



Item No. 10.4.1

Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality September 4, 2024

TO: Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

DATE: August 22, 2024

SUBJECT: **BoPC Community Survey on Policing**

ORIGIN

June 17, 2024 meeting of the Board of Police Commissioners, Item 10.2.2

MOVED by Commissioner Blackburn, seconded by Commissioner Smith

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality create an ad hoc Committee comprised of Commissioners Blackburn and O'Malley who will work with the Policing Policy Strategist to produce a proposal for a community survey of policing as requested by the Board in its 2021 motion and return to the Board.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality request Regional Council to allocate \$25,000 in the board's 2025-2026 budget for the purpose of conducting a monthly independent community survey on policing.

BACKGROUND

Until the survey was discontinued in 2012, HRP annually collected a small number of measures related to public satisfaction with the police by placing questions within a local omnibus survey (The Urban Report through Corporate Research Associates, now called Narrative Research). Alongside this survey, measures of public attitudes toward police and crime were also captured in the HRM Citizen (now Resident) Survey. The last three Citizen/Resident surveys took place in 2014, 2018 and 2021. The next Resident Survey is to take place in fall 2024.

In February 2017, HRP was directed by the Board to establish a quarterly policing survey. The first part of the work was engagement with national partners to develop standardized indicators for policing surveys. This work resulted in the report *Developing a Common Data Standard for Measuring Attitudes toward the Police in Canada*, which includes “Core Indicators”, some of which were incorporated in the 2018 and 2021 HRM Resident Surveys.

The data standard included in the report was endorsed by the CACP in 2018 and the main report on this common data standard was released publicly in 2019. In November 2019, CBC reported on the Core Indicators research project and referenced concerns, including a lack of community feedback in the development of the questions. HRP responded with a statement, which clarified that a community survey had not been finalized, and committed to taking community input into consideration before finalizing the topics and the questions.

In 2020, while still in the process of developing the proposal, it was learned that HRP’s standing offer with Narrative Research had expired, necessitating a new RFP process. In September 2020, the process concluded and MQO Research was selected for the standing offer to conduct policing surveys in HRM. That standing offer expired in September 2023 without the development of a community survey on policing.

DISCUSSION

While the HRM Resident Survey is a valuable mechanism for collecting some data on public attitudes toward policing, there remain compelling reasons for a stand-alone community survey on policing. This principle is reflected in the BoPC’s policy on Community Survey to Measure Trust, which states “Community members need to be consulted *annually* so the BOPC can gain a better understanding of what trust and confidence in police means to community members” (emphasis in original). The need to stay attuned to community needs and values on a regular basis is especially important today, given the rate at which the population of Halifax is growing, and its shifting demographic makeup.

Due to the municipality’s need to collect sufficient data relevant to all Business Units while also being mindful of respondent burden, the number of questions that can be asked in the HRM Resident Survey per business area is limited. A stand-alone survey would allow for a greater number of questions and the ability to explore areas of interest in depth.

The benefits of a stand-alone survey also include an increased survey frequency and reduced ‘cross-contamination’ effects. As the February 2017 report to the board outlines, the HRM Resident survey is conducted too infrequently to provide useful data on attitudes toward policing:

A satisfaction survey needs to be undertaken regularly to provide meaningful data, as a one-off survey does not contain adequate context. For example, a survey finding that x% of people expressed confidence in police tells us little about whether or not this is ‘good’ performance, unless we have a benchmark of previous performance. Such a figure is only meaningful in the context of whether it has increased or decreased from previous years, to understand whether, for example, police actions or engagement campaigns have had any impact (positively or negatively) on public attitudes over a period of time.

Subject to budget, quarterly surveys are also preferable over annual surveying (or surveying less regularly than annually, e.g. bi-annually). Annual surveys are more susceptible to recent events that can skew findings (such as negative or positive media reports) or seasonal fluctuations in attitudes toward policing (for example, police visibility will be higher in warmer months, and so perceptions of visibility will be lower in winter). A quarterly survey would overcome these potential impacts on results.

The report also points out that if even if the HRM Resident Survey frequency were increased, there would

be strong methodological reasons to keep a stand-alone police survey. For example, grouping municipal services together in a single survey could have crossover or contamination effects between indicators – satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the municipality in one area of service at a particular point in time could augment responses on another area of service.

Furthermore, while it is a positive development that the HRM Resident Survey does include some Core Indicators, the research report encourages those who use the Core Indicators to ask each question in both in a specific order and as the first five questions of any public attitude survey (following demographic screening questions) and that **“the core indicators should not be placed after other attitudinal measures”** (emphasis in original). Following this recommendation is not possible in the HRM Resident Survey, and therefore it should not be seen as a replacement of a stand-alone survey on policing.

Staff solicited a high level quote from a local research firm to determine the approximate cost to deliver a survey with 600 respondents annually (divided between HRP and RCMP regions of the municipality) with data collected on a monthly and quarterly basis. The survey would consist of up to 25 questions, which would allow for the 5 core indicators, 7 sub questions, along with demographic questions and some additional questions based on community feedback. It was determined that this work could be done in the range of \$17,000 to \$20,000, depending on the survey and reporting frequency.

Staff are therefore recommending that the board request Regional Council for up to \$25,000 in its 2025/2026 budget for the purpose of conducting a community survey. There are compelling reasons to begin surveying the public in the new fiscal year, rather than to launch a survey in the fall. These reasons include allowing time to onboard the new Chief of the HRP and new Commissioners, and avoiding potential confusion with the provincial survey on policing, which was launched in the summer and will hold engagement sessions throughout the fall.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications to this report. Any future financial implications arising from implementation of the recommendations will be addressed in staff reports and HRM departmental budgets as required.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Board of Police Commissioners is comprised of four citizen members and three Councillors. Meetings are live webcast on Halifax.ca. The agenda, reports, video, and minutes of the Board are posted on Halifax.ca.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Police Act, 2004, c. 55, section (3), states:

- (3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a board shall...
 - (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;
 - (d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
 - (e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers;

Section 8 (2) (h), (i), (j) and (k) of By-law P-100, which provides:

- 8 (2) The Board in accordance with the Police Act and HRM Bylaws may carry out any of the following roles and responsibilities: ...

- (h) carry out any studies or investigations respecting its civilian governance responsibilities;
- (i) monitor gender, ethnic and minority group issues and making recommendations concerning these matters to the Chief of Police;
- (j) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing goals and methods;
- (k) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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