



Report to Council

Department: Office of the CAO
Division: Communications
Date: July 6, 2020
Prepared by: Alex Denonville, Manager, Strategic Communications
Report Number: Communications 2020-03
Subject: Community Policing Survey Results
Number of Pages: 15

Recommendation(s)

That Communications Report 2020-03 entitled Community Policing Survey Results prepared by Alex Denonville, Manager, Strategic Communications, dated July 6, 2020 be received as information.

Purpose

To provide Council a summary of the results of the online Community Policing Survey conducted in May of this year.

Background and Discussion

Summary of Survey

In January of this year, Council directed administration to conduct an online survey to gauge citizens' perceptions of the quality of policing provided by Town's contracted policing service, the Ontario Provincial Police.

The survey, launched in May, provided citizens the opportunity to give their feedback on three categories related to their perceptions of local policing: general satisfaction, interactions with police, and community safety. The survey was advertised on the Town's website, via social media, as well as in the monthly half-page newspaper ad in both the Essex Free Press and Harrow News.

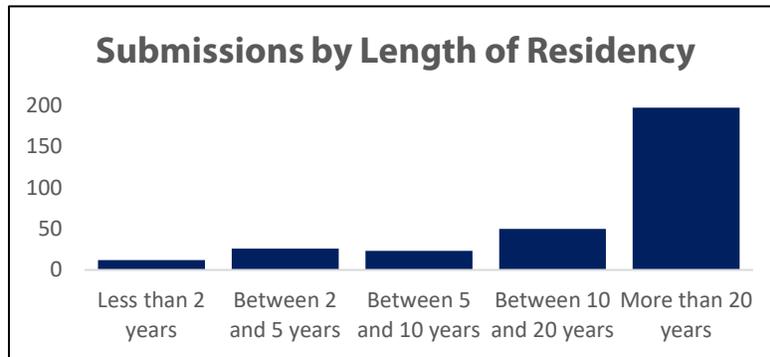
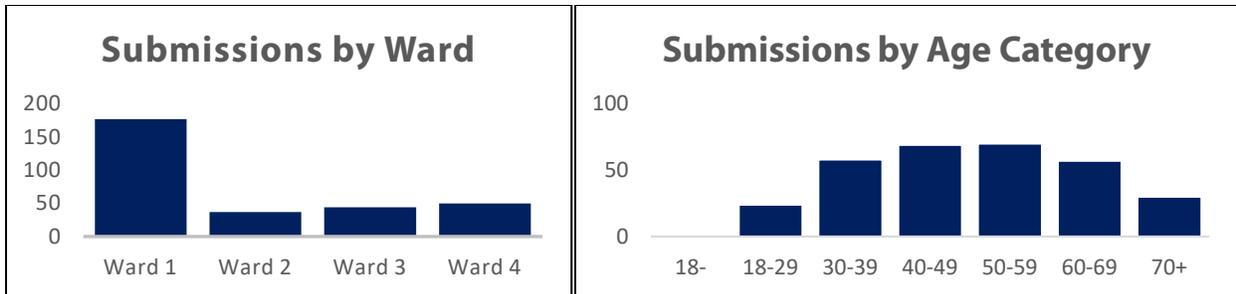
Methodology

The survey was designed to provide both quantitative and qualitative data from survey respondents. Quantitative questions asked respondents to rate their opinion on 5-point Likert scales. The points on the scales were then converted to numerical values for the analysis of results. Qualitative questions provided respondents an opportunity to give general feedback and other comments not captured by the quantitative questions. These comments were reviewed by administration for categorization and identification of overarching themes. Some comments were categorized into more than one theme.

Of note, online surveys are generally not considered to provide a representative sample of a community. Access to a computer or the Internet, for example, may limit access to the survey and skew results towards particular demographics. Typically, surveys conducted by the Town include paper copies which can be picked up or dropped off at local facilities. However, this was not possible because of the restrictions in place due to COVID-19. Even though the survey was only offered online, the number of respondents indicated significant interest from community members as compared to previous surveys conducted by the Town.

Summary of Results and Demographics

The survey garnered 308 submissions from citizens. Of the respondents, 177 were from Ward 1, 37 from Ward 2, 44 from Ward 3, and 50 from Ward 4. The sex of respondents was evenly split between male and female. Similarly, the age breakdown of respondents was well distributed. A large majority of respondents have live in the Town of Essex for more than 20 years. See below for graphs summarizing the demographics of survey respondents.

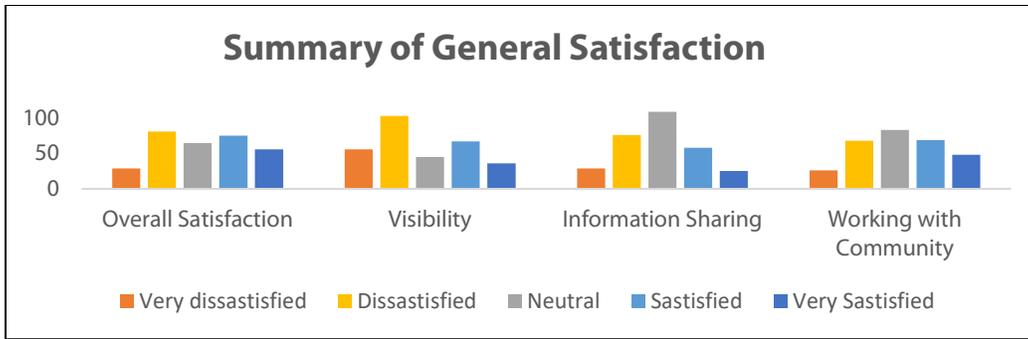


Analysis

General Satisfaction

The first category of questions focused on respondents' general satisfaction with local policing. It asked respondents to rate their satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale on the following metrics: overall satisfaction, visibility, information sharing, and working with the community. Each scale, from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied," was converted to a five point scale (1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied). The numerical scales were then analyzed to provide mean (the average score) and mode (the most common score).

For "overall satisfaction," the mean was 3.15 while the mode was 2. For "visibility," the average score was 2.75 while the mode was 2. For "information sharing," the mean was 2.91 while the mode was 3. For "working with the community," the mean was 3.15 and the mode was 3. The chart below provides a graphic representation of the responses from the general satisfaction section of the survey.



The general satisfaction portion of the survey also garnered the most comments compared to the other two. These comments were reviewed by administration to identify themes as well as to assess if the comment was positive, negative or neutral. Administration identified five themes from the 147 comments received in this section.

The theme of “visibility” was the most prominent and garnered 65 comments. These comments remarked generally on a lack of police presence within neighbourhoods or the community in general. Of those 65 comments, 58 were negative, three were neutral, and four were positive.

The second theme of “service quality” garnered 50 comments which focused on interactions with police officers, OPP administration or access to services. Of the 50 comments, 32 were negative, one was neutral, and 17 were positive.

The third theme of “comparison to municipal force” garnered 22 comments and related to how the OPP compare to the Town’s previous municipally-run police force. Of those comments, 18 were negative, one was neutral, and three were positive. Respondents who provided comments related to this theme generally preferred the services offered by a municipal police force.

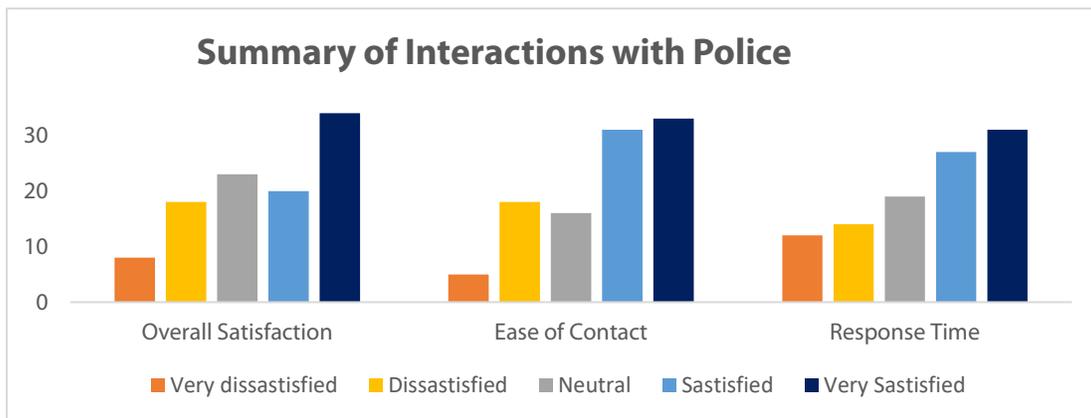
The fourth theme of “communications” garnered five negative responses and related to the OPP’s sharing of information with residents.

The eight “other” comments remarked more generally about local policing or were unrelated to the other themes. Five comments were negative and three neutral.

Police Interactions

The second category of questions focused only on respondents who have had contact with the OPP in the last year. Of the 308 total survey respondents, 104 indicated that they had contact with the OPP. This portion of the survey asked respondents to rate their interaction(s) on a 5-point Likert scale on the following metrics: overall satisfaction, ease of contact, and response time. Each scale, from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied,” was converted to a five point scale (1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied). The numerical scales were then analyzed to provide mean (the average score) and mode (the most common score).

For “overall satisfaction,” the mean was 3.52 while the mode was 5. For “ease of contact,” the average score was 3.67 while the mode was 5. For “response time,” the mean was 3.50 and the mode was 5. The chart below provides a graphic representation of the responses from the police interactions section of the survey.



The comment portion of the police interaction section of the survey garnered 46 comments. These comments were grouped into four themes.

The theme of “service quality” was the most prominent and garnered 33 comments. These comments generally remarked on the quality of the interaction the respondent had with police. Of those 33 comments, 19 were negative, one was neutral, and 13 were positive.

The second theme of “response time” garnered eight comments, five negative and three positive. These comments revolved around the timeliness of officers responding to calls or complaints.

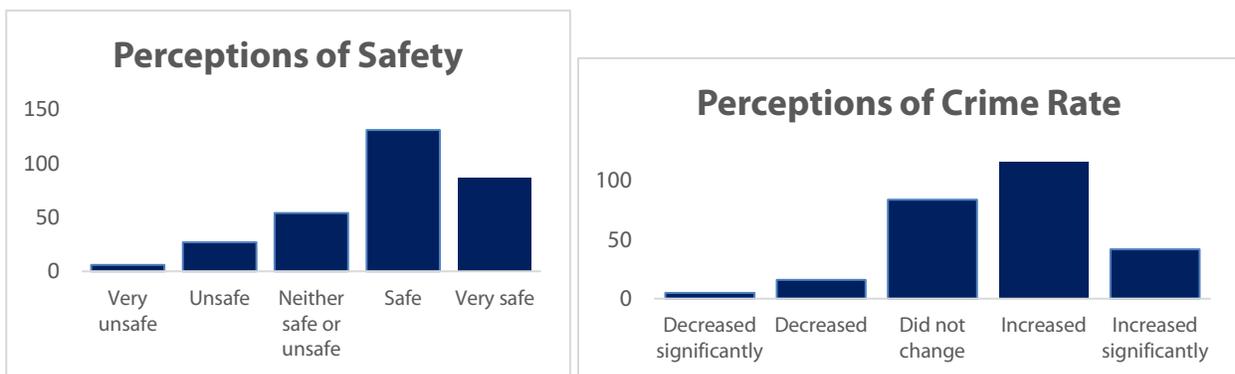
The third theme of “visibility” garnered three negative comments about the lack of visibility of officers within neighbourhoods or the community in general.

Three comments in the “other” theme were neutral and one negative.

Perceptions of Community Safety and Crime

The third category of questions asked respondents’ to rate their feelings of safety and perceptions of changes to local crime rates on 5-point Likert scales. Each scale was converted to a numerical point scale then analyzed to provide mean (the average score) and mode (the most common score).

A majority of respondents indicated they feel safe or very in the Town of Essex, with a mean score of 3.87 and a mode of 4. However, a majority of respondents indicated that they believe crime has either increased or increased significantly, which was reflected in the mean score of 3.66 and a mode of 4. The bar graphs below show the distribution of answers for questions related to perceptions of community safety and crime.



The comment section for the community safety and crime portion of the survey garnered 103 comments broken down into five themes.

The first and most common theme, “crime,” garnered 44 comments which focused generally on the local crime rate or individual instances of crime. Of these comments, 33 were negative, eight were neutral, and six were positive.

The theme of “visibility” was also common in this section, with comments revolving around how the visibility of officers may be affecting crime rates or particular instances of crime. All 29 of these comments were noted to be negative.

The third theme, “safety,” included comments related to respondents’ feelings of safety within the Town. Of the 23 comments in this theme, 14 were positive, six negative, and three neutral.

The “service” theme garnered 16 comments which focused on how local policing correlates to perceptions of safety, either positively or negatively. Of these comments, nine were negative and seven were positive.

The final theme, “other,” garnered ten comments which were generally unrelated to local policing or perceptions of community safety and crime.

Final comment section

The final comment section of the survey provided respondents the opportunity to add any additional comments which had not been covered by the previous questions. This section garnered 28 comments.

Of these comments, eight fell into the “service” theme, which noted general or specific instances of satisfaction with the current community policing model. Of these comments, four were negative, three positive, and one neutral.

Comparisons to the previous municipal police force represented an additional seven comments in this section. All of these comments were negative and conveyed respondents’ unhappiness with the switch to OPP-provided community policing. An additional three

neutral comments were related to the potential implementation or exploration of a regional policing model.

Finally, “visibility” arose again as a theme. This section garnered six negative and one neutral comment about the visibility of police within the community.

Summary of Results

The visibility of police officers was identified as particularly problematic for survey respondents. The visibility question on the survey garnered the most negative feedback of any of the questions, with a large majority of respondents indicating they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the visibility of police in the community. These findings were also reflected in the number of comments about visibility made in the optional comment sections.

Overall, most respondents indicated that they feel safe or very safe in the Town of Essex even though a majority believe that crime had increased or increased significantly.

For respondents who indicated they had recently interacted with police, a majority were either satisfied or very satisfied on all three metrics.

Financial Impact

N/A

Consultations

This survey was created in consultation with Members of Council and the Chief Administrative Officer.

Link to Strategic Priorities

- Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure which meets current and future needs of the municipality and its citizens.
- Create a safe, friendly and inclusive community which encourages healthy, active living for people of all ages and abilities.
- Provide a fiscal stewardship and value for tax dollars to ensure long-term financial health to the municipality.
- Manage responsible and viable growth while preserving and enhancing the unique rural and small town character of the community.
- Improve the experiences of individuals, as both citizens and customers, in their interactions with the Town of Essex.