

Putting a price

on policing

RCMP explains costs as province reviews police contracts

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THE TELEGRAM

The province's two largest police forces — the RCMP and the RNC — often co-operate to fight crime, but they are currently in competition as the province renegotiates its lucrative policing contracts.

At stake is a 20-year contract valued at \$50 million a year beginning in 2012.

Currently, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary polices the urban areas of the Northeast Avalon, as well as Corner Brook and Labrador West. The RCMP police the other, mostly rural, areas of the province.

Police and politicians on all sides say both forces likely will have a role under a new deal, but the Department of Justice isn't ruling out major changes — and all sides are being careful not to offend.

The RNC has ambitions to grow, telling new police recruits on its website they "may be assigned ... to any other location that in the future, may be within the jurisdiction of the RNC."

The RNC would not comment on the police contract negotiations, referring questions to the Justice Department.

Justice Minister Tom Marshall told The Telegram recently that he wants to keep both forces in the province, but is open to RNC growth into traditional RCMP territory.

A key element of the policing contract is cost per officer, which includes salary and administrative costs. The Department of Justice would not release the per-officer cost for an RNC officer.

However, the RCMP did. It costs \$177,000 per year for every RCMP officer on the job. The cost is split 70-30 between the province (\$124,000) and the federal government (\$53,000). The province pays 100 per cent of RNC costs.

The RCMP said it's discussing contract details in order to refute recent criticism by the author of a new book on the RCMP, and not to publicly argue its case.

"As far as (RNC) costs are concerned, this has nothing to do with them," said RCMP Assistant Commissioner Gerry Lynch, who is the commanding officer in Newfoundland. "The author was pointing out RCMP costs, so that's all I'm talking about here. I have no idea about anybody else."

Lynch is referring to Paul Palango, the author of "Dispersing the Fog: Inside the Secret World of Ottawa and the RCMP."

Palango contends the RCMP no longer has the best-trained officers, or offers the best value for taxpayers. Palango told The Telegram most municipal police and provincial forces — like the RNC — are now as well trained as the Mounties.

He said the RCMP is having trouble attracting qualified people because of its practice of moving people around the country into small communities.

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