoted in the context of the organization, of individuals, and in the image held by the public.

Future development of this theme will involve fundamental changes in organizational structures, recruitment and training, as well as the self-image held by many currently working in this field. It will require a refocus on the value of the “beat officer” – those working the front line in the community.

8) Sustainability

Sustainability was another theme that was found running through a variety of discussions and topics. This theme arose in the context of human resources as well as being expressed in terms of sustaining new policies/practices/initiatives and in terms of sustaining new ideologies or paradigms. This is not simply an issue of funding but involves such challenges as succession planning, recruitment strategies, adopting and fully testing new ideas and models. This theme can be viewed as one that must be incorporated into the other themes flowing from this Roundtable.

Other Issues / Challenges

The Roundtable also identified a number of issues, approaches, and challenges facing public and private security agencies. While these are not “themes” *per se*, they are major issues that policing, enforcement and public safety must face over the next decade.

- 1) Recruitment and retention of personnel
 - Marketing/recruiting strategies
 - Mobility (including pension portability)
 - Value of the “beat officer”
 - Personal development (mentors)
- 2) Image management and enhancing public confidence and support and to enhance recruitment.
- 3) Role of the local community in determining priorities and approaches
- 4) Potential “mandate creep” in integration and networks
- 5) Allocation of funding and the increasing cost of providing services.

- 6) Dealing with complex requirements of the Criminal Justice System that place extreme demands on police and enforcement officials.

Next Steps

The primary purpose of this roundtable was to develop a set of themes and principles that would guide the future directions and activities of the Department of the Solicitor General and Public Security, and particularly of the Public Security Division. A secondary purpose was to provide a forum for stakeholders to examine their own directions and activities.

Because of the wide range of stakeholders in the fields of policing, law enforcement, and public safety and security, it was impossible for everyone to attend the 2007 Roundtable. This paper provides a basis for those unable to attend to provide their input, comments and suggestions on the future direction of the whole field of public safety and law enforcement. The Department is interested in hearing all feedback or comments on the Future of Policing in Alberta.

Once we have reviewed submissions based on this paper, the Department will redevelop the themes and principles which will then be incorporated into future goal setting and planning.

Contact

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