

The 2024 Surrey Police Service Community Consultation: *Executive Summary*

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Background

Surrey Police Service (SPS) initially conducted a community consultation as part of the transition from the RCMP to an independent police service in 2021. In preparation for becoming the Police of Jurisdiction (POJ) in November 2024, SPS conducted a second community consultation. Both consultations involved an online survey of Surrey residents, and interviews and focus groups with a broad range of community stakeholders. The second consultation was conducted between July and September 2024 with the objective of gathering information from a broad range of stakeholders and community residents to understand lived experiences of different groups and record their views on important issues, including challenges facing Surrey and how the police can address community needs and increase the safety and security of the community.

This report presents the findings from the community consultation that was conducted in 2024 and, as well, key findings from the initial consultation completed in 2021. The findings from the two consultations provide important insights into the perspectives of community residents and other stakeholders. This report contains the results of 60 interviews and focus groups that were conducted with a broad range of community stakeholders (Parts I and II, prepared by Curt T. Griffiths, Ph.D. and Stephanie Dawson, Ph.D.) and the findings from a survey of 808 community residents (Part III, prepared by Eli L. Sopow, Ph.D.).

Key Themes From The Community Consultation

There were several key themes that emerged during the consultations with community stakeholders. The results were broken down into three parts: Part I details the most common themes that represent interviewee and focus group participants' perceptions of the main issues facing Surrey and the key elements they would like to see from the police to increase perceptions and safety and police legitimacy. Part II contains the themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups relating to stakeholders' perceptions of a community policing approach. Part III outlines the findings from the community survey.

Part I

Positive Visibility

Community stakeholders believe that increasing the police presence will contribute to increased feelings of safety, building trust and confidence in the police, and increased quality of life in Surrey. Community stakeholders want SPS to be proactively and positively visible in the community.

Community Engagement

In addition to a strong police presence, community stakeholders want SPS to be connected to the community, actively engaged with community members, involved in regularly educating the community about what is happening and what the police are doing, and following through with promised actions.

Challenges and Potential Solutions

Violent crime and organized gangs are among the top concerns that community stakeholders would like to see SPS address. As such, community stakeholders continued to view gang-specific programs as valuable. However, community stakeholders were also concerned with a rise in social issues, including homelessness, mental health issues, and drug use. Noting rapid changes in infrastructure, population and demographics, community stakeholders suggested that SPS will need to be innovative in addressing dynamic community issues.

Addressing Perceptions of Safety

Perceptions of fear of crime and safety appear to differ based on geographic location and who the individual is. Most community stakeholders noted that Surrey is generally a safe city, but many still believe that certain types of crimes and social disorder are prevalent in Surrey. In order to increase feelings of safety, community stakeholders suggested that SPS work with the media to promote more positive happenings in the community.

The Importance of Early Intervention

Community stakeholders want to see SPS focus on targeting at-risk youth and vulnerable community members through prevention and early intervention programs. There was strong support for properly implemented school-based programming. However, it will be important for SPS to develop evidence-based programs that will meet the needs of the community.

Competent and Consistent Level of Service

Community stakeholders reported having high expectations in terms of the level of service they want to receive from *all* SPS employees. Ensuring that sworn and civilian employees of the service have the requisite training, skills and competencies to engage with the community and to successfully prevent and respond to crime and disorder within a problem-solving framework will help to ensure SPS can meet the community's service expectations.

Part II

The desire of stakeholders is that SPS take a professional, human approach to service delivery that involves having the capacity to respond to the needs of youth, vulnerable and at-risk persons, and to have positive interactions with residents. There were several key elements that community stakeholders would like to see SPS implement as part of their community policing approach:

1. Ensuring community members are given a voice, so they feel seen, heard and respected.
2. Building sustainable partnerships through a commitment to ongoing dialogue and two-way communication, engagement, collaboration, building a positive SPS brand, taking a human approach to policing, and giving back to the community.
3. Ensuring there are proper accountability mechanisms in place, including a well-received police board and body-worn cameras.
4. Ensuring a wrap-around approach to addressing community issues that leverages expertise and resources from different sectors and agencies.
5. Addressing diversity by seeking regular input from diverse communities
6. Localizing the delivery of police services through the development of mini community police offices in each policing district and deploying officers within specific neighbourhoods to ensure community needs are addressed and police are able to develop relationships in each community.
7. Dedicating resources to ensure SPS can provide a timely response to calls for service.

Part III

Public Predictions for the Priority of Police Services

Public opinion and related expectations can have a significant impact on the future level of service, organization, and operations of SPS, which, as of November 29, 2024, becomes responsible for policing and law enforcement in Surrey rather than the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

A 2024 survey of Surrey residents shows the public offering a far more pessimistic outlook in June 2024 than in June 2021 about the impact of key areas impacting crime and police services in the next 12 months. For example:

- **Organized crime gangs** is the top concern (66 percent) for the next 12 months for Surrey residents, as it was in 2021 (67 percent). This shows that over three years, the Surrey public feels no safer from organized crime.

- A “**growing population**” is an equally top future impact (66 percent) on policing services, a significant jump from the 50 percent recorded in 2021.
- Economic growth in Surrey is identified as having a high/very high impact on police services (35 percent in 2024 compared to 27 percent in 2021).
- Both the future impacts of **homelessness (57 percent) and mental health calls (56 percent)** are predicted to be greater on police services than in 2021.

The Surrey Public’s Priority Today for Police Services

The data show overall similarities and significant differences between Surrey’s six communities and five embedded police districts. This *perception* of policing priorities is compared to *statistical crime and occurrence data* provided by the *B.C. Police Records Information Management System (PRIME)* and Statistics Canada.

- The highest public priority overall for policing in Surrey is **violent crimes** (81 percent) which ranges from a high of 82 percent in Cloverdale / Port Kells (District 4) to a low of 77 percent in Fleetwood (part of District 2 along with Guildford, where 79 percent rate violent crimes as the highest priority).
- By contrast, PRIME crime data shows that in the first half of 2024, **violent crimes accounted for 20 percent of all occurrences in Cloverdale / Port Kells while property crime accounted for 60 percent.**
- South Surrey (District 5) rated more police services as **above-average priority** amongst all.
- The **category of policing rated most frequently by all communities** is *non-violent property crime and police involvement in youth and school programs*, both achieving above-overall ratings in three communities, Newton (District 3), Cloverdale / Port Kells (District 4), and South Surrey (District 5).

Fear of Victimization

Fear of walking alone at night in your neighborhood is an excellent measure of public safety and confidence in policing and the criminal justice system. The overall rating by Surrey residents differed by community and police district in 2021 and 2024.

- The person most afraid of walking alone at night in Surrey is a **woman between the ages of 18 and 24**, likely living in **Guildford** (District 2).
- All age groups feel about as safe walking alone at night in 2024 as they did in 2021 (less than half and over two-thirds of certain age groups do not feel safe).
- Residents between the age of 18-28 feel the most *unsafe* walking alone at night (48 percent), *a 19-percentage point decrease* over 2021 survey results.

Choice of Having Service Contact / Visibility with Police

Residents were offered three choices of what approach or combination of approaches SPS could offer in service delivery: police patrols mostly on foot, police patrols mostly in vehicles, or police patrols on foot and in cars. The majority prefer a combination of foot and vehicle patrols (66 percent); however, some areas had a stronger preference for different policing styles. For example, many South Surrey residents prefer police patrolling in vehicles (30 percent):

- The rationale for the answers can be mixed, including crime rates, perceptions of crime, the presence of commercial outlets and population density within communities, as well as shopping and workplace locations for Surrey residents.
- For example, Fleetwood residents with the highest preference for a mixed model of police presence also reported the highest overall percentage of crime victimization (28 percent), the highest percentage of “financial scams” (7.8 percent), and a slightly higher than average priority rating (66 percent) for having a “frequent, visible presence of police.”

Other Observations

- Based on a list of common crime incidents, 17 percent of Surrey residents reported being an overall victim of crime with the highest being “theft from auto” reported in Whalley / City Center (District 1) (27 percent) and Fleetwood (District 2)(21 percent.)
- Sixty-one percent reported their crime occurrence to police, and 39 percent did not, which indicates a significant level of “shadow” or unreported crime.
- The Surrey public continues to have strong support (84 percent) for SPS officers wearing body cameras.
- While almost half of survey respondent (42 percent) agree that SPS should have an equal number of male and female police officers, more people (60 percent) agree that SPS police officers should be fluent in more languages than English.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: In order to build a successful policing organization that is reflective of the community being served, it is recommended that SPS develop a community policing model that includes the following pillars:

- A. Community-focused policing as the foundation;
- B. Localized policing;
- C. Innovative, evidence-based, targeted programs;
- D. Authenticity;

- E. Engagement and communication;
- F. Building a positive police culture, which involves hiring the right officers, placing priority on evidence-based recruit and in-service training to meet the needs/demands of the community, and ensuring there is strong, quality leadership;
- G. Transparency and accountability;
- H. Multi-sector partnerships; and
- I. Prioritizing the health and well-being of sworn and civilian employees and ensuring a positive workplace culture.

Recommendation #2: The findings from the 2024 community consultation can be used to inform SPS policies and decision-making going forward.

Recommendation #3: Although a centrally coordinated organizational perspective is important, SPS needs to recognize the unique needs of each community and create a customized, collaborative community policing approach in each district.

Recommendation #4: SPS should undertake a comprehensive organizational review to ensure external environmental needs are aligned with internal organizational culture, structures and climate.

Recommendation #5: Ensure ongoing comprehensive external environmental scans and impact analyses are completed to assess for risk-impacts and community policing opportunities.