Summary of the Evaluation of the RCMP's Police Dog Service

Context

In 1935, the RCMP purchased its first puppy, marking the beginning of the RCMP's Police Dog Service (PDS). Since then, PDS has grown to over 150 teams across the country. In 1937, a canine training school was established; the Police Dog Service Training Centre (PDSTC) is now responsible for providing the requisite training and quality control for all RCMP PDS teams, as well as offering training and validations to other public safety agencies on a cost-recovery basis. PDSTC is also the location of the RCMP's breeding and imprinting programs, as well as the policy centre for PDS.

The objective of the evaluation conducted by RCMP National Program Evaluation Services was to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of PDS in accordance with the Treasury Board Policy on Results. This evaluation was national in scope and focused on the governance and delivery of PDS between 2018-19 and 2023-24. RCMP divisions and the PDSTC were engaged through interviews and a survey.

The evaluation focused on three questions:
1. Is the current PDS governance structure effective and efficient?
2. Is PDS delivered in a manner that supports modern (high quality and effective) policing?
3. Does PDS operate in a manner that maximizes resources and is consistent with identified best practices in other organizations?

Methodology

Interviews
42 interviews with RCMP and external stakeholders

Document Review
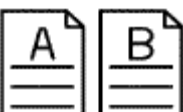Policies, annual reports, strategic plans, vision documents, reviews, assessments and business cases

Internal Survey
Survey with a response from 57 PDS clients

Performance Data
Financial data; data related to breeding, imprinting, training and field operations

Site Visits
Three site visits: PDSTC (Innisfail, AB); Red Deer RCMP Detachment; Calgary RCMP Detachment

External PDS Review
Review of four other organizations with dog programs: Ontario Provincial Police; Calgary Police Service; Correctional Service Canada, Canada Border Services Agency

What we found

1. From a governance perspective, the positioning of PDS under Depot Division poses a challenge to the effectiveness of the program. PDS operations are not well supported and some of the roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined or understood.

2. There are challenges within imprinting and pre-training, which have led to inefficiencies in the program.

3. PDSTC provides training that generally meets the needs of PDS. However, the PDSTC is not meeting the demand for training in terms of frequency and types of courses offered.

4. There are several deterrents for RCMP members joining PDS, which may be amplified for women.

5. The current operating environment, infrastructure, and delivery of the PDS program pose risks to the physical and mental health and well-being of PDS employees and dogs.

6. There are insufficient human resources within the PDSTC to support the efficient and effective delivery of PDS. Without adequate personnel, the program will fall further behind in providing services for front-line members.

7. Although PDS collects performance data in a variety of areas, data related to PDS field operations is not collected consistently.

Recommendations

1. Review the current reporting structure of PDS with a view to better align PDSTC with the RCMP's in-service training mandate and supporting operations in the field.

2. Update PDS policy with a view to better reflecting the operational reality of handlers in the field (including kit and procedures), and enhancing officer and animal safety.

3. Ensure sustainability of the PDSTC by determining and addressing resource gaps based on the demand for dog teams across the country. In particular, ensure PDSTC has sufficient positions within breeding, imprinting, pre-training and training to fulfill its mandate.

4. Review and modernize training offered at the PDSTC to reflect the needs of handlers in the field and recognized best practices.

5. Address the health and safety concerns of PDS employees and dogs at the PDSTC (e.g., infrastructure, workplace morale) and in the field.

6. Enhance the approach to performance measurement through the consistent collection and reporting of PDS data. EDI considerations should be included in performance measurement activities to inform future programming decisions.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Gendarmerie royale du Canada