

Ontario Police Services Board Chair Survey 2023

A candid look at the issues facing the chairs
of Ontario's police services boards

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The photos in this document reflect the municipalities that StrategyCorp has served over the years. They should not be taken as an indication of police service board chairs who participated in the survey.

■ DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all those who have served as the chair of a police services board in Ontario, in honour of their service to the public.

StrategyCorp wishes to acknowledge the confidential participation by this year's interviewees, without whom this report would not have been possible.



GIVING VOICE TO THE OPINIONS OF ONTARIO POLICE SERVICES BOARD CHAIRS

The purpose of this report is to give voice to the Chairs of Police Services Boards.

In winter 2023, StrategyCorp interviewed 20 chairs from boards under Sec. 31 of the Comprehensive Police Services Act (those with their own municipal police services). Participants represented a wide variety of police service boards, from the largest to the smallest, from those that are relatively stable in size to those that are growing rapidly.

We wanted to listen to them. Find out what they think is going well. What needs to change.

Interviewees were provided with the list of questions ahead of time and while they were taken through the questions in sequential order, participants were encouraged to speak openly and not feel as if they were required to spend equal time discussing each question.

As always, StrategyCorp made two promises to the participants:

- We committed to faithfully and accurately record and report what they told us.
- We assured them that their comments would remain non-attributable.

We acknowledge that there are many great ideas in this report that are worthy of attribution, but that would defeat the promise of confidentiality and potentially compromise participation or candor.

It is always our intent to let the voices of the chairs be as we heard them: honest and forthright. In some cases, quotes have been edited for brevity, readability, or to protect anonymity, while remaining faithful to the sentiment expressed by the participant.

This report should be understood as qualitative, and not quantitative, research. We do not suggest that our sample is representative or capable of scientific statistical analysis. We also acknowledge our role in collating, grouping, and analyzing the responses.

Nevertheless, we believe that the participants provided us with an honest look into the trends and challenges facing Ontario's police service boards and that we have done justice to what we heard in the pages ahead.

We continue to believe that further work of this kind is valuable.

This annual survey provides chairs an opportunity to reflect on their roles and responsibilities and on what worries them, what keeps them up at night.

We hope that this report will prove useful for those interested in understanding the opinions and experiences of Ontario's most senior leaders at this moment in time.

We also hope that our findings will invite further discussion about the state of

Ontario's police services boards and provide useful context and insights for decision makers at all levels of government.

This report is a research project of StrategyCorp's Municipal Services Practice Group. It was funded solely by StrategyCorp and was not sponsored or influenced by any third party. It builds on previous research into issues in municipal governance through its Municipal Chief Administrative Officer Series (2015-2022).

“Nothing about us, without us,” and the scope of this report

The authors of this report have the greatest respect for Indigenous Rights Holders and the challenges of policing and Indigenous Persons in Ontario. In our view, much improvement is needed in this area.

We acknowledge the importance of the issue. But as a team of non-Indigenous persons, we understand that is not our subject on which to express opinions. Accordingly, we chose to yield this very important policy terrain to others. This decision was not an omission, but a conscious act of respect.



■ BACKGROUND: Ontario's Police Services Boards

This paper reports on the opinions and concerns of police services board chairs.

We chose to study police service boards because their work is critical at this time of growing concern about policing in Ontario.

“The Walkerton of today is policing. We need to invest to give effect to civilian governance.”
– Survey participant

Police services boards are civilian bodies that govern police services in Ontario.

Civilian governance is a key principle of policing, most memorably described by Sir Robert Peel in his landmark Principles of Policing:

“To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”¹



Ontario's traditions of policing embrace civilian governance. We can do no better than to quote the Expert Panel which examined issues related to the Thunder Bay Police Services Board, and which reported in April 2023, concurrent with the writing of this report:

*“Strong and effective civilian governance is the cornerstone of our system of democratic policing. Ontario’s Police Services Act gives a police services board a set of important responsibilities, the carrying out of which demands a broad range of knowledge, understanding, skills, expertise as well as community connectedness.”*²

But as much as civilian governance is critical to our system, no one said it was easy. The principles are complex. The rules are ill-defined. Success of the whole seems to depend very much on human relationships and trust. And public trust in policing is at a low ebb.

There are many aspects of policing that function well on a day-to-day basis for Ontarians.

Public opinion surveys about satisfaction with police services are common. They tell us that many Ontarians are generally satisfied with police services, most of the time.³ But as good as that is, is it good enough?

Policing is for everyone, not just the majority. The killing of George Floyd in police custody had echoes around the world. In Canada, the Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security documented incidents and concluded that systemic racism is “pervasive” in Canadian policing. It found that “a transformative national effort is required to ensure that all Indigenous, Black and other racialized people in Canada are not subject to the discrimination and injustice that is inherent in the system as it exists today.”

Police governance systems need to be robust enough to manage the challenges of the worst days. The G20 Summit, and the Ottawa Truck Convoy both tested the limits of effective policing and police governance in high-stress situations. Both incidents led to comprehensive reports that documented mistakes made, and further informed discussions around best practices.

When establishment entities like parliamentary committees and public inquiries are calling out systemic problems and instances of failure, it is worth thinking about how to do better.

Ontario Police Services Boards are responsible for managing these challenges.

Many have written about what this task takes. Thunder Bay’s Expert Panel observed:

*“The Board must have the caliber, expertise, political sophistication, and, most importantly, the political savvy to provide visionary leadership. It is also critical for the Board to have the financial and human resources necessary to carry out its responsibilities effectively.”*⁵

Clearly, it takes capable people with sufficient financial and human resources. But that is not all. Police board members operate inside a legislative structure that governs their actions. It is notable that the Panel used the word “political” twice to describe the function. We do not disagree, but caution that “politics” is a cluster concept, with many definitions, ranging from the purely descriptive to the less flattering.⁶

The Powers of Ontario Police Services Boards

The statutory powers and responsibilities of police service board are well known by

practitioners but are briefly described here for the casual reader. Until such time as new legislation is proclaimed, the general authority of police services boards is still set out in Section 31 of the Ontario Police Services Act (the "PSA"): ⁷

The Board is *"responsible for the provision of adequate and effective police services in the municipality."*

"Adequate and effective" is a subject that is inherently political, depending on one's perspective. Our participants told us that sorting out what it means today is the core challenge assigned to the board.

More specifically, the board shall:

- Generally determine, after consultation with the chief of police, objectives, and priorities with respect to police services in the municipality;
- Establish policies for the effective management of the police force;
- Recruit and appoint the chief of police and any deputy chief of police;
- Direct the chief of police and monitor his or her performance;
- Establish guidelines for complaints and monitor the complaints system.

Based on our interviews, each of these areas is a source of challenge to police services boards.

The board has a limited authority to give "orders and directions" to the chief:

- Orders and directions may only be given to the Chief, and no one else;
- Orders and directions may not relate to "specific operational decisions" or be "with respect to the day-to-day operation of the police force;"
- It is of note that individual board members (including the Chair) may not give orders and directions. They may only be given as an act of the board. This is similar to powers of municipal councils that, in most cases, may not direct municipal staff individually.

Based on our interviews, this authority and knowing where it starts and stops, is very difficult to operationalize.

At law, the board is the employer of the police service. This is important, as it imposes on the board the obligations of an employer under the *Ontario Human Rights Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

The Board is also responsible for the police budget. But that budget will be funded by the municipal taxpayer. Council cannot approve or disapprove of specific items in the budget. It can only establish an overall budget for policing. Should the board not be satisfied with the overall budget, it can refer the matter to the Commission for adjudication. (PSA s. 39)

This framework sets out the policy terrain that police service boards navigate.

The following questions helped us dig into each of these issues.

■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: WHAT WE HEARD

Over the course of 20 interviews, participants provided us with commentary on the functioning of their police services boards. Some reported that things are going very well. Those that identified issues tended to speak to three broad challenges as set out below.

Challenges related to the public safety threats facing the community:

- **Mental health and addictions crisis:** Many PSB chairs expressed concern about the growth in demand for service related to mental health and addictions. Police are often called to respond in situations that might be more appropriately handled by or in conjunction with social service or health care providers. Police face increased scrutiny and criticism from the public on how they deal with these cases.
- **Growth in the range and complexity of crime,** and in overall demands for service and the failings of the judicial system.

Challenges related to resourcing the police service:

- **Police budgeting increasing financial (and political) stress:** Board chairs noted that prudent police budgeting has always required strong financial oversight, skills which are often lacking on appointed boards. These challenges have increased as policing budgets have become a political battleground, whether from community members who want to “defund police” or others who demand foot patrols on every street corner.
- **Unprecedented human resources challenges:** Many chairs reported that it is a struggle to recruit, train, and retain sufficient officers. They also told us that officers are dealing with mental health issues, PTSD or PTSI, and were on long-term disability due to the stress of the job.



Challenges related to leading an effective police services board:

- **The challenge of good governance:** We heard that police board governance is complex. The “one size fits all” rules come from the Act, but our interviews disclose that how boards really work depends very much on quality of interactions among board members and between the board and the chief. A big part of this is trust and credibility, of each other, and of data.
- **Populating boards with quality members:** Many reported the appointments process left boards with uneven quality and no strategy for meeting either skills or diversity needs.
- **Training, training, training:** We also heard that training of board members is inadequate and should be increased. The problem encompasses both the need for training, and the lack of available content.
- **Challenges in managing relationships with other government entities:** We heard that boards have complex and often strained relationships with municipal councils, the Ministry of the Solicitor General, police chiefs, and police associations.
- **Meeting public expectations and the decline of public trust:** Many commented on the decline in public trust in today’s political climate. This has been exacerbated by polarized views on the legitimacy of police in the wake of high-profile incidents involving equity-seeking groups. Establishing, or expanding, community policing and improving community relations was referenced by many as a possible solution to these problems.

Many of the issues noted above are not new. Indeed, many of them have been known for a long time. It is a source of frustration to some that promised solutions have been held up by delay in proclamation of the new Community Safety and Policing Act. The following chart sets out some of the key issues identified in the report, and recommendations for action.

Key areas for action relating to improving the ability to lead police service boards:

CONCERNS WE HEARD	PROPOSED MEASURES TO IMPROVE CONCERNS
<p><i>"Reforms that were debated [over 10 years ago] were intended to result in some reforms in policing and its governance, but it did not result in change."</i></p>	<p>Proclaim the Act to improve the clarity of the framework. In 2019, the Ontario government passed the Community Safety and Policing Act (CSPA), but the legislation is not in effect at the time of publication.</p>
<p><i>"There is a fine line between policy and operations."</i></p>	<p>Elaborate policies to better define the line between policy and operations.</p>
<p><i>"We do not invest enough in the skills of police service boards. Mandatory training is essential."</i></p>	<p>Create the content and deliver mandatory training. The new Act, when proclaimed, will mandate training for board members.</p>
<p><i>"Many boards do not have a strategic plan. Or not a good one. And if they do, it was probably driven by the chief."</i></p>	<p>Create board-driven strategic plans. Improve capacity of police boards to create appropriate strategic plans.</p>
<p><i>"[Use of force reporting] is a routine function – it doesn't get a lot of attention. You must rely on the people giving you the information."</i></p>	<p>Ensure that boards have a policy for how use of force is reported and that they are engaged in that process.</p>
<p><i>"I did not have the resources as a board to stand up to the force when needed and [to] propose changes to the budget."</i></p>	<p>Improve the capacity of the board for budget making through better training and improving access to the skills to evaluate it.</p>
<p><i>"The police chief has all the data. The chief is holding all the cards." "We only know what they tell us, and we don't know what we don't know."</i></p>	<p>Resolving the doubts about data. Boards rely on information that comes to them directly from their police services to make decisions. Improve access to professional support to help them analyze what they have.</p>
<p><i>"There is no such thing as independence from the city."</i></p>	<p>Reinforce the independence of the PSB with policy and training of councils.</p>
<p><i>"If you get a police chief who knows how to manipulate them [the board], they can become cheerleaders."</i></p>	<p>Reinforce the importance of the PSB in its mandated role to oversee police leadership and hold the service to account.</p>



■ WHAT WE ASKED...

StrategyCorp undertook confidential interviews with PSB chairs from across Ontario in municipalities where the board oversees a local police service.

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Question 1

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE THREE BIGGEST FACTORS AFFECTING YOUR POLICE SERVICES BOARD IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

WHAT WE HEARD...

Comments in this section can be grouped under the three broad headings.

Factors related to the Public Safety Threats Facing the Community

Growth in calls for service relating to mental health and addictions and homelessness: Many participants mentioned the growing pressure on police to act as responders of last resort for mental health and addictions calls. Gaps in the capacity of the system to address these issues are driving the demand for police intervention in these areas. This is the case, even when the problem might better be addressed by social workers or health care professionals.

"We have had an incredible increase in mental health calls for service. This is complicating the job of our sworn officers and hampering our capacity to respond to other issues too."

[Responding to mental health situations] "is a very time consuming and complicated intervention. It can take hours. If we take them to hospital, then there can be a huge delay before the officer can complete the transfer."

"There needs to be a role [and access to] a more human response. We are on call, but not necessarily best positioned to respond."

Several participants indicated that the growth in the incidence of mental health and addictions problems, plus the lack of provincial funding was causing cascading demand for police call outs. They called directly for more provincial involvement.

"Until we have proper funding [for social services and healthcare] police will continue to bear the brunt of criminalization of addictions."

"We are always playing catch up. [Mental

health caseloads are going up] but there is no more funding for these things, so we ask more from police."

"The province needs to stop talking, and actually start taking action [on mental health and addictions care]."

Growth in the range and severity of crime, and the failings of the judicial system: Compared to mental health, addictions and homelessness, there were relatively few comments relating to the volume or intensity of crime itself, although it was top of mind for some.

"The increase in our violent crime reached a new high in 2022. [This has led to] increases in staffing levels."

"There is a growing burden of responding to complex crimes, relating to fraud and cybersecurity, which is putting a strain on our resources."

"There needs to be some serious re-think of justice and bail reform."

Increased calls for service caused by population growth: Ontario is growing. Some chairs in high-growth areas referred to the increased demand for service brought about by the rapid in population. They noted that critics seemed not to realize that growth would bring growth-related problems, such as increasing the demand for policing.

"We are in [a high growth area]. Our officer-per-100,000 of population ratio is way less than other municipalities. We are one crisis away from a catastrophe."

[We are very concerned about the] "rapid community growth and the ability to respond [to growing demands]."

"Keeping up with the extraordinary community growth over the next 5 to 10 years -- we are scrambling to keep up with that."

Factors Related to Resourcing the Police Service

Financial sustainability of police services and the challenge of budgeting. Many chairs told us about the multiple upward pressures in policing costs. Compensation rises every year and comprises the bulk of the police budget. The increases are largely out of the hands of the board, yet it's the board that is responsible for the budget. One comment stands out:

“Our biggest challenge? Money. [Police budgets make] a big sucking sound.”

Other participant comments were perhaps less succinct but provide further detail of the challenge.

“There are many factors driving increases in costs of policing: personnel costs, the need for more, and better, technology, increased expectations, the growing complexity of crime, inflation and the new realities of the supply chain.”

“Technology. Body-worn cameras ... the cameras are inexpensive, but data and data management hugely expensive.”

“Computer crimes are growing, and they take substantial investments to investigate.”

Personnel costs are the major driver of budget increases. A common thread to all participants was an overall respect for those who dedicate their lives to public service through policing. But respect aside, many also shared their frustration with personnel costs in general, and specific entitlements embedded in negotiated agreements from the past.

“The cost of staff is out of control – over 90% of our budget is wage-related costs. I don't know how you pull it back. The police associations don't realize how good they have it.”

“They make their own justifications for the benefits they have, the time off they take, the way they get full pay during suspensions. These things are all crazy. They bilk the system. Everyone from inspector up has a car for personal use. And these are very expensive vehicles ... Why do they get that kind of gift?”

Finding strategies to manage and control costs. Several focused on the strategies that have deployed to manage and contain costs.

“We have done a good job of containment by sharing costs for high-tech with other services. Not just traditional services, but with specialty services, such as CN Police – anyone who can help us defray costs.”

“We saw [our council's] big debate on increased costs ... It will require careful navigation to temper expectations” [about ability to contain costs].



Financial pressures in rural municipalities prompt discussion about OPP Costings.

In general, participants from smaller rural communities voiced similar concerns, but some expressed specific concerns about the benefits and costs of a local police service versus continued use of OPP contract services.

"OPP v. municipal force debates – residents like a local force but it is expensive. Residents like the community policing feel that municipal forces bring."

The HR challenge. Recruitment and retention are top of mind. Many participants reported that it is a challenge to maintain the necessary headcount to meet service needs. With more public scrutiny on and criticism of policing, it's increasingly difficult to attract new recruits.

"We find ourselves in competition with other forces for new officers."

"We are having a tremendously difficult time hiring qualified staff."

"Hiring is a real challenge ... not just for front-line officers, but for back-office support, especially IT, and call operators, and of course, finding people who want to be officers today."

"The police world has changed. Public criticism and cellphone cameras have made the job a lot less desirable. There is a smaller group who want to be officers."

Factors related to Leading an Effective Police Services Board

Many PSB chairs commented on the complex burden of police governance.

"Police service board governance is a dimly understood concept."

"There is a fine line between policy and operations. The board needs training to make it work."

Police Service Boards are meant to be independent of the municipality. Many told us that in practice, they are not as independent as they may seem, or as they should be.

"There is no such thing as independence from the city."

"The idea of a PSB independent from the city is not so true in reality. The Act gives the mayor an automatic seat on the PSB."

"The reality is that police services boards are not independent [from the city]. If you asked them for an 8% budget increase, they would shoot you."

"I had the mayor's office calling our provincial appointees to try to influence a PSB vote."

"Undermining [by the office of the mayor] was apparent during my term."





In difficult situations, gaps in understanding the board's governance role or policies can come to a head.

"Some city councillors act as if they could direct the police."

[In my opinion, without having been there] "the relationship between the board and the council was mishandled in Ottawa during the Freedom Convoy. It did not function like a proper arm of governance. Council members [speaking out on] policing operations did not result in good outcomes."

"We do not invest enough in the skills of police services boards. Mandatory training is essential."

Others expressed concern that PSBs do not have the tools to adequately set policy and assert control over their chief.

"It's complicated. There is inadequate training. The police chief has all the data. The chief is holding all the cards."

"Many boards do not have a strategic plan. Or not a good one. And if they do, it was probably driven by the chief."

Some chairs experienced conflict with the local police association.

[One of our biggest issues is] "the entrenchment of police associations and their unwillingness to change."

"The intransigence of police associations" [is one of my top three issues.]

Proclamation of new Police Services Act. Many participants expressed their frustration at delays in the proclamation of the new policing act.

"Reforms that were debated [over 10 years ago] were intended to result in some reforms in policing and its governance, but it did not result in change."

"I was like a kid in a candy store when I heard Justice [Michael] Tulloch was [leading the Independent Police Oversight Review] and touring the province, then so disheartened to see it just get shelved."

"The change in legislation, when it is finally proclaimed, will be fairly dramatic. It is a change in thinking and a different way of doing business, a change in 'who does what' and 'how it works.' It will take a while to implement and settle down. But it will be an improvement."

"They need to just get on with it and proclaim the act."



Board composition was discussed by most participants and named as a significant challenge by many.

"Requests to change the appointments process [to result in the appointment of] skills-based boards have not been acted on by the province."

"I see big difficulties in the way PSBs are set up [appointments are a partisan, not a skills-based process]."

"The provincial appointment process is concerning. I have no issues with the structure, but how they are appointed is concerning. We get some real duds."

Some participants identified a culture clash between local and provincial appointees.

"For a while we were a very diverse and progressive board. The provincial appointees were very different. They did not meet our requests for diversity. The provincial appointment process has no transparency at all."

"Our most recent provincial appointees were extremely partisan. Many other applicants had extraordinary experience but instead, politically linked people were picked."

Training of board members is inadequate and should be increased. The problem is not only the need for training, but the lack of quality content that is available to boards.

"Training, training, training. We need more training. It is the biggest issue."

"Board members' lack of education prior to appointment is an issue. Board member qualifications and education ought to happen before the appointment is made."

[The training mandated under the CSPA] "will make it a challenge for board members to keep up ... I don't know how a retired person will have the time for it, let alone somebody else."

Public trust in the institution of policing. Many commented on the general decline in public trust in the post-COVID political climate. This has been exacerbated by polarized views on the role and legitimacy of police in our society in the wake of highly publicized incidents involving equity-seeking groups.

"It's a societal problem. Since COVID there has been a distrust of every institution. And a lack of empathy in what people experience. And it is showing up in mistrust of policing."

[One of our biggest challenges is the] "lack of public trust in institutions such as the police."

[The level of] "general government and media support for police has to change."

Meeting and managing public expectations.

Several commented that the decline in trust and lack of public awareness of policing issues made it difficult for boards to manage public expectations.

“As long as people think more police means a safer community, we are caught in this vicious cycle.”

“It is challenging to manage public expectations when there is a choice between dealing with a property crime versus dealing with a distressed person. This can lead to very unhappy stakeholders” [no matter what choice you make].

“Policing is something that needs to be done with the community, not to the community. This needs to be remembered, along with [Sir Robert] Peel’s other principles. Sometimes police leadership forgets these principles.”

“Public expectations. This works both ways. There are both ‘defund’ folks, and ‘pro-police folks.’”



Who bears the burden of public education?

Some described it as a matter of the public needing to “educate themselves.” Others put that burden of education and communication on the service and the board.

“More effort needs to be made to communicate what is going on in police service. The knee-jerk reaction is always ‘more ‘police.’ More police isn’t always the answer.”

“Policing costs are getting high, and I understand why they are getting high, the issue is communicating to others why.”

Invest in improving community relations.

Establishing, or expanding, community policing and improving community relations was referenced by many as a possible solution to these problems.

“I listened to the community and what they said, and I didn’t disagree about the treatment of minorities by police. Change is difficult and there is a ‘thin blue line.’ But it comes down to the expectation on us to change and our ability to act on it.”

“We have specialized services that others don’t have and can resource share. These will amount to nothing, though, if we don’t strengthen community policing.”

“The expectation is that we won’t do or say anything [to change the system for the better], and we are told ‘if you stick your head up you may get it chopped off.’”

“Too many police services boards just ‘fly under the radar.’ [They need to ask themselves], ‘Are you there to [make things better] or to be a steward of the status quo?’”

Many participants referred to the importance of improving relations with the Indigenous community. The following comment is representative of the sentiment:

“We have a need to continue to build relationships with our Indigenous leaders in the community.”

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

The answers to this question set the groundwork for the themes of the rest of this report, many of which will be further explored in the questions that follow.

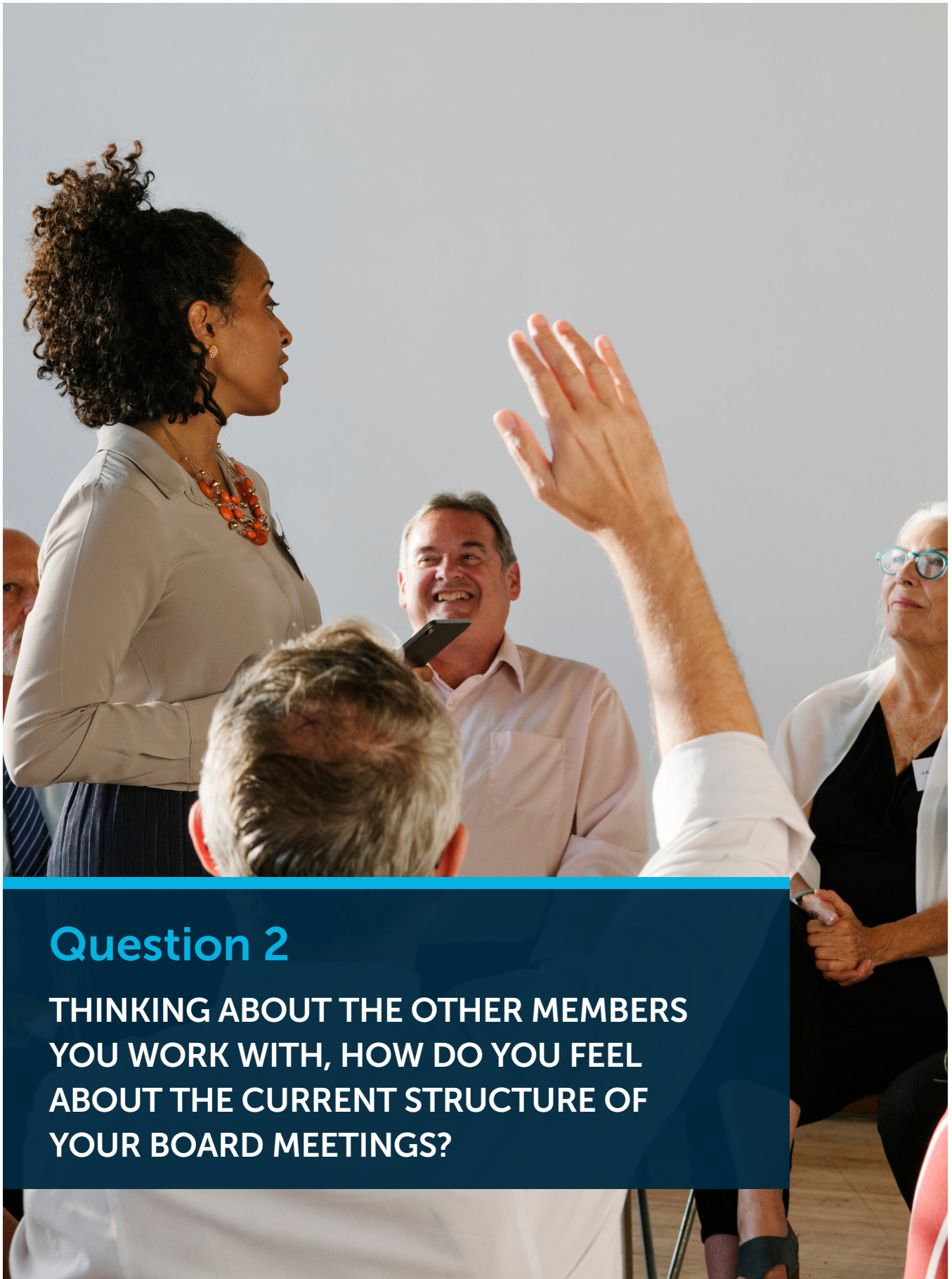
Interestingly, they expose the fundamental challenge of the role, which is the need to be both:

- The overseer of the police service, in terms of all aspects of adequacy, including strategy, spending, fairness and representation, and use of force; and
- The champion of policing when it comes to budget time and ensuring sufficient resources to deliver adequate policing.

Much of what we heard elaborates on this basic challenge. Are boards steering the police, or being steered by the police? Are they watchdogs? Or supporters?

The answers to this question also anticipate solutions to the worst problems faced by board chairs:

- An improved board appointments process, to ensure we have capable, skills-based boards
- More training for board members, to ensure everyone knows their role
- Dedicated, expert staff resources, reporting to the board, to support the board decision making



Question 2

THINKING ABOUT THE OTHER MEMBERS YOU WORK WITH, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CURRENT STRUCTURE OF YOUR BOARD MEETINGS?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

There was a range of answers on the overall effectiveness of the PSBs. Generally, if the chairs and chiefs saw eye-to-eye, and individuals around the table had appropriate skills, the board was able to make effective decisions. But we heard numerous complaints about the political leanings of appointees, especially those members named by the province, and that council members bring divided loyalties to the board.

On a positive note, some chairs felt their boards worked well together.

"We function very well. The board is community-minded and questions things critically. It is not a 'coffee club' and nothing is lacking."

"We have a great board. We have great conversations and there are no holes. We have established a good rapport with our senior partners."

"I am happy with our board conversations. Board conversations are only as good as what the chief and chair bring to the meeting."

However, several reported a divide between provincial and local appointees. Some pointed the finger at the motives or skills of provincial appointees.

"The provincial appointments are very political. Potentially, it could create a lot of issues. I worry about the provincial appointments because they are political."

"Many do not understand why they are even [on the board]. The province needs to move towards more of a skills-based appointment process. We are not getting people ideally suited for the job."

"We need to remove the political value of being on a police services board. We need to change it back to what it was originally meant to do, which was stewardship."



Others were critical of municipal appointments. Several pointed out that municipal appointees are too busy and divided between their duty to the PSB and their desire as a council member to mitigate budget increases. This can create tensions at the board tables, especially if the mayor acts as chair.

"I am a strong proponent of [...] banning municipal council members from being the board chair. They find it very difficult to separate the municipality and the police services at times."

"Elected councillors do not have the time to fulfil the obligations of chair for a board of this scale."

"Having the mayor as board chair can be a strategic mistake."

"You need a strong board who can say no to whomever the mayor or strongest personality is."

"The governance relationship with council is not well understood."

Training for members is currently inadequate. We heard that any gaps in PSB governance and board meetings are largely owed to the fact "training and development are non-existent" for members. Members do not fully understand their role, or the skills required.

"The keys are knowing the Act and being trained in governance rules. It's simple."

"Our biggest issues are the lack of training, and the lack of clarity surrounding our role."

"There are lines crossed with respect to the operational-accountability relationship, and that is due to these uncertainties."

Some chairs said they had hoped that the new Act, which clarifies rules and requires formal board training, would have been in force by now.

"The new policing act sitting on the Minister's desk needs to be proclaimed. There is no common set of training for board members, no common set of rules."

"The training mandated under the CSPA will make it a challenge for board members to keep up ... I don't know how a retired person will have the time for it, let alone somebody else."

"Board members' lack of education prior to appointment is an issue. Board member qualifications and education ought to happen before the appointment is made; high-tech resources available to the criminal are higher than what is available to the police."

Others worry that some board members forget that the police service is accountable to the board.

"[Some board members] become the police service's cheerleaders. They forget they are the governance oversight body. Because of this, we are unable to have the right conversations."

"If you get a police chief who knows how to manipulate them, they can become cheerleaders."

But while the board oversees the service, it is not allowed to direct police operations. Many chairs told us this is a difficult nuance for members to navigate.

"Governance is a complex topic. There is a great degree of ambiguity of where our job begins and ends. The role is evolving from the 'be seen but not heard' role into some form of operational involvement, but it is not known as to how much."

"The PSB has a limited capacity in what it actually does from a governance standpoint, but there needs to be an understanding for the different roles about what they bring to this."

"The current structure does not work. A lot of what the board ends up doing gets wrapped up in the minutia of operational matters, that we do not spend enough time on the governance side."



We heard that some boards didn't have the expert resources in legal, financial and governance policies they needed to make judicious decisions.

"Police boards do not have the capacity internally to undertake the policy functions that they need. Often, our support staff act as administrative assistants without this expertise."

"The board is hugely dependent on what the chair, the chief and the board secretary bring to the meeting" [by way of agenda and materials].

"There was always a sense that we could not use [resources from] the police service to support our long-range governance-type work, but our PSB had a limited capacity to do this work ourselves."

"We lacked the tools we needed to deal with a board member going rogue. When the rest of the board called attention to this, there was no support from higher orders of government. When things start to go awry, there needs to be support so the boards can accomplish what they need to accomplish."

■ STRATEGYCOPR'S PERSPECTIVE:

Despite the challenges, some boards seem to make it work very well. This is most likely a tribute to the individuals involved.

Other board chairs report significant problems, and report several legislative and structural problems that run the risk of cascading into challenging situations.

Inadequate board member selection procedures. The appointments process is designed to ensure that no one body controls the appointments. That makes sense from the perspective of ensuring that neither the province nor the municipality can control the board. But it means that there is no overall skill matrix that is driving the board selection process. Many chairs report that the quality of appointees is not adequate. They also report gaps in the representation and in the skills their boards need to be effective.

Inadequate training. If there is a repetitive "broken record" of police services boards complaints, it is the "need for more training" in almost all aspects of the job.

- Frustration: There is great frustration that mandatory training contemplated by the new Act has yet to be implemented.
- Concern: There is also great concern that the content for training does not really exist, because of the enormous complexity of the subject matter.

Inadequate staff supports. We heard that the role is demanding at the best of times. To do it properly can be overwhelming. Key tasks, such as strategic planning and budget making require specialized skills. Without the right skills reflected among board members, boards need specialized staff support to meet these tasks. Most don't have it, or the resources to get it. As a result, they have little choice but to rely on the service that they are tasked to oversee.

Inadequate definition of role. "Police governance is a dimly understood concept." We heard this, or similar sentiments, from many participants who are at the sharp end of police governance. For example, no one we spoke to thinks it is easy to articulate or navigate the "strategy vs. operations" dichotomy. Yet, that is at the heart of civilian governance.

■ The Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency made findings about an extreme case of this problem concerning the Ottawa Police Services Board and its relationship with its chief.

The OPSB, it seems, shared a diminished view of its own authority. For example, Ottawa City Councillor and OPSB member Carol Anne Meehan responded to an email from another councillor saying, "Wish we had the power to do something, besides watch." Chair [Diane] Deans agreed that the OPSB's oversight role was limited. While the OPSB appears to have generally understood its authority to request information, it did not know how to respond when Chief [Peter] Sloly pushed back.⁸

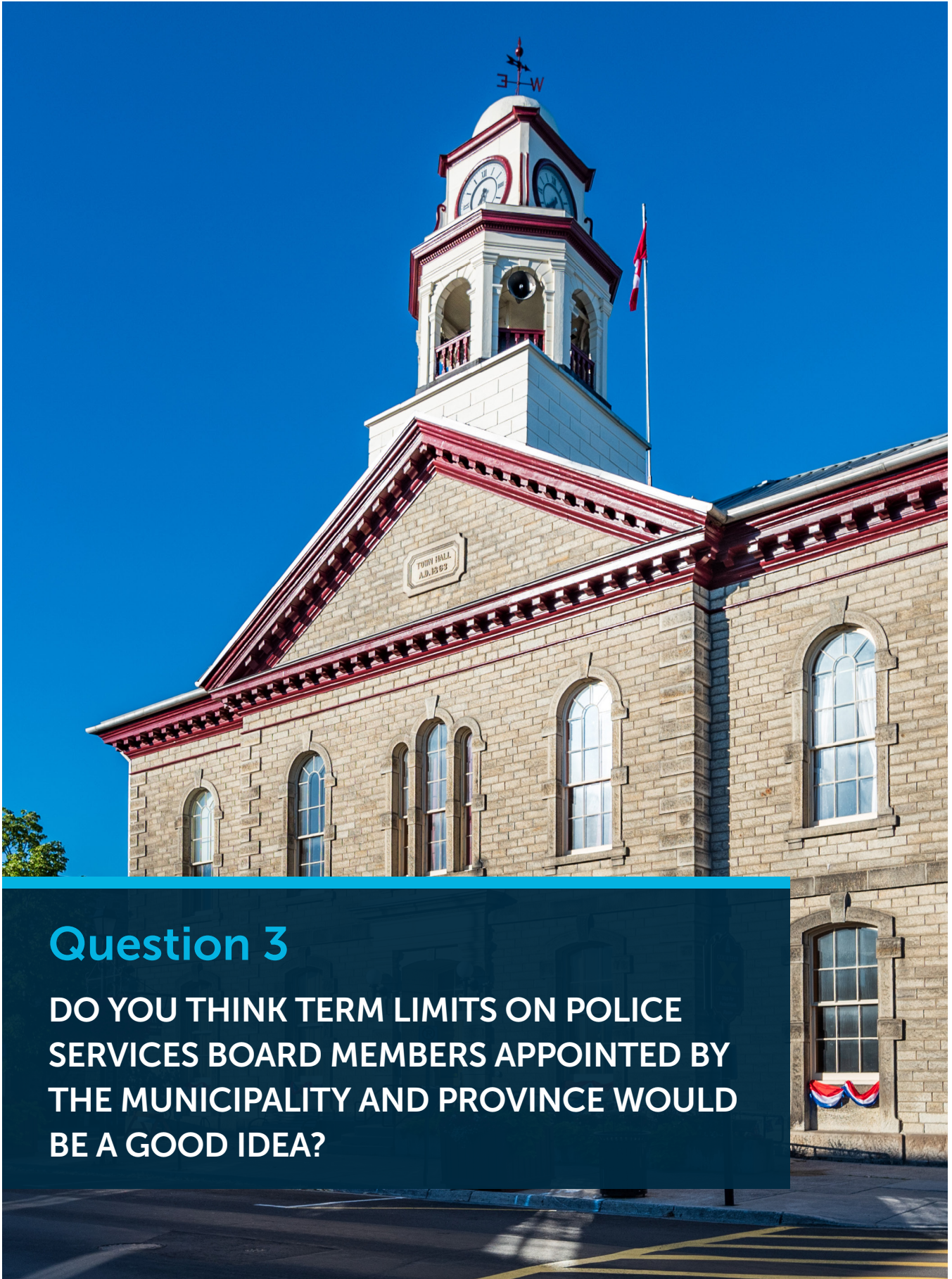
Although he told Chair Deans that it would be unlawful for him to provide certain information, when testifying, he agreed that the OPSB was entitled to any information relevant to its oversight function and there were no legal impediments to providing this type of information. By suggesting the contrary, he discouraged board members from pursuing information to which they were entitled.⁹

This was an extraordinary situation.

We did not hear that all boards are dysfunctional either in their skills, operations, or relationships with their service. Quite the contrary. We heard from many that their boards work effectively, often due to the personalities of the chairs and chiefs, and their hard work together.

Based on what we heard, however, it seems clear that many chairs are concerned that aspects of the system leave it weaker and more vulnerable than it should be.

It is worth repeating that additional training for members about their mandate and responsibilities could improve the functioning of all boards, which will be required once the Community Safety and Policing Act is finally in effect.



Question 3

DO YOU THINK TERM LIMITS ON POLICE SERVICES BOARD MEMBERS APPOINTED BY THE MUNICIPALITY AND PROVINCE WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

We heard a range of views on the idea of term limits for board members.

Term limits cause a loss of institutional memory. Perhaps not surprisingly, veteran members were more likely to be against term limits. They argue that it takes time to learn the role, and that mandatory term limits forces institutional knowledge out the door. For some, this would limit the ability of PSBs to perform their function and deliver control of the PSB into the hands of the Chief.

"As a long-term member of council, I do not believe in term limits. When they are used you lose institutional knowledge, and you revert to being at the whim of who is running/seeking the appointment. You could lose valuable experience."

"I have strong feelings against them. We are undergoing negotiations with the police association, and I have [several] negotiations' experience, [and the] others have zero."

"With the CSPA coming in, and the training involved, I think putting a time limit on [board service] is not a good idea."



In fact, some chairs argued that if appointments were decided on the skill set of members, term limits could be detrimental.

"I am also chair of another board. We built a skills-based board and made it a gold-standard system and board. I then lost half my board due to term limits. They were good members. This hurt our progress."

Proponents of term limits believe that they would encourage rejuvenation of the board.

"Absolutely, agree with term limits ... I would like to see it reduced to six years, because the more participation, the less chance there is for cronyism."

"I think people should be moving on after 'X' number of years. People need to move on, we need new blood. It is good to have new people coming in and bringing new ideas."

"Term limits would prevent people who are not there for the right reasons from staying too long."

How long is too long? No consensus. But even among those who are in favour of limits, there was no consensus on how long a member's tenure should last. At least one chair who is generally pro-term limits worried about the "steep learning curve" that comes with the position.

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

While term limits are rare in Canadian electoral settings, four provinces – Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and New Brunswick – have imposed term limits ranging from six to 10 years on individual police board membership. The question over term limits is a valid one.

There is some natural turnover at boards, which brings new voices on a regular basis.

But as the appointment system currently stands, there is a concern that cronyism can creep into the system. With so much to do, every position matters.

As we saw in Question 2, there is more consensus around the need to improve the quality and diversity of board appointments overall, than there is concern about tenure.

We heard time and again from survey participants that they'd like to see members appointed for their qualifications, as opposed to their political leanings.



Question 4

HOW'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHIEF OF POLICE?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

There is no more important relationship for a police services board than with its chief.

"Whether its budget or labour relations or whatever, most boards do not have the support they need [to really do their role of oversight.] The chief comes in holding all the cards."

"If you don't have a good relationship with your chief, you are screwed."

"A disconnect from the chief is one of the things that keeps me up at night."

Many chairs told us they have excellent relationships with their chiefs.

"We discuss operational issues, but in a sounding-board role, I let him know that it is his decision."

"The chief is great at providing data, educating the board on operational matters, and respects the board's input."

"One thing I learned is to never fall in love with a chief, but I will go to bat for him anytime."

Upskilling the executive team. Part of the success of the relationship was attributed to raising the overall qualification requirements of the position, and of other members of the senior management team.

"We were smart enough to build a succession plan throughout the system, and rules were put in place that organizational leaders needed [higher education.]"

One chair from a smaller municipality wondered if their chief was perhaps too good.

Good chiefs are hard to retain, especially in smaller municipalities, as new opportunities are always arising.

"I worry about him getting recruited away by a larger force; he is young, competent and wise."





Others told us that some chiefs act as if they don't answer to the board.

"They have done a fantastic job in recent years of establishing themselves and running the boards, and that is an error. They have forgotten that they are the employees, and we have let that happen."

"The relationship can get strained around budget time. Many chiefs like to try and run the show to a strong degree, which requires checks from the board."

"Does the chief know how to behave? Many think that they are in charge and expect it to be that way."

One chair delivered a dire warning for chiefs on this subject.

"If you want to be a political chief, you will die on that sword."

"The issue with the community is that with police so sensitized, police begin acting quasi-politically."

"I am very impressed with his community interaction. He does a very good job [engaging the community]."

Some chairs report their chiefs are making sincere efforts to build relationships with the community.

But others have encountered more resistance from their chiefs over engaging equity-seeking community groups.

"In the recent business plan, the chief did not want to encourage diverse group participation."

"We had a chief that, early on in his tenure, he decided he did not like [community-organized equity seeking groups]."

"The chief's relationships with the community, the police associations, was frayed."

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

Clearly, many boards have a successful relationship with their chief.

Leadership starts at the top, so goes the adage. We found that it remains true in each of our CAO surveys.

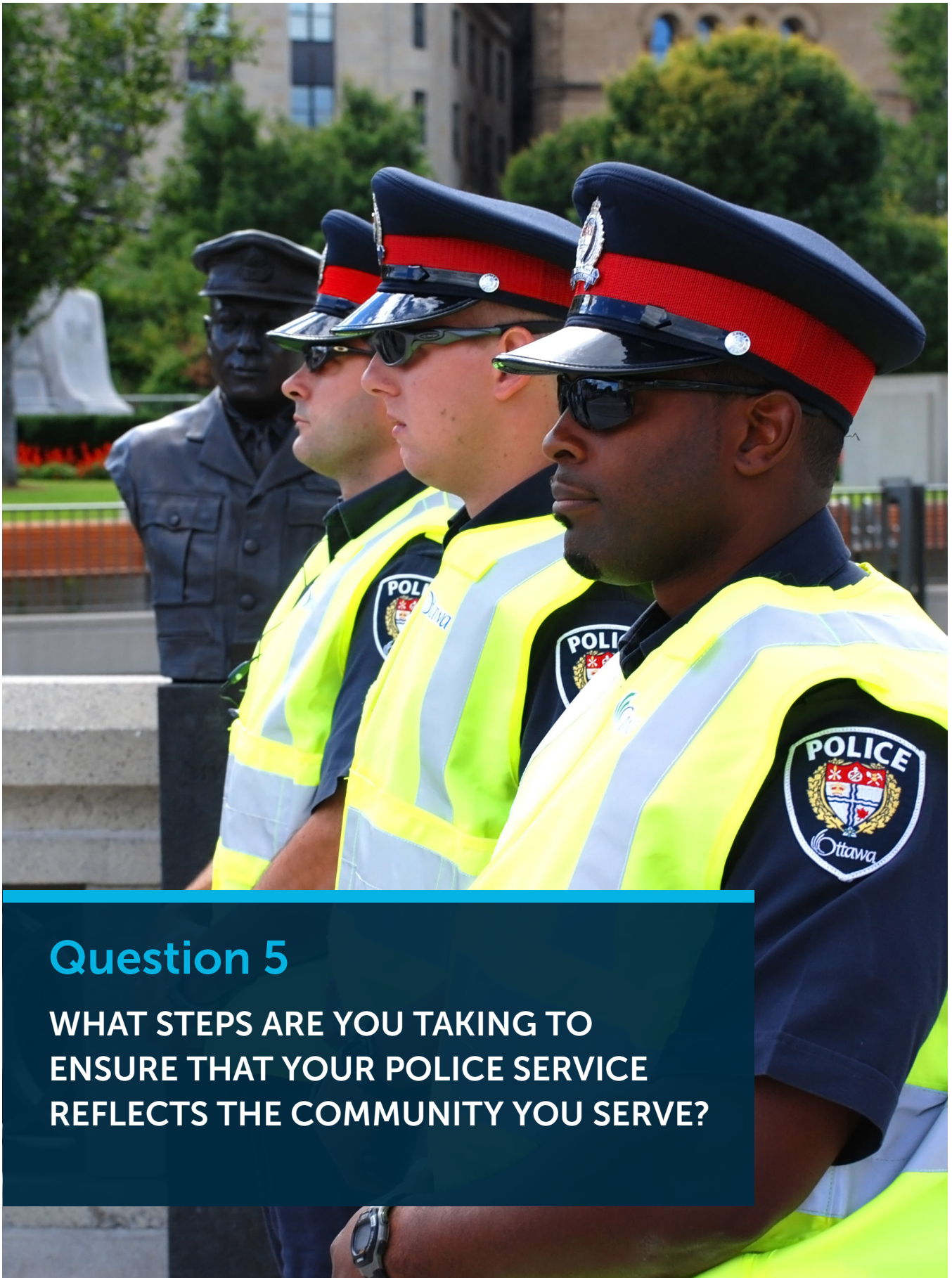
Credibility is key. As one participant said in our 2017 Survey, "For CAOs, the job begins and ends at credibility. You must establish credibility and maintain it."

Based on our interactions with chairs, the same seems to be true of chiefs of police in their relationship with the board. After all, the chief is both hired by and accountable to the board. Conversely, the board receives most of their information about the police service through the chief.

Being a police officer is divorced from politics, and especially from partisan politics. But the subject of policing is inherently political today. In an era where policing has become increasingly political, the chief of police has a difficult landscape to navigate.

The relationship between the chief and the chair matters – perhaps too much. Some frank assessments spoke to the challenge of a structurally vague relationship among chairs, boards, and chiefs.

Mutual Respect. It is important for both parties to respect each other's role, be accountable to each other, and exhibit strong communications skills.



Question 5

WHAT STEPS ARE YOU TAKING TO ENSURE THAT YOUR POLICE SERVICE REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY YOU SERVE?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

More diversity is still the goal. We heard that diversity continues to be a goal on most boards, and that there was more work to do. Many are conducting outreach to raise awareness of hiring opportunities in segments of the community that may not have traditionally considered policing.

"We took steps. We realized we needed some EDI [equity, diversity, and inclusion] practices in our hiring, so we worked with human resources. We authorized a budget to engage with First Nations communities and other communities."

"With the help of the chief, we have installed an EDI Officer at the sergeant level to audit the service to ensure that we are not drifting on the values that we have set."

"Officers and board go through EDI training."

A few participants suggested their services have made more progress from a gender-equality standpoint.

"The force has strong female members that contribute to, and greatly reflect, our community."

Listening and outreach help when diversity falls short. Police are who they are, and changing the demographic makeup of the service takes time, even where it is a priority. But participants pointed out that police of all stripes can, through their behaviours, ensure that they reflect and engage with the community. Some see this as supportive of relations in general, but also part of a longer-term recruitment strategy.

"The chief recently established a community inclusion committee, where they have gone out and sought members [from underrepresented groups]. The mandate of that committee is to provide information to the chief ... which then comes to the board."

"The chief is strongly supportive of the diverse communities in the region."

"We also have a community safety policing officer. He goes into the community to talk to new communities, in schools, he represents the force."

But some still feel they don't have enough information to make a diversity plan.

"We don't have that community level knowledge to come back to the board to say, 'This is what the community wants, this is what we need.'"



Many participants indicated that they wanted greater diversity on their board. This quote is representative of several.

“We want more diversity including Black and Indigenous members.”

Boards do not control their own membership. With appointments to the board in the hands of the local and provincial governments, we heard that there is no one directing strategy guiding board appointments, either from the perspective of skills or diversity.

“I have had trouble convincing council that we need a First Nations representative on the board, even though our police serve a First Nations community.”

“How do we achieve diversity on the board when the province controls a number of the appointments?”

“[During my term we] had many applicants for a single appointment, but an older, white male was chosen. I think it was a missed chance.”

Board members need training on diversity issues. Some chairs said it was a challenge ensuring their boards understand the needs of different members of the community and the changing demographics of many Ontario municipalities.

“Policing is going to be the biggest pain in the neck [for municipal governments] for the next while. Members need training to understand the changing social dynamics.”

“It again needs to focus on training. Tokenism on boards is ineffective. Just because the board looks representative, doesn't mean it actually represents the community.”

Many paid close attention to the chief's connection with the community, especially the relationship with diverse groups.

“The chief of police has open houses which are well-attended by some segments of our population.”

“The chief has done a really good job about community police being the priority.”

Increasing board size is not the answer. Most did not support the idea of larger boards to create more opportunities for representation.

“Larger boards have their own problems.”

“We don't need larger boards. We need better selection and training of the board positions we have now.”



■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

Board diversity, alone, is not enough. "Diversity is a fact, inclusion is a choice," it has been said.

Seeking diversity of board membership should be a given, but as a practical matter, it is not enough. No board of seven members could ever be recruited to properly reflect the demographic diversity of our growing communities. Tokenism never works.

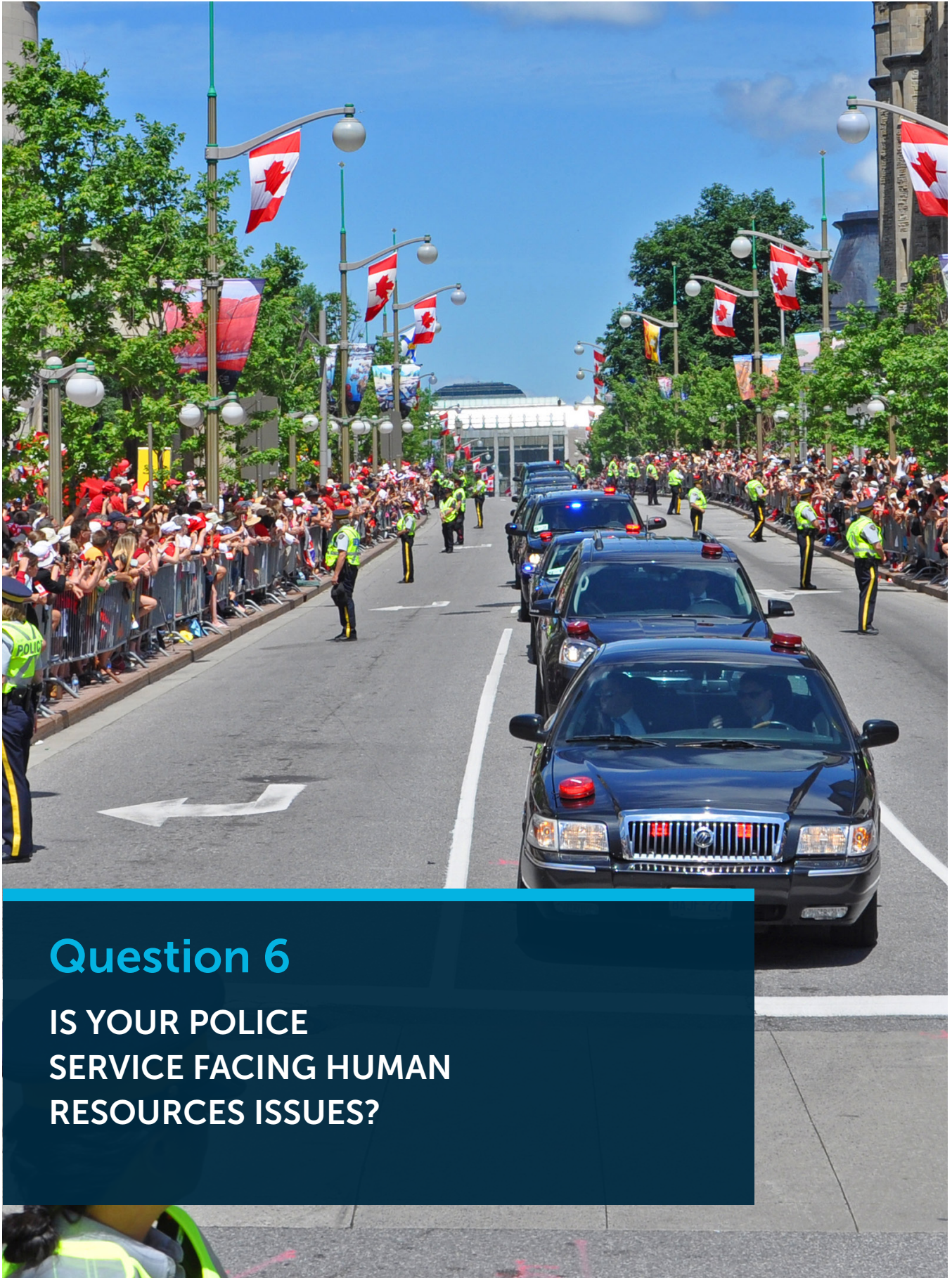
This means that the practice of inclusion must be built into the actions of every person who is appointed to serve. Training is essential to create a common appreciation of the needs for and the practice of inclusion.

The workplace of the service must reflect the diversity of the community.

Organizations are grappling with the challenge of ensuring a diverse and equitable workplace for their employees and the people they serve.

Police services are often involved in high-stakes situations with vulnerable individuals and communities who have historically had negative interactions with police. Ensuring decisions are made in ways that improve equity, diversity and inclusion goals is an important obligation of Ontario police services boards.

Boards are responsible for creating diversity plans and ensuring that adequate and effective policing is administered in compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Code. Boards will have an important role in creating open lines of communication and continuing or strengthening relations between police and communities.



Question 6

**IS YOUR POLICE
SERVICE FACING HUMAN
RESOURCES ISSUES?**

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

Hiring is a challenge. We heard loud and clear that there are fewer qualified people willing to join the police service. Virtually all PSB chairs said they are struggling to attract new people – even if they could afford to hire them.

“We are having a tremendously difficult time hiring qualified staff.”

“We would hire 10 [front line cadets or constables] this year, but our HR department can only handle five, and we don’t even know if we can get that many.”

The job is less attractive than it used to be. The current political climate, increased job stress, and general social change that often views policing more negatively makes joining the service less appealing.

“Hiring is a real challenge ... not just for front-line officers, but for back-office support, especially IT, and call operators, and of course, finding people who want to be officers today.”

“It is no longer the policing gig it was when our senior constables began. This has made it difficult to bring some new members in.”

“Social pressures around defund the police make it hard to recruit new members.”



Competition is stiff. This has created a notable increase in competition among police services for qualified personnel and has generated pressure for boards.

“We are seeing a huge drop in applications. The volume is no longer there.”

“With staffing shortages, we have three to four part-time officers picking up the slack.”

Officers’ mental well-being and LTD leaves are a significant concern for many. Long-term disability (LTD) can place an outsized financial pressure on smaller police service budgets, not to mention the impacts to the individual often suffering from post-traumatic stress injuries (PTSI).

Participants were mixed on how LTD is affecting them, from it being “not a major problem” for one service, while “a large number of officers on long-term disability” is a challenge for another.

Many chairs have been working on preventative measures to help reduce long-term disability.

“We have hired a psychologist that comes in [regularly] and it is mandatory that everybody must see them. It is to build a relationship of trust, that they can trust somebody and know they have somebody to talk to.”

“We hired an in-house psychologist to address PTSI. It has benefits in terms of counselling and access to care. Many PTSI issues are bigger than us, they are systemic.”

“We stressed the mental health strategy. We increased officer mental health allowance by six-fold.”

Modernizing HR practices

Ensuring access to adequate HR expertise.

Many interviewees highlighted the work boards are doing to update their human resource policies to ensure there are standards in place for promotions and supporting human resource issues.

“One issue is with the police force not possessing the requisite HR knowledge to conduct advanced investigations, etc. We signed an agreement with the city and force to have the city HR staff involved with human resourcing matters. This will add expertise.”

Standardize promotion and hiring processes to ensure compliance. Chairs had concerns about police services standardizing promotion and hiring processes, some of which risked being challenged under human rights law.

“Until a few years ago, the promotional system was completely ad-hoc.”

“We had panels that would ask female promotional applicants questions about their family commitments and life.”

“We directed the chief to create policies around the promotional process. I still see hesitations from marginalized applicants not wanting to go through this process.”

There is a need for change in suspension-with-pay rules. Some also pointed to the current suspension-with-pay policies for officers charged with serious offences as a challenge financially, but perhaps more important, a reason for cynicism among the public.

“Many officers on suspended leave for criminal complaints. The process to deal with criminal complaints is inadequate; sometimes it can take years to resolve this issue.”

“They receive full pay while off on suspended leave due to provincial legislation. Tried to take on this as a legal battle. Next week, the mayor went to council asking for legislation change, but it did not make it far.”



Relations with the association. The relationship of the board with the local police association got several mentions as an important ingredient in labour negotiations.

“I think the association should be part of the new regulations, we should be required to copy them on agendas and minutes. They would be up to date about what we are doing.”

“Good relationship with the police association, even though they do not like me. We built a culture of respect here. We have labour peace, it was hard fought for, but it creates stability.”

But some told us that relationship was fraught.

“Relationship with the police association was horrible. It was one of the reasons I decided to not put my name forward again.”

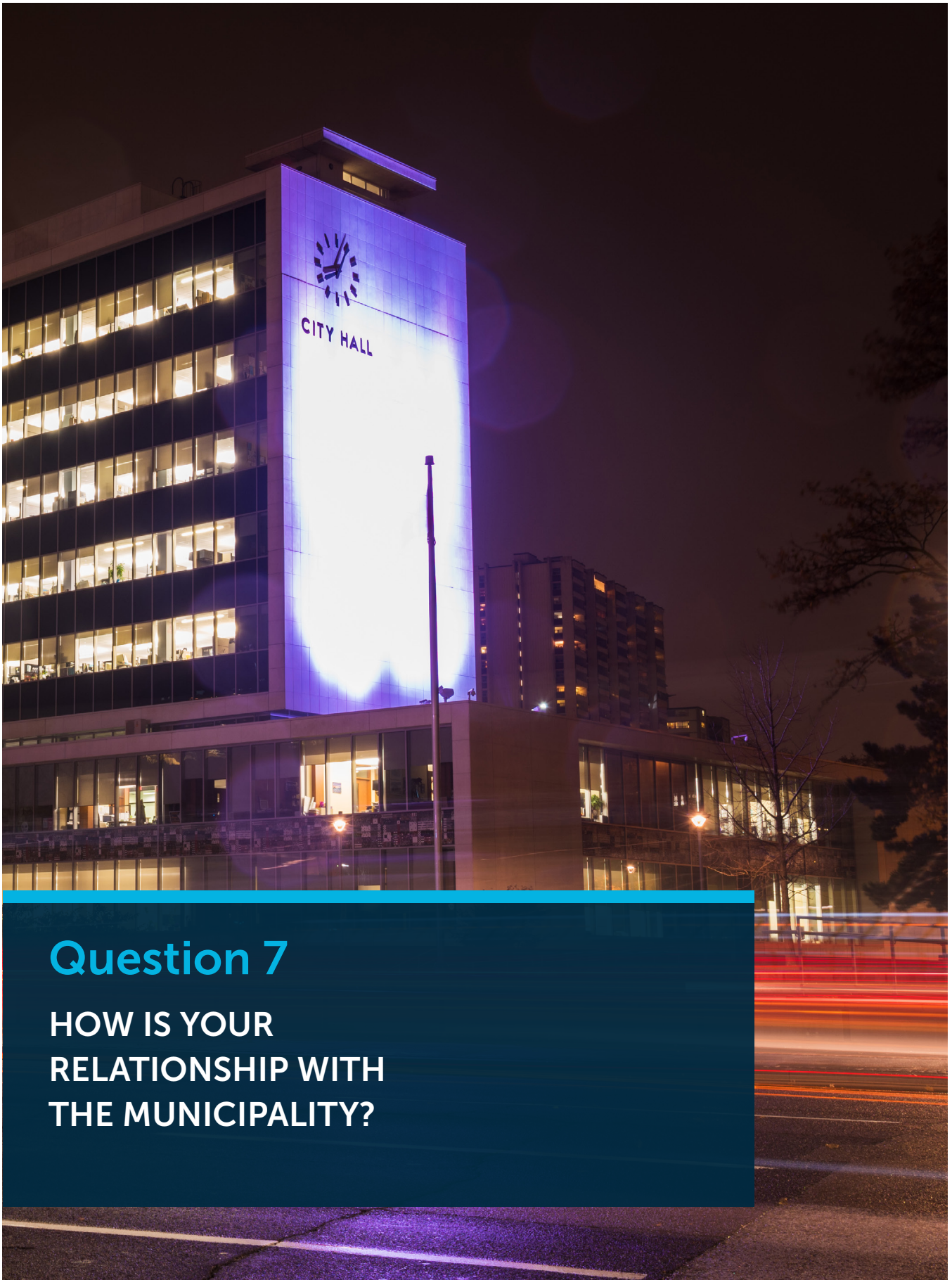
“We need to add more policy surrounding what this relationship means.”

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

The shortage of police officers is real. In 2021, Ontario's auditor general found that the OPP alone was short more than one thousand front-line constables. The provincial government recently announced it will reverse their intention to add post-secondary education as a requirement to be hired as an officer and will cover the costs of mandatory training to attract more applicants.

The main obstacle to drawing new recruits appears to be the nature of policing today. The job is more stressful than ever, as society often views policing in a negative light. Officers must deal with mental health and addictions calls, which they may not be trained to handle. And it's no secret that officers themselves suffer from PTSD.

It will not be easy for boards to address these issues. They must work with their police services – and police associations – as well as other levels of government, to increase confidence in the institution of policing. That could be done through more transparent and accountable oversight, more diversity within the service and on the board, and more funding to address mental health issues in the community.



Question 7

HOW IS YOUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH
THE MUNICIPALITY?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

We heard a wide range of opinion on this subject, ranging from very positive to somewhat negative.

Interestingly, we heard a diversity of opinion from the same respondents, depending on the issue.

Perhaps the most generally applicable answer to the question, "How is your relationship with the municipality?" was that it *"very much depends."*

Not surprisingly, budget approval was the biggest irritant.

Some mentioned that the relationship was good, but expressed concern about how it would perform if there were a significant incident, such as the Ottawa truck convoy.

Some that said they had a strong relationship tended to focus on the importance of trust and two-way communication.

"Overall, the municipality and the PSB have a functional relationship."

"Really good. We have a fantastic relationship."

"The relationship is excellent."

"Board-city relations work very well. The PSB is also involved with related advisory committees at the city level."

Absence makes the heart grow fonder? Some describe the relationship as positive and well functioning because they stay well away from each other. For these participants, the absence of communication and engagement is the sign that things are working.

"During my tenure, the city government saw the police as separate from the government, there was not a strong need of dialogue."

"Non-existent. In my tenure, it is a non-issue, we do not interact much with the city."

"Council can't get into the weeds of overseeing the operations, it doesn't work that way."

Unless it doesn't. An absence of ongoing engagement is not always perceived as a good thing, however.

"The chief used to attend every council meeting. Not anymore. Now, council just sees the budget once a year and says, 'Oh my God.'"

Tension is often about money. Most who indicated that there is tension attributed it to the high cost of policing and pressures associated with the impact of the police budget on municipal finances.

"Budgetary issues arise where the provincially loaded PSB approve police-favoured budgets."

"Council sometimes wishes they had more control in this regard."

"Council sometimes feels the board makes many decisions that heavily impact their municipal budget. Overall, however, the relationship is very good."

"By having the mayor on board, we can help pave that rough road during the budget every year."

"Police budgets have reached over 10% of municipal budgets, it is time for municipalities to participate."

Some also expressed concern about council not understanding its role regarding policing.

Chairs called for more training of staff or council on the independence of police services boards.

"Councillors do not understand the governance relationship between the board, council, and the service."

"The relationship should be truly independent. Instead, it has influence from special interest Councillors (for or against the police)."

"The old relationship was not good. Council didn't understand the issue facing the police. It was not a two-way street."

Leadership matters. So too does personality.

Sometimes it varies with the styles of individuals, such as the mayor or municipal CAO. In the end, it requires an effort at communication.

"It can be tough to oversee the chief as a board if there is a mayor telling him what to do."

"Recently, the council and the Board did not have good relations, especially under the previous Mayor."

"New CAO is very supportive of the police force and social initiatives. This has improved relations."

"The previous CAO liked operating in siloes. They often pitted groups against each other, such as the police and fire services (for budget dollars)."

"Previously there had been very little effort to inform council. We have initiated more regular briefings. It is helping."

Roles will change when (or if) the new Police Services Act is proclaimed.

"Today, the relationship is contentious, due to the inability of the municipality to do a line-by-line police service budget, and their frustration with this as costs rise."

"Under the new Act, a Municipality will be able to challenge a police budget and propose their own, and so long as it meets service standards, they can take both budgets to OPAC for a ruling. On [lesser functioning] boards, this will be a disaster, but for good ones, this will be a valuable tool."



■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

There is nothing new about the tension between municipalities and police services boards over budgets. While they can reject it whole (a rare occurrence), councils can't tinker with the police budget. And yet they are responsible for levying the taxes that pay for it (and any annual deficits).

As police budgets consume an ever-greater portion of municipal tax revenues, these tensions can only be expected to continue.

The police board is formally independent from council, and yet most of the board is comprised of council members and those appointed by council.

As was viewed in Ottawa during the truck convoy, council can oust the members it appoints from the board when it wants. This undermines the concept that the board is truly independent.

Good relations with their municipalities stem from respect from all parties, and a willingness to share resources without stepping on each others' toes. Municipalities should not interfere with the police and police services board business. On the other hand, while the board considers its responsibility to deliver adequate policing, it is only practical that it should have regard to the ability of the municipality to shoulder budget increases.



Question 8

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT
YOUR CURRENT COMMUNITY
SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PLAN?**

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

The provincial requirement to create a Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan was met with what might have charitably been called differing levels of enthusiasm. Some saw it as *“another box to tick,”* while others hoped it would be a cross-functional planning tool with the potential to enable better service delivery. Still others believed it could lay the groundwork for a reassignment of services among community partners that might bend the cost curve and improve service delivery.

We heard a range of views of the usefulness of the community safety and well-being (CSWB) plans.

Some were skeptical. These tended to be chairs who felt that the board and the service had not been involved in creating the plan.

“Honestly, it was something the board was not involved with. It was brought to us, to ‘ooh’ and ‘ahhh’ at the right moments, and that is it.”

“From my perspective, it sits in a box somewhere. Administration may use it, but it has not come to our board.”

Some think it’s too soon to tell. Many were not sure what would come if it in the end but were nonetheless confident that the process of creating the plan was a good first step.

“It has worked here. The chief believes in the standards being set by the plan and the act. The chief is highly involved, very participatory.”

“The plan is excellent. Just the process of completing the plan was so beneficial to get the social services sector better aligned with other emergency services.”

“The community lens was a game changer. Now it is an example of a best practice.”

Some were positive. Some survey participants suggested the plans will help identify practical supports to help vulnerable populations.

“In the pandemic, we had an [incident that involved vulnerable populations]. The plan was very beneficial in the response to this incident.”

“I wish the Community Safety and Well Being Plan had a stronger presence of mental health and addictions workers, and systems navigators to assist individuals in distress get the supports they need.”

“It was messy, contentious, and many angry individuals spoke out. But we looked at upstream funding for community groups to award grants to organizations. This came from the Community Safety and Well Being Plan project.”



There were concerns about where funding would come from to implement the plans.

"When it comes down to it, it is the same issue we always have – how are we going to get the money to do what we want to do with it?"

"We put so much into that report, and then with the change in government, it went nowhere. We need to aggressively partner with other agencies to engage in the safety of the community."

Other board chairs highlighted the benefit of the CSWB plan in relation to their own strategic planning process.

"It is an important part of our governance and service."

"I don't think police should have carriage over community safety and well-being."

"I don't even know what has happened to the community plan, but I would say that what has come out of it is that the chief understands the issues."

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

As we said in our 2021-2022 CAO Survey that asked similar questions to municipal leaders, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Prevention, however, takes belief, commitment, and a plan.

Now that Community Safety and Well-Being Plans are in place, it will be incumbent on municipalities, police boards, and police leaders to provide continued support and commit to implementation and measurement.

New police services board strategic plans and a fully implemented Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act could provide added momentum to preventative policing initiatives developed in CSWB plans, but political momentum at the municipal and provincial levels of government will also be a necessary ingredient.

Municipal Chief Administrators Perspective on CSWB Plans

StrategyCorp asked a similar question to CAOs about CSWB Plans in our 2022 CAO Survey. Municipalities were tasked by legislation to develop the plans. Not surprisingly, we found a similar mixture of optimism and skepticism about their value so far, and how to make them useful.

The full chapter can be found [here](#) starting on page 57.

Some had high hope and big goals.

- *“One main thing from the Plan is that we want the elimination of systemic racism. It is better to reach for the stars on this issue.”*
- *“Our Plan reimagines what safety means for the community...we are approaching it from an EDI and anti-racism lens.”*

We saw a correlation between the CSWB Plan that were most highly supported, and those that broadly engaged a spectrum of service delivery partners.

- *“The city couldn't do all this work ourselves without community partners ... we really enjoy the boots on the ground approach from these organizations.”*
- *“The process of developing the plan has really stressed the importance of relationships ... a broad spectrum of service entities worked together.”*
- *“[We had a] very good cross-representation of community agencies: policing, enforcement, community partners, health care.”*

The relationship-building, silo-busting work of creating a CSWB Plan is probably as important as the resulting Plan itself.

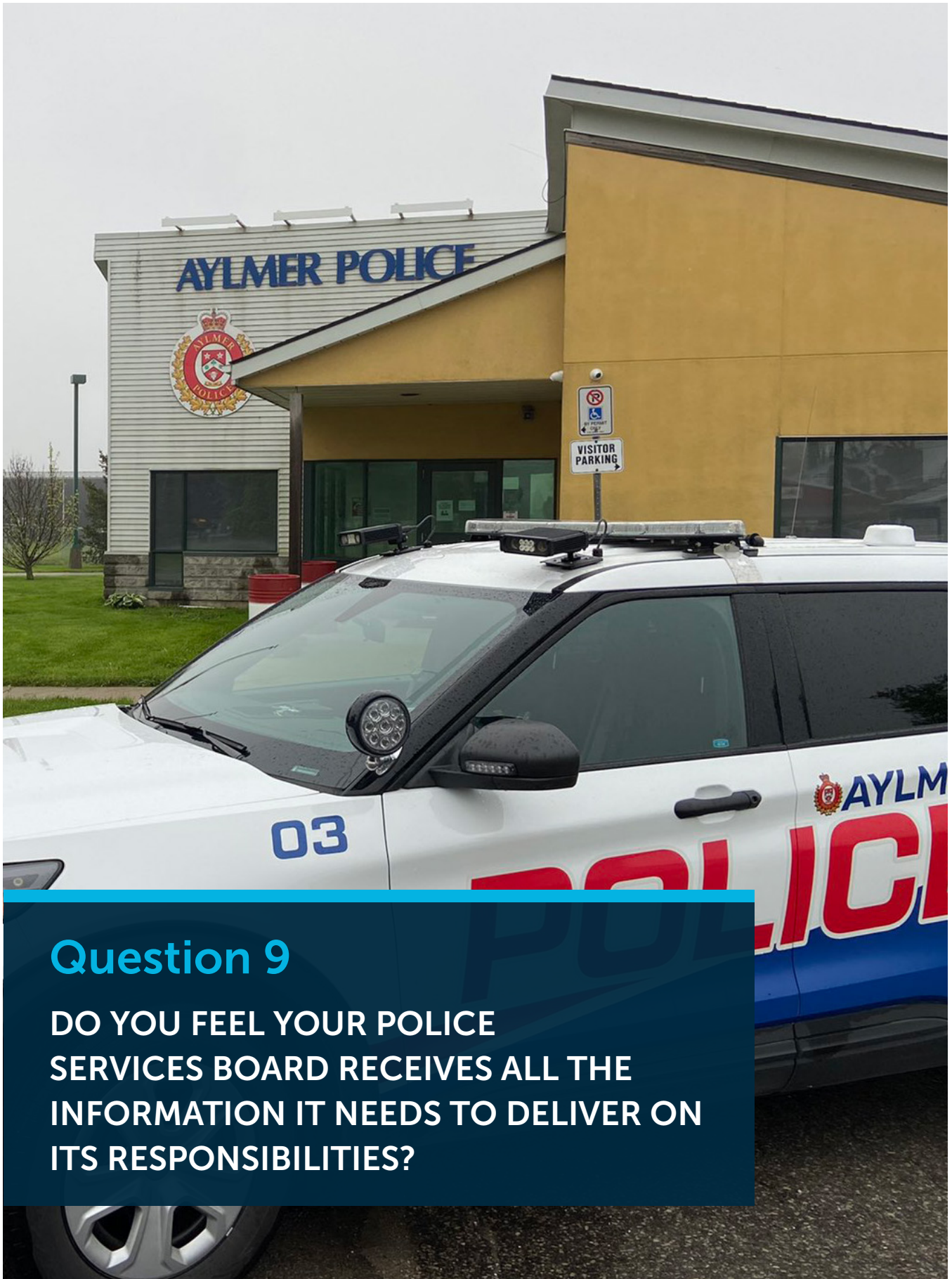
- *“Development of the plan has forced us to work together. It is interesting that this forced and mandatory legislation from the province is forcing us to break silo barriers within and across municipalities and community agencies.”*
- *“Some people interpret the Plan as defunding the police but in reality, it is actually de-tasking rather than defunding.”*

Views were divided on whether plans would be a success.

- *“I think this Plan does matter and will make a difference.”*
- *“To be blunt, I do not envision long-lasting benefits from the Plan.”*

Implementation is key.

- *“If it is a community initiative, who is really responsible for implementing it? Too early to tell how successful the Plan will be.”*
- *“I hope to see lasting benefits. We have this Plan and clear measures, now comes the legwork to work with community agencies to implement the Plan...people like to plan and less to do.”*
- *“To be effective there needs to be a close relationship between the police services and the other service delivery partners [that serve the most vulnerable].”*
- *“Until you put funding on the table, you will be dancing around the issues.”*



Question 9

DO YOU FEEL YOUR POLICE SERVICES BOARD RECEIVES ALL THE INFORMATION IT NEEDS TO DELIVER ON ITS RESPONSIBILITIES?

WHAT WE HEARD...



Many PSB chairs told us they have absolute confidence their police services provide them with all the information they need to make informed decisions.

"I am strongly confident in the data that I receive from the police service. It gives good comparison to other jurisdictions and provides for good trend lines. We are satisfied with it."

"The service knows they need our support to get what they want, so they are great at providing us with data to make decisions. The mutual respect is what drives this."

"Very confident in the data that comes from the police force."

However, a significant number of chairs were somewhat skeptical about the data provided.

"If we ask, we get information and updates. But I don't know what I don't know. It took me a lot of time to figure out how to chair our board."

"There is no way to ensure we are getting the full story."

Several participants noted the risk that chief can present information in a way that "stacks the deck" in favour of his/her preferred course of action.

"[We] receive monthly crime statistics, but these statistics are of limited effect. The chief presents them whatever way he wants."

TMI? Many participants noted that there was almost too much information. The bigger problem was to understand and interpret the information to support strategic decision making. As one participant put it:

"On a month-to-month basis there is a lot of information. But KPIs are not front and centre [for us in doing the work of the board.] There is governance and then there is management. KPIs are for management. If a governing board is too deeply involved in KPIs it is too deep and not really consistent with its strategic role. Our board was very aware of results, and that might be enough there."

Some PSB chairs complained of a lack of resources to support the board's ability to interpret, verify or challenge the information the police services provided them.

"The service gives what they give [and] we do not have the resources to critically go through it. The board and the service are not on the same playing field."

"Many times, the service withholds budgetary information from the municipality due to confidentiality, despite questionable grounds to be withheld for that reason."

And there's not much board chairs feel they can do about it.

"As an employee, the chief should expect if they are withholding information, they face a disciplinary hearing. But I have never heard of a board doing this. There is a real concern about the possible breakdown of this relationship."



Some chairs admitted they often didn't know how to assess the information they receive, or even what to request.

Responses were mixed over whether having more information was more advantageous or not.

"The board and reporting focus too much on [key performance indicators], which are for management, not governance. Data comes with blind spots, regarding gender. We don't have facilities tending to women who are victims of gender-based or sexual violence. We have heard from community groups about this, but when I raise it at the board, I get blank stares."

"We have the information to do the 'what' on the issues, not the 'how', as it is intended to be."

As with so many of the questions we asked, respondents pointed to more formal training to help board members perform their roles more effectively.

"Boards need to know the right questions to ask."

"Sometimes it feels like information overload, but you soon get comfortable. The buck ultimately stops with the board, so it is important for members to be aware of this."

"Every election, AMO does excellent training for new council members. There should be similar training for new PSB members. It takes a while to grasp everything that you need to."

■ STRATEGYCOPR'S PERSPECTIVE:

Having the right information from the police service – and being able to trust that information – is a fundamental requirement for a PSB to be able to function. This information serves as the foundation of accountability.

Hence, it is a problem if the board does not have full confidence in the information it receives from its police service.

Part of the skepticism emerges from an inability to independently verify information provided by the police service. Most boards do not have sufficient resources, through dedicated staff or independent third parties, to support them in interpreting the data they receive. Many don't know the right questions to ask or even what they are legally allowed to request from the police.

There is a similar gap in the opinion on how much information is needed. Some chairs cited the need for more information, while others complained about information overload.

These gaps indicate a lack of consistent reporting standards and guidelines around how police service activities should be measured and held accountable.

Once again, increased training and more resources supporting the work of the board would go a long way to improving accountability and trust.



Question 10

AS A BOARD CHAIR, YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING A BUDGET PROCESS THAT WILL DELIVER ADEQUATE AND EFFECTIVE POLICE SERVICES. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT INFORMATION AND RESOURCES TO FULFILL THAT MANDATE?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

Every year, the police services board must prepare and present a budget. This is perhaps the greatest responsibility a police services board faces in fulfilling its mandate to provide adequate and effective policing.



The first challenge is to make sure the board gets the information it needs. There was an even split among participants between those that are “confident in the budgeting and data information” they receive, and those that worry that they are not getting the full picture from the police service.

“I don’t know what [information] we didn’t have. My instinct was that we were presented with a glossy budget summary. But it never turns into the tough discussions we need to have.”

Assuming the board has access to the necessary information, the second challenge is whether the board has the skills to evaluate it.

“The only time I felt comfortable about the budget was when I hired an external auditor. That was when we went to a zero-based budget. It took a lot of time, but we learned a lot from it. The issue is, it is costly, and we cannot [afford to] do it every budget.”

“I did not have the resources as a board to stand up to the force when needed and [to] propose changes to the budget.”

Some noted that the boards do not receive adequate technical support in the budgetary process.

“If we had a problematic service, would we have the talent to deal with it?”

“Members are not given enough training to adequately comprehend budget issues at the moment.”

As expected, participating chairs had varied and conflicting views about the best approach to conducting a budget process.

“The deputy chief runs the process of getting information from staff. The relationship is proactive so both parties understand what each other accepts, and they work closely together.”

Some chairs noted that the individual character of the chief heavily influence how a budget process plays out.

“Our chief has been really good at maximizing their budget. We have not had one police budget get rejected by the city.”

“Our board and chief are cognizant of protecting the taxpayer. We keep that at the heart of everything we do.”

And that doesn't always work out well.

“The Chief often did not know the inputs for the budget. Oftentimes, the chief would provide no evidence for budgetary inputs.”

“We made it known to the service that last minute, lacking-disclosure budget documents will not be accepted this year.”

Some chairs expressed concern about the perception that the board's role in the budgetary process amounts to little more than a “rubber stamp.” Several participants indicated that they had worked hard to change that belief, but more is needed.

“We need to revitalize our budget process. [We] only meet two-to-three times. I think what we need to do is have quarterly meetings to have some more input.”

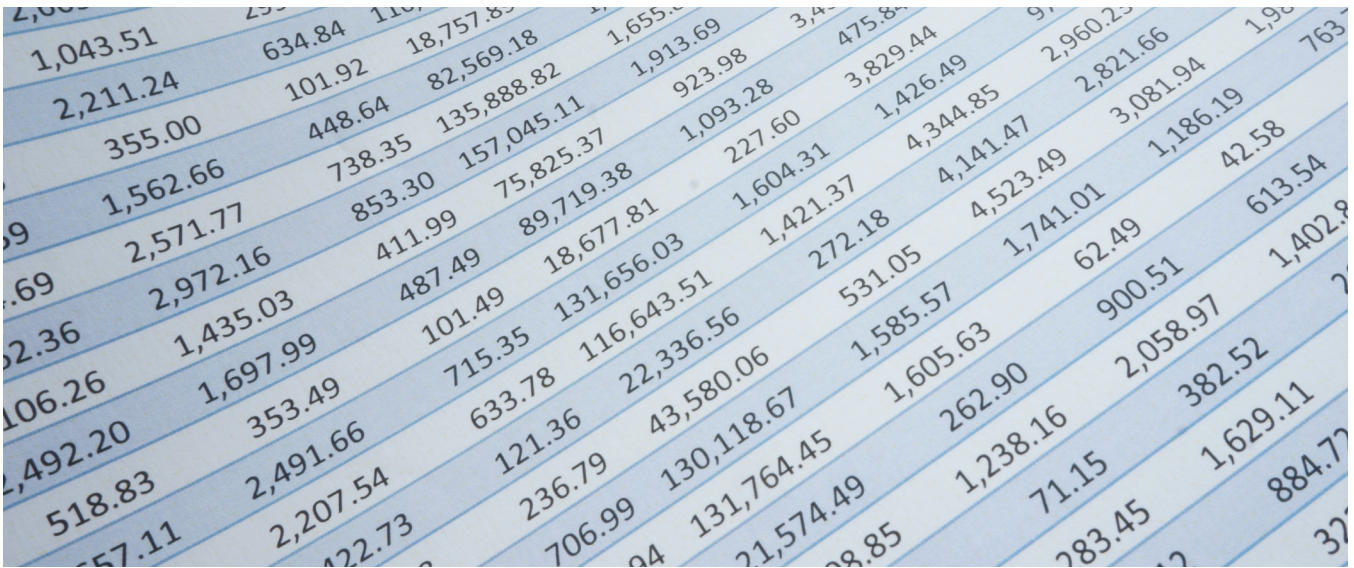
“We used to be treated as a rubber stamp for the budget. I have changed that. The board is very eager on the budget file. They expect from the police service what we get from municipal department as councillors.”

Boards really benefit from having members with strong budgeting skills, who know what questions to ask.

“We go line-by-line ... so we can say to the public that this was a purposeful budget, this was a meaningful budget.”

“We are proactive with budgeting. It was a year-round process that reflected the needs of the community.”





The financial pressure is heightened when other community groups have demands that differ from the police service, such as social service.

"Budget time was very difficult with police budgetary demands. Issues arose when the board sought to meet some of the desires of equity-seeking groups [for mental health supports] and [as a result] the police did not receive their full ask."

Inflation is also not helping when it comes to rising police costs.

"We implemented CPI growth for the budget. It was 0% one year, then 7% the next."

Some chairs observed that the public has strong but varied views on the police budgeting process.

"The public sees the police budget as a target-rich environment for finding funds."

"For the most part, people support the work of the [board]. There are enough people impacted by crime. They desire community policing, but for budgetary reasons we had to abandon these community satellite stations."

"If you have a mediocre meal at a restaurant, you just leave. It isn't like that with the police, there are no in-betweens – people either like them or can't stand them."

Many found the budget process is impacted by the priorities and influences at the provincial and municipal levels.

"There are broad, overall pressures. I would like to not see policing be 50% of our town's budget. But the only way to do this is to look at restructuring. I think we can do more, but it will take people looking beyond municipal boundaries."

"During budget time, the mayor's office tried swaying the provincial appointees. They didn't know when to stand up to the mayor."

"Over 30% of our budget goes to police and [emergency medical services]. This is a response to social issues. The province needs to support us with these ongoing issues that pressure the budget. Support for social issues fall by the wayside because we fund necessary services which strains our means. We lack the funds to deal with the grassroot initiatives."

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

With the public-police relationship being on the front burner now more than ever, the need for intelligent, resourced, and capable police boards to tackle the budgetary process head-on has never been greater.

Municipal financial sustainability is a constant struggle, exacerbated by the mismatch between municipal delivery responsibilities and the relative inadequacy of municipal revenue tools.

The 2022 spike in inflation created a new level of pressure on municipalities and their taxpayers. Police budgets are an increasingly large portion of municipal spending, pressuring other essential services,

Thus, competition for scarce financial resources will only get worse.

While more PSBs seem to be moving away from a rubber-stamping role that used to dominate this budgetary process, they need to be supported and given objective information that is reliable to enter this process.

As we saw in our survey, too many chairs find themselves cross-pressured as to how they can live up to both their "financial oversight" role and their "get the dollar the chief needs" role.

To oversee the service, it must get the numbers, dig into them, and be confident in them.

To get the dollars, it needs to set a budget that provides adequate policing, and successfully sell it to the municipality that must pay for it.

Ensuring confidence in the numbers

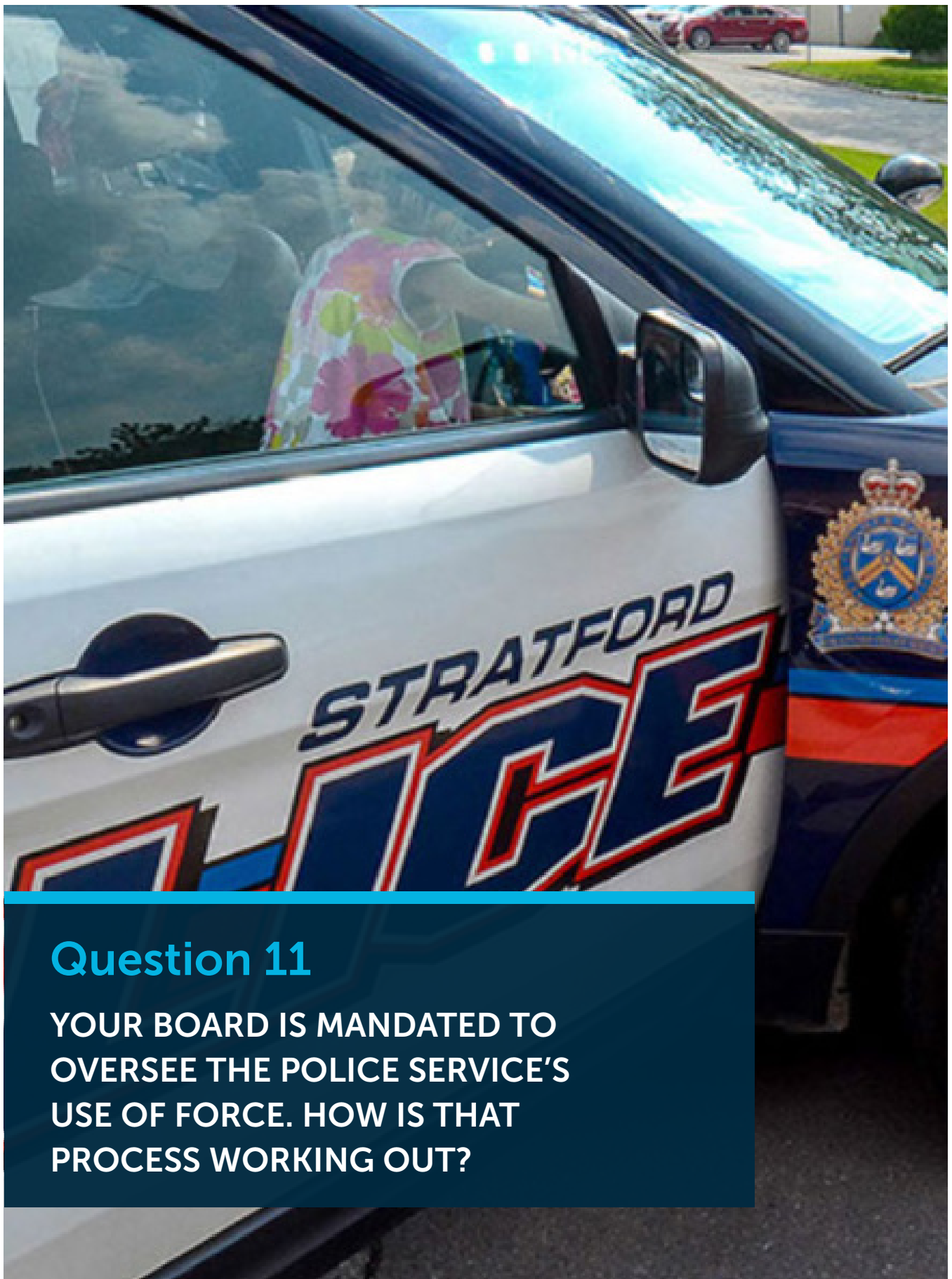
For about half of those we interviewed, there is no concern. For the other half, there is significant concern that they are not getting the information they need.

That needs to be resolved.

Ensuring there is capacity to analyze the numbers.

Once they have the numbers, they need to be able to analyze them. Ensuring a skills-based board is essential to that. Many of the most confident board chairs we spoke to were those who were comfortable in their own capacity to read and analyze a budget. For those without that skill, they relied on colleagues or external supports. Failing that, they were very concerned.

Here is yet another area where chairs point to more training and support that could make the process more transparent and accessible.



Question 11

YOUR BOARD IS MANDATED TO OVERSEE THE POLICE SERVICE'S USE OF FORCE. HOW IS THAT PROCESS WORKING OUT?

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

Police services boards are responsible for reviewing use-of-force reports at the local level and providing strategic direction on these issues. We heard that boards across Ontario are having mixed experiences with this important role.

Some chairs reported that their use-of-force policies are effective and working well.

"We get good information."

"There are strong reporting mechanisms, and the province is really starting to lead this charge."

"We get our use-of-force report, and quite frankly, it is an insignificant issue for us, it is very minimal. If there were any red flags, I didn't see them. The report is good at explaining the reasons for use-of-force."

"Received a complete review on use-of-force policies, which were approved by the Board. In our municipality, it is 'serve and protect,' not 'beat and punish.' Our incidents of complaints are minimal, and I am quite proud of that."

Others expressed concerns with the reliability and validity of the data that they receive. The primary worry is that the use-of-force metrics used to hold the police service to account comes from the service itself.

"We have an active policy. It says all the right things, but the biggest issue was we don't know what we don't know."

"You think of how much reporting is from the officer themselves, when recalling from a heightened situation it can be a difficult situation."

"It is a routine function – it doesn't get a lot of attention. You must rely on the people giving you the information. I [still] think use-of-force reporting is a good thing."

Other chairs felt that there is not enough training for board members on use-of-force generally. This is impeding the effectiveness of the reporting because members don't fully understand the standards, reporting practices, or other relevant information.

"There are members who still think a 'bullyish' police presence is needed, but this is contrary to community policing. We are leading these individuals and letting them know it is not acceptable."

"We have identified [training] as a need. The provincial regulations will change it, but we are already on it."

"We are having a full-day workshop to educate board members on use of force matters and training."

Body-worn cameras are becoming an extra accountability tool. Some chairs noted that use-of-force oversight efforts are strengthened with the widespread implementation of body-worn cameras.

"Once body cameras were implemented, we got all that information too."

"We are investing in body-worn cameras. Analysis of input will be critical, and this chief and leadership believe this service is good for the community."

"Our board and leadership feel it is an investment worth making."

■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

The use of force has become one of the most contentious subjects of public debate when it comes to policing and public safety. Recognizing this as an issue, the provincial government has mandated the collection of race-based data for all use-of-force reporting.

Boards have flexibility in setting a policy for reporting that is appropriate to the needs of their own community. Many boards have not taken advantage of this flexibility to develop their own tailored approach.

While this is welcome oversight by many groups, there is some concern about the transparency of police use-of-force reporting as it comes directly from the police service itself. Many chairs have reservations about this process. Although they don't necessarily believe they are being given incomplete, misleading, or untruthful reporting, the current process leaves open the possibility of data manipulation.

Many boards are taking comfort in the fact that body-worn cameras are being implemented for their front-line officers. Many studies indicate that the wearing of the cameras is associated with a reduction of police use-of-force overall. And for groups that have historically had troubled interactions with police, body worn cameras can provide a layer of confidence when dealing with officers.

With board training on use of force soon becoming a mandated fixture of PSB member training, and technological advances increasing police accountability in the field, many concerns that our participating chairs noted seem slated for improvement in the months and years to come.



Question 12

**WHAT ARE THE THREE
THINGS THAT KEEP YOU
UP AT NIGHT?**

■ WHAT WE HEARD...

Every year, we end our survey of CAOs by asking them what keeps them at night. In keeping with that tradition, that's how we ended our Police Services Board Chair Survey, too.

One participant was able to tell us that their board is very much on the right track.

"Nothing significantly worries me, none of our problems are earth shattering. I sleep comfortably at night knowing we are making progress in key areas and inserting ourselves in areas where we are supposed to be."

But from what you told us about the challenges involved in chair a board, the response could quite rightly have been, "What doesn't?"

The overarching worry we heard was whether boards were keeping the goal of protecting everyone – from the most vulnerable members of society to those on the front lines – at the core of their decision-making.

"How do we make this about the people we serve, about community safety?"

We were struck by how deeply you care about the role you undertook, but also how difficult it can be to navigate. Not surprisingly, the problems specific to your board over which you're losing sleep echo what you told us at the start of the survey about the challenges facing all boards in the in next few years.

Again, these concerns fall under three broad areas: the challenges of policing the community, the challenges of resourcing the service, and the challenge of leading the police services board.

Here's what we heard.



On the challenges of policing the community and the changing nature of crime

While chairs take their governance roles very seriously, they are also deeply concerned about the health and well-being of the individuals they oversee, and the changing issues they face.

They worry about the increase in the rate and complexity of crime.

“The level of violent crime, gun and gang activity we see in the community.”

“It used to be a big city problem. but it is on our doorstep now.”

“I worry for the families who face violent crime and how we address this.”

[The increase in] cybercrime and [the inability to control] misinformation.”

“How do we find a way to deal with poverty and addictions in a way that is not police-first?”

“You fear something will happen in the community, but you will not be prepared.”

Given the record number of police officers killed in the line of duty over the past year, many are kept awake thinking about the well-being of service members.

“Officer safety is my number one concern.”

“I worry about the safety of the officers.”

[Given the concern about recent incidents of violence against officers] “is the paperwork of after use-of-force events a deterrent” [to officers properly protecting themselves]?

At the same time, we heard that many participants worried about how some officers deal with members of the public, especially those from minority groups.

[There was an instance where] “I did not feel the degree of force I saw used was warranted. Not necessary. It resulted in a preventable death. I was worried to take this on because of potential community and police backlash at the board.”

“I listened to what the community said [about use of force against minorities by police] and I didn’t disagree. Change is difficult and there is a ‘thin blue line.’”

On the challenges of resourcing the police service

While the compensation and other policing costs continue to rise, it is also becoming more difficult to attract new recruits. Chairs are worried their services *“are not going in the right direction”* on either of these fronts, and they don’t know how their boards will be able to keep their police services financially sustainable.

“The service is not going in the right direction from financial perspective.”

“Trying to figure out where the next dart is going to come from, especially in a town where many care about low taxes.”

“Managing the budget and the [high cost of policing relative to] total municipal revenue.”

[Managing the disruption of] “a potential OPP costing.”

Whether boards will be able to hire enough new recruits was a worry for many.

“The service is not going in the right direction from a HR lens.”

“Whether we can keep enough officers on the job with officers out on [leave] and the challenge of hiring new cadets.”

“The competition for talent -- HR challenges, the need to recruit [a significant number of] officers in the next three years.”

On leading an effective police services board

We heard that many chairs are losing sleep worrying about whether their boards are living up to their responsibilities to the people of their municipalities, especially when the legislative structure and processes appear at time to hinder those efforts.

“My biggest concern? The board itself and the obligations of being chair. Not just the time, but educating board members, and ensuring that the board functions with good governance and integrity and setting [the right] governance vision. It is a huge responsibility.”

“Ensuring that the board functions with good governance and integrity.”

Many chairs stay up worrying about the board’s relations with the province. It’s the province that writes legislation overseeing boards, sets out the details -- or lack thereof -- of their mandates, and makes appointments to the boards under an opaque process.

“I had no trust in our relationship with the Ministry. [When we asked for guidance] it was influenced by their agenda.”

“The inability of our political structure to understand just how serious PSB-related governance matters are. [Decisions from the province] are decisions being made out of convenience, and that frightens me.”

Frustration was expressed repeatedly over data and the lack of expert resources for boards to fulfill their oversight mandate. We heard many don’t feel they have the information to discharge their role.

“Knowing that there is a lot that we don’t know.”

“The expectations placed on the Board to change the wrongs under the system. The board is toothless, we don’t have the power to change these things.”

“The board approves the plan, but it is initiated by the force.”

And some told us that their role in HR matters kept them up.

“The process of selecting another chief. I do not have confidence in the board for the chief selection process. Hiring a chief is a profound area of impact for PSBs, and it is a major decision.”

“I don’t like when I feel [discipline of an officer] is too light, or the public feels it is too light, but it is also difficult when we have to [terminate the employment] of somebody.”



■ STRATEGYCORP'S PERSPECTIVE:

The 20 participants who have taken part in StrategyCorp's survey have provided keen insight and critical observations of the many challenges facing Ontario's police services boards. There was an eagerness to continue to serve and support community safety.

We thank them for all that they do, and for their contribution to this Survey.

We look forward to continuing to support progress in this important area of public service.

■ ENDNOTES

¹ Government of the United Kingdom. (2012, Dec. 10), FOI release: Definition of policing by consent, Home Office.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/policing-by-consent/definition-of-policing-by-consent>

² Mukerjee, A., et al., "Building Trust through Bold Action: Roadmap for real change."(2023), 14.

³ See, for example "OPP Community Satisfaction Survey." (2022)

⁴ MacKay, John. Systemic Racism in Policing in Canada: Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. (2021), 1.

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/SECU/Reports/RP11434998/securp06/securp06-e.pdf>

⁵ Mukerjee, A., et al., Op. Cit., 14.

⁶ See for example Connolly, W. E. *The Terms of Political Discourse* (2nd ed), (Princeton: 1983), 11 – 13. Connolly describes how in our common use of the term "politics" there are at least eight different meanings. Thus, referring to something as "political" could mean anything from "policies backed by the legally binding authority of government" to a "political decision" as "the extent to which decision outcomes affect the interests, wishes or values of particular segments of the population."

⁷ The Police Services Act (1990) is to be repealed upon the proclamation of the Community Safety and Policing Act (2019). As of the date of publication (May 2023), this has not yet occurred, although it is forecast for 2024.

⁸ Rouleau, Paul S. Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency Public Order Emergency Commission, Vol. 2.: Analysis. (2023), 268.

⁹ Ibid, 267.

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