

Cobourg Police Service
2022-2025 Strategic Plan Development
Community Survey and Focus Group
Summary of Key Findings





Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Community Consultations	1
Community Survey 2021	1
Methodology	1
Participation	2
Focus Groups.....	4
Methodology	4
Participants	4
Key Findings.....	5
Insights on Policing Priorities for the Next 3 Years	8

Community Consultations

The Cobourg Police Service Community Consultation 2021 is the third in a series of surveys conducted by the Cobourg Police Service (CPS) in partnership with its Board since 2014. For this edition of the consultation, an extensive online survey was followed up by a series of focus groups. Together, these data collection tools help satisfy the requirements of the stakeholder consultation component of the Cobourg Police Services Board obligations under the [*Police Services Act*](#) and the pending [*Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act \(2019, S.O. 2019, c.1-Bill 68, Section 39\(1\)\)*](#).

Both the community survey and the focus groups aimed at asking residents of the Town of Cobourg about their perceptions of crime, fear of crime, feelings of safety, policing priorities, police visibility, and police performance.

Community Survey 2021

Methodology

The survey instrument was based on the 2014 and 2017 surveys to ensure comparative data, with some additional



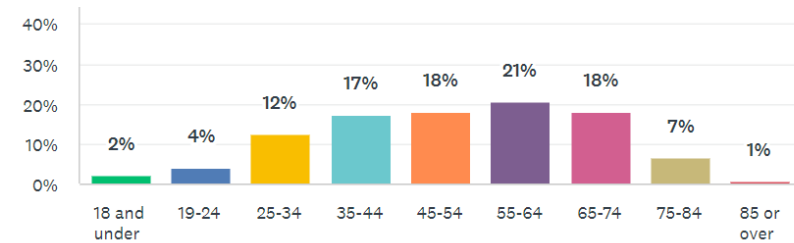
questions related to the pandemic, as well as some minor modifications based on lessons learned and to align with current nomenclature. The survey was live online for approximately one month starting on June 21st, 2021. It was hosted on the platform Survey Monkey under contract with the Lansdowne Consulting Group. The link was promoted through email using existing CPS community distribution lists, on CPS social media as well as through the focus group invitations. To reach less-connected populations and those not linked to CPS social media sites, police members visited various community gathering areas including the beach, downtown core, community centre, schools and seniors' residences with both paper copies and tablets inviting members of the public to participate.

Participation

The 2021 survey was completed by a validated 663 respondents, which is the highest response volume achieved to date. Sampling was not targeted to be proportional to the regional population, meaning that there were no quotas imposed by gender or age. Demographic information was collected on a voluntary basis against the following variables: gender, age, income, ethnicity. Postal code was included as a mandatory field to confirm that respondent lived within the geographical area surveyed. Only postal codes within the Town of Cobourg area were preserved as part of the survey sample.

The demographics that participants identified with are presented below. The highest represented group was from adults aged 55 to 64 (21%) with 74 percent of respondents aged 35 to 74.

Table 1: Age of Participants

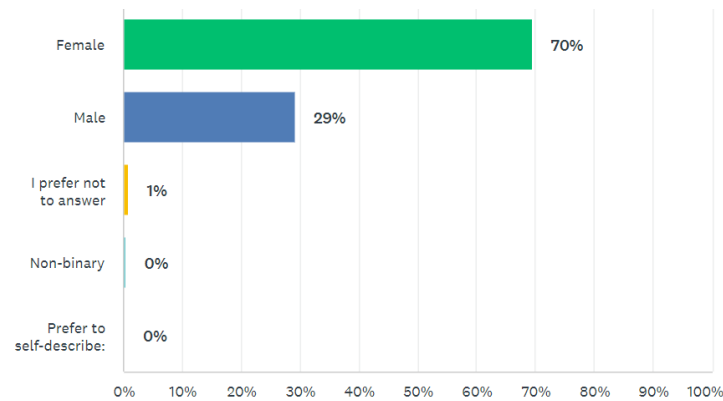


Age range	Percentage
18 and under	2%
19 to 24	4%
25 to 34	12%
35 to 44	17%
45 to 54	18%
55 to 64	21%
65 to 74	18%
75 to 84	7%
85 or over	1%



From a gender perspective, participants identified primarily as female (70%), male (29%), with 1% who preferred not to say.

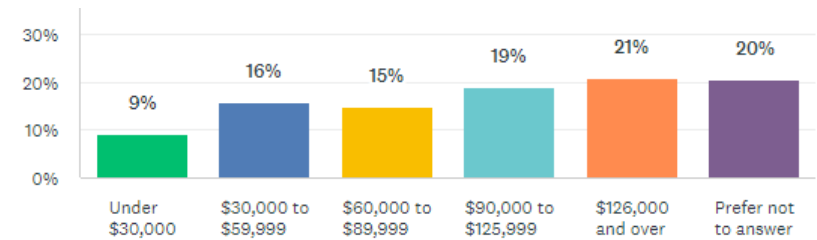
Table 2: Gender of Participants



Gender	Percentage
Female	70%
Male	29%
I prefer not to answer	1%
Non-binary	0%
Prefer to self-describe	0%

Most of the participants identified with a household income of over \$90,000 (60%), with only 9 percent earning under \$30,000.

Table 3: Household Income of Participants



Household Income	Percentage
Under \$30,000	9%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	16%
\$60,000 to \$89,999	15%
\$90,000 to \$125,999	19%
\$126,000 and over	21%
Prefer not to answer	20%

Of the 663 participants:

- 456 (73%) reported having been in contact with a Cobourg Police officer in the last 3 years.
- 321 (53%) reported having contacted the Cobourg Police Service for an emergency or non-emergency situation.
- 96 (16%) stated that they or a member of their family had been a victim of a crime in the last 12 months.
- 76 (78%) of them reported the incident to police.



Focus Groups

Methodology

The focus groups aimed at hearing directly from community members about their public safety concerns, perception of police and policing priorities. A focus group discussion guide was developed by the Lansdowne Consulting Group in consultation with the CPS and its Board. It included a series of questions drawn from the survey to better understand the perceptions of crime, feelings of safety, police performance and policing priorities from various perspectives in the community.

Given the constraints of the pandemic, a mix of in-person and virtual focus groups were facilitated. In-person focus groups were held at Venture13 in Cobourg and virtual sessions were hosted using MS Teams and the use of a Mural whiteboard. Focus groups were targeted to the business community, health, school and social services partners, seniors, youth, and the general public.

Outreach was led by Corporate Communications leveraging community contacts that include leaders of local businesses, associations, organizations, and services. Electronic invitation letters to attend a focus group themed towards specific population groups were sent with the date, time, and link information.

A series of 1-hour and 1.5 hour focus groups, both in-person and virtual, were conducted at different times of the day and into the evening to accommodate various

participant schedules. One focus group was scheduled upon request of the public for an evening virtual session given the apprehension of in-person participation as the pandemic restrictions shifted. RSVP was requested but not necessary to participate.

At the beginning of each focus group, facilitators reviewed the objectives, and participants were assured that the data collected would not be attributed and would form part of an aggregated report. There was no police presence at the focus groups to allow the public participants to speak freely. Sessions were facilitated by a facilitation consultant supported by a scribe. For virtual sessions, participants were given the choice of keeping their video on or off and offered the option to participate via the chat. Sessions were not recorded, and scribe notes were not attributed in any way to an individual.

Participants

The community focus groups were segmented as follows:

- Community partners and allies in health, social services, and safety
- Local businesses
- General public (1 virtual and one in person session)
- Older adults / Seniors
- Youth

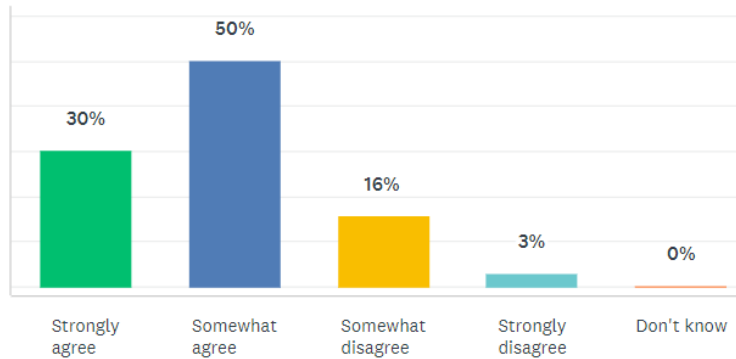


Over 60 community participants attended the focus groups with between 4 and 23 participants in each session.

Key Findings

“Cobourg is a safe town to live in”: A total of 80 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Although this continues to be strong, it represents a 13 percent decrease from 2017.

Table 4: Is Cobourg a safe town to live in?



Is Cobourg a safe town to live in?	
Result	Percentage
Strongly agree	30%
Somewhat agree	50%
Somewhat disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	3%
Don't know	0%

Priority safety concerns and crime issues: Respondents were asked to identify their top five safety or crime concerns. The results represent some shifts since 2017.

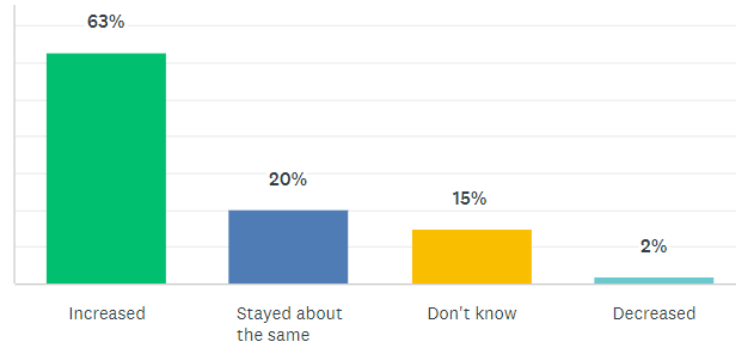
- Drugs remain the top concern (83%) (52% in 2017).
- Mental health climbed from 7th to 2nd in 2021 (56%).
- Drunk and intoxicated people made the top five list for the first time (31%).
- Road safety issues related to drinking & driving and speeding remained in the top five (30% and 27%, respectively).
- Residential break-ins did not make the top five list for the first time.
- Domestic violence climbed the list from 22% to 27%.
- Property damaged remained the same at 26%.
- Loitering and noise rose from 10% to 20%.

Perception of crime trends: A total of 63 percent of respondents perceived that crime in the Town of Cobourg, over the last 3 years, had increased, whereas 20% felt it stayed about the same and 2% felt it had decreased. The remaining 15 percent did not know. As the crime data will indicate, violent crime has decreased; however, there has indeed been an increase in social disorder.

To review crime stats from previous years please access the Cobourg Police Service Annual Reports by visiting cobourgpolicesservice.com/annual-reports/



Table 5: Perception of crime trends



Perception of crime trends

Level	Percentage
Increased	63%
Stayed about the same	20%
Don't know	15%
Decrease	2%

Views on Satisfaction and Confidence in the Cobourg Police Service: Many respondents are satisfied with the services provided by the police service (64%), noting that 22% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 11% are dissatisfied.

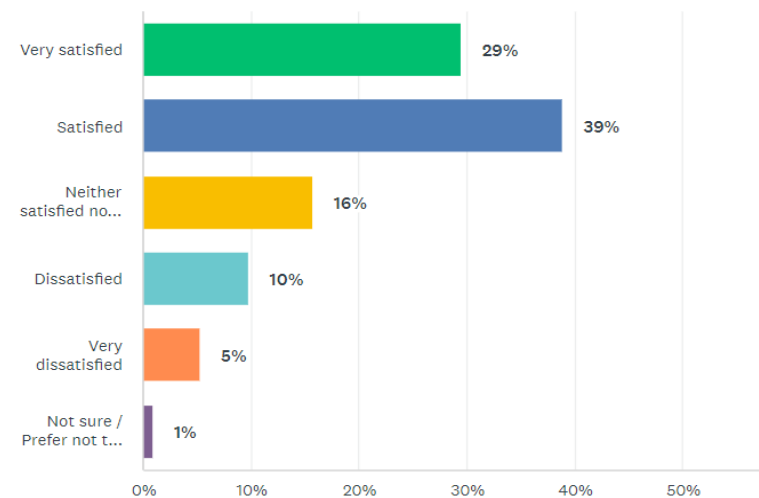
Overall, satisfaction has seen an overall decrease since 2017, although the number of those satisfied has remained relatively constant (from 42% to 40%) with downward shifts observed mostly for those who are very satisfied (from 33% to 24%).

Many also expressed moderate to utmost confidence in their police force (88%), compared to 8% who say they have little to no confidence; however, this does represent an important shift of those who have utmost confidence from 20% in 2017 to 11% in 2021 and with 38%

stating moderate confidence up from 26%. Little to no confidence remain relatively unchanged at 8% (a shift of 1%).

Quality of service for those who contacted police in the last 3 years: Of the 49% of respondents who contacted the Cobourg Police Service in the last 3 years for an emergency or non-emergency, 68% were either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of service (down 5% since 2017), compared to 16% who stated being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 15% who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This represents an overall reduction in the level of satisfaction in the quality of service for those who contacted police.

Table 6: Level of satisfaction in the quality of service for respondents who contacted police.





Breakdown by percentage of the level of satisfaction in the quality of service for survey respondents who contacted police.

Result	Percentage
Very Satisfied	29%
Satisfied	39%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	16%
Dissatisfied	10%
Very dissatisfied	5%
Not sure / prefer not to answer	1%

Satisfaction with the reporting process: Of the 15% of respondents who reported an incident to the police in the last 3 years, 61% are satisfied with the reporting process (up by 5% since 2017), compared to 20% who are dissatisfied with the reporting process and 19% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Key Themes from the Focus Groups

The focus group participants were presented with the key finding from the survey and asked what they perceive may be driving the reduced sense of safety and the sense that crime has increased in the last three years. There was a high degree of congruence with what we heard in the community with what we heard in the focus groups, which provided the following insights:

- the erosion of a sense of safety caused by the pandemic.

- a sense of not being safe at night.
- issues with traffic safety related to school crossings, other crosswalks and intersections, and no respect for stop signs.
- the growing visible presence of drugs in the community including legalized cannabis retailers in the downtown area.
- the rising presence of people in public spaces dealing with alcohol or drug addiction, mental illness, and homelessness.
- the increase in property theft in neighbourhoods.
- a desire for more police presence in certain areas at certain times of the day – such as after school, after dark in the downtown or beach area, and more frequent presence in residential neighbourhoods where there is more frequent theft.
- some confusion in the community about the tiered policing model, roles, and powers of different tiered police members.
- a notable increase in media reporting of drug related offences creating greater awareness on this issue.
- suggestions around more partnerships with health and social services led by community but assisted by police (specifically with mental health, addictions, and homelessness).
- more collaboration opportunities across jurisdictions given the transient nature of residents in the area.



Insights on Policing Priorities for the Next 3 Years

Overall, an increased presence of drugs, homelessness and people in crisis were top of mind for residents of Cobourg in this year's public consultations. When asked what CPS should focus on going forward, there was an important shift from previous years, with drugs, mental health and homelessness making the top five list for the first time. More specifically, we heard from over 700 residents and businesses that CPS should focus on:

1. the presence of **drugs** and drug use and responding through prevention, support, and enforcement with partners.
2. alternative approaches to respond to **mental health** calls and collaboration with community partners.
3. continued **community engagement** and visibility that requires some clarity around the tiered policing model and the roles of Auxiliary, Special Constables, and Officers.
4. the intersection between addictions, mental health and **homelessness** and the role of police in these complex social issues.
5. pedestrian safety, road safety and **traffic enforcement**.

In addition to these focus areas, the community most frequently listed the following opportunities for improving services:

- officer training related to responding to mental health and addictions calls, cultural competencies, trauma-informed approaches, and responding to calls in a fair and inclusive manner.
- improve the diversity within the police service.
- further build community connections, relationships, and opportunities for collaboration.
- enhance accountability and transparency.
- address concerns that CPS may not have enough Officers to have the visibility required in the downtown core and in neighbourhoods to address the safety needs of the community.

The Role of CPS on addressing complex social issues

Complex social issues are increasingly impacting the community as reflected in calls to CPS. The consultation highlighted that although police have an important role to play in responding to mental health, addictions, and homelessness, responses should be led by the health and social services systems, in true collaboration with police,



health services, hospitals, emergency services and housing providers.

In this partnership, the appropriate role for the police as identified by the community, is as a convenor and a partner in decriminalizing these complex social issues through specialized training of its officers and alternative responses. The Mental Health Engagement and Response Team – MHEART – being one example.