



# SASKATOON POLICE SERVICE

**TO:** Jo Custead, Chairperson  
Board of Police Commissioners

**FROM:** Troy Cooper  
Office of the Chief

**DATE:** 2023 November 01

**SUBJECT:** Provincial Investment for Alternative Response Officer Expansion

**FILE NO.:** 2,020

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## **ISSUE:**

The Provincial Government has made funding available to the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) to facilitate the hiring of five additional Alternative Response Officers (AROs). This funding is contingent on the City of Saskatoon matching the Provincial Government's (the Government) investment. The revenue and expenditure associated with this initiative has not been included in the 2024 and 2025 budget that was discussed at the October 19<sup>th</sup> Board of Police Commissioners (the Board) meeting.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Board approve the following:

- Increasing the authorized strength of SPS by 5 FTE's for the additional AROs.
- Increasing the SPS operating budget by \$200,000 to match the Provincial funding of \$200,000 for the program.

Revised 2024 and 2025 Operating Budget Summaries have been included in Appendix A reflecting the impact of these recommendations on SPS's budget and FTE's.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

Participation by the SPS in this Government co-investment opportunity meets three of the five themes in the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan: Crime & Safety, Partnerships, and Innovation.

## Crime & Safety

Since inception, the AROs continue to address community concerns affecting public safety by playing an effective role in the prevention and intervention arenas, particularly in their relationships with complex needs individuals.<sup>1</sup>

## Partnerships

The Government has already recognized the value-added benefit AROs bring to the public safety ecosystem by previous one-time financial co-investment in their expansion through another grant earlier in 2023. Community stakeholders have similarly appreciated the benefits of the AROs through continued relational investment.<sup>2</sup>

## Innovation

As documented, the deployment of an ARO is a cost-effective means of addressing a host of low threat/low intensity events that challenge Patrol availability and work effectively with those possessing complex needs.<sup>3</sup>

## **BACKGROUND:**

Public safety concerns expressed by community members following the movement of an emergency shelter from downtown to a residential neighbourhood, and recent presentations by members of a different community group to the Board during the October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, clearly illustrate that ongoing involvement by the SPS in these spaces is required. Over time, police resources focused on community safety challenges have not only increased in variety but have matured in their relationships across sectoral lines as well.

The advent of the AROs has been one such growth component. The AROs were developed, in part, to be an agile and responsive police resource that could address the growing rate of social disorder reported in the Downtown and Riversdale Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). They have increased both the breadth and depth of SPS service delivery and partner collaboration.<sup>4</sup> Their deployment area was expanded, and reinforced, by similar increases in neighbourhoods such as Fairhaven. Within the continuum of community safety concerns, AROs have become a key component in a rightsized response, well-documented by local media. Their presence on streets and in neighbourhoods has contributed to positively engendering a greater feeling of safety by those citizens who are both mainstream and marginalized.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Saskatoon Police Service offers Alternative Response”, *Leader Post*, March 13, 2023, last accessed: <https://leaderpost.com/sponsored/top-employers-rlp/saskatoon-police-service-offers-alternative-response>

<sup>2</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, “Government Funding Saskatoon Alternative Response Officers”, March 21, 2023, last accessed Oct 24, 2023: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2023/march/21/government-funding-saskatoon-alternative-response-officers>

<sup>3</sup> Tarah Hodgkinson and Darren Pringle, “Alternative response officers: investing in policing alternatives and community safety in Saskatoon, Canada”, *Policing* Vol. 17 (2023): 1-17, last accessed October 24, 2023: <https://academic.oup.com/policing/article-abstract/doi/10.1093/police/paac109/7192934?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

<sup>4</sup> Brody Ratcliffe, “SPS alternative response officers focusing on community engagement”, *Global News*, Sep 29, 2023, last accessed October 24, 2023: <https://globalnews.ca/news/9986032/sps-alternative-response-officers-community-engagement/>

<sup>5</sup> Isobel M. Findlay et al. “Toward a Community of Safety and Care: Exploring Public Safety in Downtown Saskatoon”, *University of Saskatchewan, Community-University Institute for Social Research* (2023).

## **DISCUSSION:**

With the announcement of further Government assistance coming for complex needs individuals in Saskatoon, there is anticipation that other neighbourhoods will be impacted by an increase in social disorder calls and related events. As continues to be done city-wide, the appropriateness of ARO intervention in a given area will be evaluated as engagement with communities occurs. In support of this evaluative and responsive process to community concerns that the AROs can best address, the Government has made available monies for the City of Saskatoon, enabling growth of the complement of AROs from the current number of ten to fifteen. The money is being offered in a common form of intergovernmental grant: *matched funding*. The grant is deemed to be “matched” due to the requirement by the Government that any expenditures under this grant are matched by the local government, in this case the City of Saskatoon. Matched grants effectively lower the relative cost of the initiative for the grant recipient.<sup>6</sup>

While common to matched funding are *conditions* requiring the dispersed funds to be expressly spent on pre-specified local public sector activities, this current Government offer is not of the sort. The Government instead will rely on the SPS to ensure through constant operational evaluation that the infusion of ARO money will place those new members in areas facing the highest level of need and that they are able to address. This co-investment by Government will support buffering neighbourhoods from associated degradation and low-level property crime. While additional professional police presence will continue to be necessary, AROs can offer a significant portion of the public safety response. Partnering with the Government for these resources is a way in which the complement can expand to meet the anticipated demand, at a lower cost to the city.

While the new AROs will be involved in a number of administrative activities inherent in the categories of Investigative Support and Enforcement Support, freeing up Regular police members to attend to incidences of serious crime and violence, they will also be heavily engaged in completing job tasks pertaining to the Direct Service Delivery category focused on prevention, intervention, and deterrence-related activities. Walking the Beat, transporting arrests, intervening in on-view low threat/low intensity disturbances when tactically sound to do so, facilitating outreach and referral for vulnerable persons, and engaging merchants and citizens in conversation are but a small number of the critical tasks that will be performed in locations of need.

## **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:**

In its initial days, the Alternative Response Unit was consistently staffed by six full time equivalent (FTE) AROs focused on job tasks drawn from all three deployment categories: Direct Service Delivery, Investigative Support, and Enforcement Support. With the advent of a wellness centre in a residential neighbourhood in 2022, and resultant co-investment by the Government at the beginning of 2023, four more ARO FTEs were added to the SPS complement. The matched funding offered by the Government for 2023 and 2024 will see five more new hires, to bring the total complement of SPS AROs to fifteen FTEs.

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<sup>6</sup> Tracy Snodden and Jean Francois Wen, “A Primer on Intergovernmental Grants”, *Wilfrid Laurier University*, Department of Economics, Working Paper Series 99-03 (September 1998): 1.

A portion of the cost for the new AROs will be absorbed by the SPS with the budget that is already approved, to reduce the impact on the 2024/2025 budget. The requirement of the Government, however, is that the municipality match the \$200k grant in 2024 and beyond. The Service will be able to provide equipment and vehicles required for this additional staff from existing funds.

|             | <u>Total Annual Cost</u> | <u>Provincial Government Funding</u> | <u>Absorbed in SPS Existing Budget</u> | <u>Municipal Funding Required</u> |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>2023</b> | \$84,100                 | \$42,100                             | \$42,000                               | <b>\$0</b>                        |
| <b>2024</b> | \$517,800                | \$200,000                            | \$117,800                              | <b>\$200,000</b>                  |
| <b>2025</b> | \$544,000                | \$200,000                            | \$144,000                              | <b>\$200,000</b>                  |

*Note: The \$42,000 of revenue in 2023 reflects the provincial government grant attributable to 2023 for the 2023/2024 \$100,000 provincial grant funding.*

**CONCLUSION:**

The AROs have continued to deliver lower cost public safety response, service to vulnerable populations, interruption of street-based anti-social behaviour, provision of public reassurance, and community responsiveness in tandem with their armed police officer peers and colleagues from other human service agencies. Prior co-investment by the Government has signaled an understanding of the value of this service delivery method. As stewards of the public purse, it makes financial sense for the City of Saskatoon, through the SPS, to continue to welcome co-investment in ARO growth and deployment by the Government.

**Written by:** Darren Pringle Superintendent, Patrol  
**Approved by:** Cameron McBride Deputy Chief, Operations  
**Submitted by:** Troy Cooper, Chief of Police

## Appendix A Saskatoon Police Service 2024 and 2025 Operating Budget Summaries

| SASKATOON POLICE SERVICE<br>2024 OPERATING BUDGET SUMMARY |                       |                       |                     | BOARD APPROVED<br>Added AROs |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
|   | 2024 Budget           | 2023 Budget           | Variance            | %Variance                    |
| <b>Revenues</b>   |                       |                       |                     |                              |
| General Revenue   | 2,612,600             | 2,798,700             | (186,100)           | -6.65%                       |
| Prov. of Sask. Revenue                                    | 10,098,500            | 9,622,100             | 476,400             | 4.95%                        |
| Gov't of Canada Revenue                                   | 151,300               | 258,800               | (107,500)           | -41.54%                      |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                     | <b>12,862,400</b>     | <b>12,679,600</b>     | <b>182,800</b>      | <b>1.44%</b>                 |
| <b>Expenditures</b>                                       |                       |                       |                     |                              |
| Staff Compensation  | 105,163,700           | 99,089,500            | 6,074,200           | 6.13%                        |
| Operating Costs   | 25,948,300            | 23,886,000            | 2,062,300           | 8.63%                        |
| Cost Recovery   | (170,700)             | (176,200)             | 5,500               | -3.12%                       |
| Transfer to Reserves                                      | 3,514,400             | 3,604,400             | (90,000)            | -2.50%                       |
| <b>Total Expenditures</b>                                 | <b>134,455,700</b>    | <b>126,403,700</b>    | <b>8,052,000</b>    | <b>6.37%</b>                 |
| <b>Total Net Budget</b>                                   | <b>\$ 121,593,300</b> | <b>\$ 113,724,100</b> | <b>\$ 7,869,200</b> | <b>6.92%</b>                 |

|   |        |        |       |       |
|---|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Total Staff - Full Time Equivalents (FTE) | 739.33 | 725.33 | 14.00 | 1.93% |
|---|--------|--------|-------|-------|

| SASKATOON POLICE SERVICE<br>2025 OPERATING BUDGET SUMMARY |                       |                       |                     | BOARD APPROVED<br>Added AROs |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
|   | 2025 Budget           | 2024 Budget           | Variance            | %Variance                    |
| <b>Revenues</b>   |                       |                       |                     |                              |
| General Revenue   | 2,746,500             | 2,612,600             | 133,900             | 5.13%                        |
| Prov. of Sask. Revenue                                    | 10,098,500            | 10,098,500            | -                   | 0.00%                        |
| Gov't of Canada Revenue                                   | 151,300               | 151,300               | -                   | 0.00%                        |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                     | <b>12,996,300</b>     | <b>12,862,400</b>     | <b>133,900</b>      | <b>1.04%</b>                 |
| <b>Expenditures</b>                                       |                       |                       |                     |                              |
| Staff Compensation  | 111,167,900           | 105,163,700           | 6,004,200           | 5.71%                        |
| Operating Costs   | 26,926,800            | 25,948,300            | 978,500             | 3.77%                        |
| Cost Recovery   | (170,700)             | (170,700)             | -                   | 0.00%                        |
| Transfer to Reserves                                      | 3,514,400             | 3,514,400             | -                   | 0.00%                        |
| <b>Total Expenditures</b>                                 | <b>141,438,400</b>    | <b>134,455,700</b>    | <b>6,982,700</b>    | <b>5.19%</b>                 |
| <b>Total Net Budget</b>                                   | <b>\$ 128,442,100</b> | <b>\$ 121,593,300</b> | <b>\$ 6,848,800</b> | <b>5.63%</b>                 |

|   |        |        |       |       |
|---|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Total Staff - Full Time Equivalents (FTE) | 749.33 | 739.33 | 10.00 | 1.35% |
|---|--------|--------|-------|-------|