



Ontario Police Service Board Chair Survey 2026

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

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Dedication

This survey is dedicated to the **Honourable John Wilson Morden** whose landmark review of policing, the *Independent Civilian Review into Matters Relating to the G20 Summit*, provided guidance for Ontario's new policing legislation. Justice Morden's work continues to resonate through police governance in Ontario via the efforts of Police Service Board Chairs.

Introduction

Leadership on Police Governance

Focusing on the civilian police leaders that oversee municipal police services, this report captures the current views of Ontario's police service board chairs.

Since 2016, StrategyCorp has conducted annual surveys of public sector executives across Ontario. Through confidential interviews, our reports showcase the voices of senior public sector administrators with a degree of protection that allows for greater candour when discussing the top issues that are influencing their organizations, and the political landscape of their local communities. These reports serve as a pulse check on the issues shaping Ontario communities.

As the effects of economic uncertainty and shifting geopolitical dynamics increasingly play out at the local level, this report gives voice to the leaders navigating these challenges as they relate to public safety.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This year, we conducted 24 interviews with police service board chairs from across Ontario. We spoke to chairs with a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds: some are mayors or local councillors, while others are provincial appointees with extensive backgrounds in community and business leadership. Regardless of background, the chairs were all grappling with a new legislative framework and police budgets facing operational and political scrutiny.

Interviewees were posed three sets of questions focusing on governance, service budgeting and leadership, and community relations.



Executive Summary

The new *Community Safety and Policing Act* had yet to be proclaimed when we completed our last survey of municipal police service board chairs in 2023. Now, two years after the CSPA was proclaimed, we are revisiting police service board chairs from across Ontario to check in on their expanded roles, current challenges and hopes for the future of policing.

Chairs have been working hard over the past two years to meet the new CSPA standards for police board governance. This work has led to enhanced governance practices, improved best practices, and better Board-Chief relationships in many cases. However, each board is at a different stage in their journey of compliance with the new Act, and all are waiting to see where the Inspectorate of Policing will provide additional guidance. Overall, there is a general sense that the legislation provides an appropriate framework for the important role of civilian police oversight.

In the following chapters, we will explore the candid comments of chairs. We look at the biggest issues affecting their role; the governance and accountability improvements being undertaken; police budget management and leadership through strategic planning and the relationships with chiefs of police; their service's connection to the community; and, finally, what keeps them up at night.

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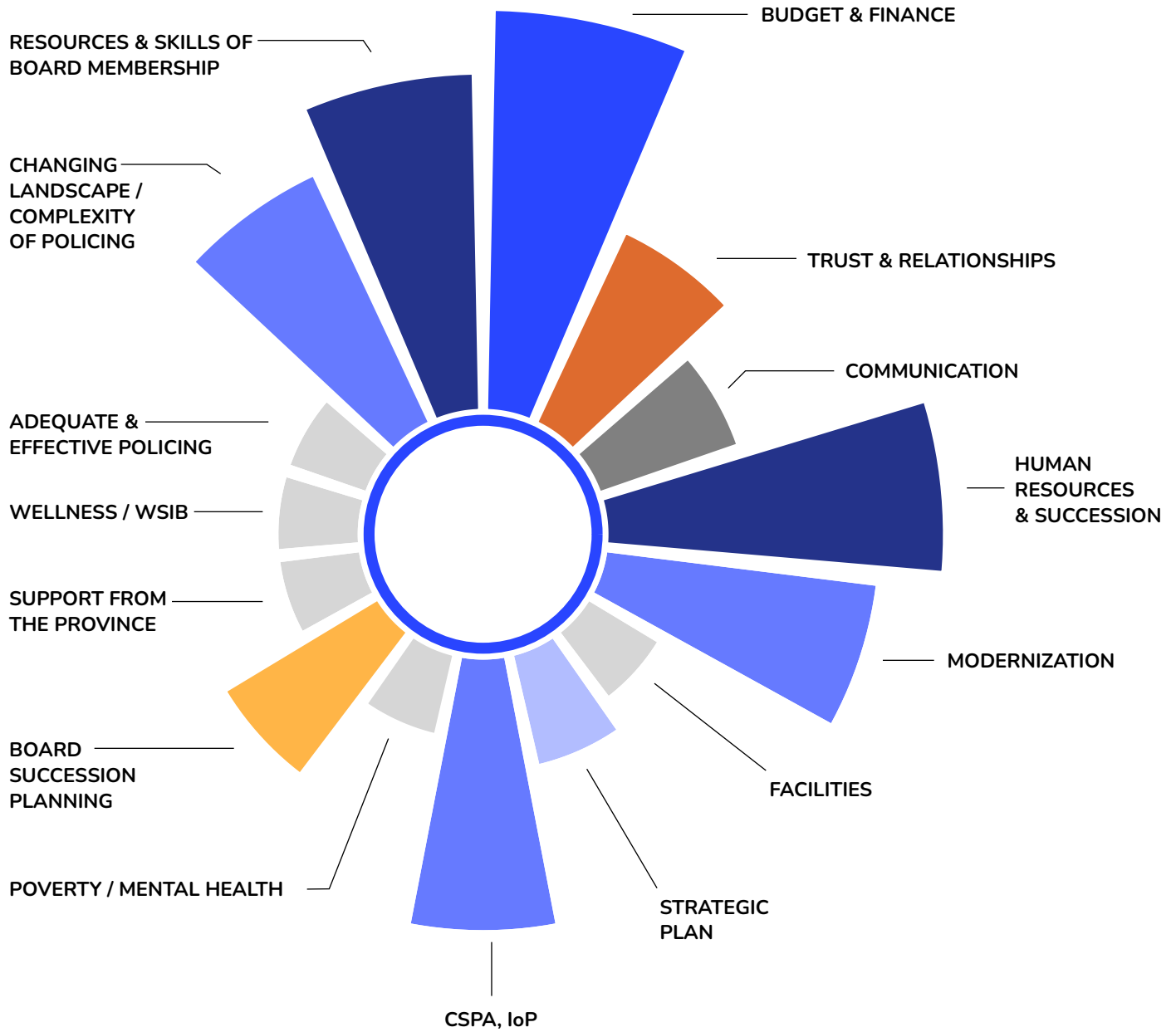
An oil painting depicting a professional meeting. Five individuals are seated around a large, polished wooden conference table. On the left, two men in dark suits are seen from the back and side. In the center, a man in a light blue shirt sits with his hands clasped, looking towards the right. On the right, a woman in a white blouse and a man in a dark suit are also seen from the back and side. The table is covered with papers, a glass of water, and a pen. The background features a large window with a view of a building and a green plant on the left. The overall style is expressive and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a warm, golden light reflecting off the table.

SECTION

01

The biggest factors affecting
police service boards

What do you see as the three biggest factors affecting your police service board in the next five years?



What We Heard

The chairs we spoke to described a more complex and demanding environment for police governance. They identified five pressures affecting their boards most directly: rising budget demands, human resource challenges, board readiness and capacity, changing public trust, and the growing complexity of crime.

BUDGET PRESSURES

Securing a municipally approved budget allocation is one of the most important jobs of a police services board. More than any other issue, the budget was highlighted by chairs as a key pressure for their boards.

“Police budgets for municipalities have been increasingly challenging and understanding the role the police services board has in that discussion.”

“I could likely just say finances, finances, finances.”

A police service board must ensure that the budget allocated by the municipality can meet the adequacy standards in the CSPA. To support this, boards rely on the expertise and presentation skills of their chiefs of police, as well as the goodwill of their municipal councils to facilitate a cooperative budget-making process. If the budget process becomes strained, it can weaken the relationships needed for effective police governance and make it more challenging for boards to secure the funding required to meet CSPA requirements.

“I think we’re going to face continuous budget pressures over the next five years, and that will impact the relationship with the chief and the relationship with the city as we go through the budget cycles ... we’re looking at different ways of trying to understand the long-term viability of the service in terms of budget planning processes.”

Costs are going up: Chairs also made it clear that policing in 2026 is expensive, even when budget processes function as they should.

The growing complexity of crime places significant pressure on capital budgets. The specialized tools required to respond to crime, and the time needed to investigate and prevent it all have high costs.

“... those investments in capital, technology [are] very much growing faster than municipal revenue ... that’s been really tough on our budgeting process ... we are very behind on a lot of things.”

Bending the cost curve: Sometimes these costs can be reduced by smart organizational decisions or cost-share partnerships between multiple police services, but there is only so much that can be done to bend the cost curve.

Many police services will face pressure to keep cost increases low. Those political pressures can come at different points in the municipal political cycle, but they often only delay inevitable increases needed to serve the community.

“We had a bunch of years where we didn’t increase our funding envelope to where it should have been, and now we’re trying to play catch up.”

“We can’t keep coming back with big financial asks. I mean, that’s affecting taxpayers.”

Provincial funding may be needed: Increasingly, local boards are turning their eyes to the province and wondering when more help will come, particularly with the new CSPA in force.

“It’s great to have the new act. It’s great to have these expectations and compliances, but if [the Province doesn’t] back it up with money, it’s not going to happen.”

HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGES

People are the lifeblood of our police services. Our previous survey highlighted major challenges in recruitment. Some of those pressures seem to be addressed. For example, the Ontario Government funded the Answer the Call campaign, and chairs mentioned there have been stronger recruitment strategies from local services.

But with more new recruits, services are getting younger, creating a new challenge in terms of allocating the right resources and mentorship for promotions, and a gap in training, for senior positions.

“We have to be alert to ... either retirements or contracts ending at the chief and the deputy chief levels. But more importantly, that we have a pipeline in place within the service for promotions.”

Some identified the risk of police service civilian corporate positions being receiving a higher salary than peers in the municipality. These pressures could force some difficult staffing and organizational decisions by boards in justifying the higher costs.

“You’re overpaid by being a civilian at the police department versus what we could have if the city delivered this corporate service.”

BOARD READINESS AND CAPACITY GAPS

While new policing legislation took significant time to be developed at Queen’s Park, once it came into force in 2024 timelines were tight for board compliance.

“The act was pretty much dropped upon us. And we had a very small window in which to do the necessary continuing education that was required to be on the board and continue to attend meetings.”

While most chairs indicated that mandatory CSPA training requirements had been completed or were expected to be completed soon, fulfilling the broader requirements of the Act is not a matter of just checking off training modules. The CSPA imposes ongoing governance duties and skillsets that test board members from meeting to meeting and crisis to crisis.

Several chairs expressed concern that some new board members may not fully understand the scope of these responsibilities or have the skills and preparation required to carry them out effectively.



“I’m not saying the people that we’ve got on these boards are not dedicated. They are, or they wouldn’t bother. However, they are not prepared and I’m not sure they understand the enormity of what they’ve taken on. This is a real turning point in police governance.”

“I’m not certain that people who are appointed to these boards understand their responsibilities under the CSPA that are different than the Police Services Act.”

“I’m very concerned about people who are brought to the board and who aren’t prepared to work and are scared off by the responsibilities ... For instance, if something happened at the courthouse, it would land right at our feet if somebody was injured. I don’t think anybody comes to a board recognizing that you have to make sure that court security is adequate and effective.”

Board chairs projected a real sense of duty throughout the interviews, yet also a concern about how to maintain the increasing expectations on governance. The new expectations are being guided by the Inspectorate of Policing (IoP). Many chairs suggested the IoP is providing helpful guidance and support, suggesting that any worries are just the growing pains of a new organization.

ABOUT THE INSPECTORATE OF POLICING

The Inspector General serves the public interest by promoting accountability in the policing sector, operating at arm’s length from the government.

They provide regulatory oversight to ensure compliance with the Community Safety and Policing Act and its regulations. The Inspector General ‘may make an order requiring a police service board or the Commissioner to ensure adequate and effective policing is provided in an area if he or she finds that adequate and effective policing is not being provided in the area or that an emergency exists in the area.’ - Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019

“... they’re still trying to build their own organization, and I think get their feet under them.”

Some, however, worried about a heavy-handed approach that limit local input and decision-making on solutions.

“They are sucking the life out of the room with these particular changes ... and everything that we’re hearing ... it’s only going to get worse.”

All of this change in governance leads to the question: are boards provided with enough resources to fulfill their governance obligations?



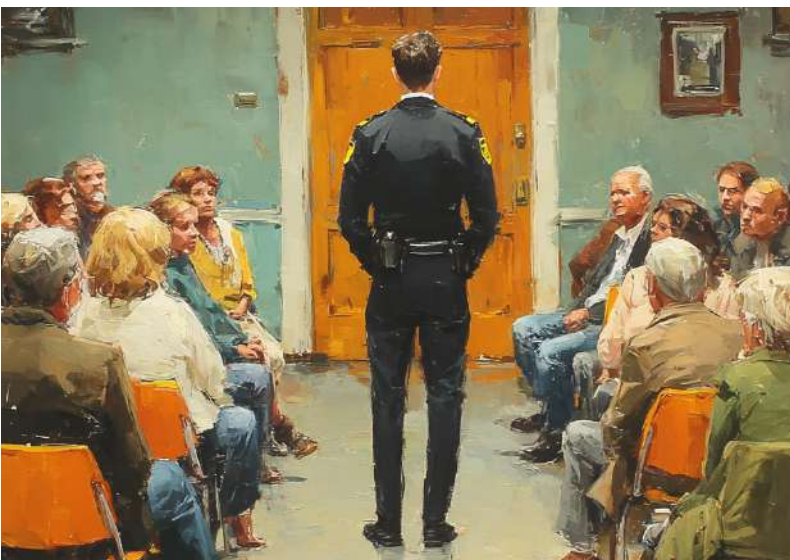
Smaller boards face resource challenges.

“We are not resourced currently to handle the requirements of these changes. It is going to require ... a significant amount of money for us to beef up on the staff side to support the board.”

There is a distinct resource divide between the Big 12 boards and other municipal police boards in Ontario. The Big 12 have staff and consulting budgets to support their boards that is too often lacking in smaller services.

PUBLIC TRUST IN POLICING

The Declaration of Principles is at the very start of the CSPA. It is a reminder that, although rules and regulations are essential, trust remains a prerequisite for effective public safety.



DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Section 1 of the CSPA states:

Policing shall be provided throughout Ontario in accordance with the following principles:

1. The need to ensure the safety and security of all persons and property in Ontario, including on First Nation reserves.
2. The importance of safeguarding the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Code.
3. The need for co-operation between policing providers and the communities they serve.

The importance of respect for victims of crime and understanding of their needs.
4. The need for sensitivity to the pluralistic, multiracial and multicultural character of Ontario society.
5. The need to be responsive to the unique histories and cultures of First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities.
6. The need to ensure that police services and police service boards are representative of the communities they serve.
7. The need to ensure that all parts of Ontario, including First Nation reserves, receive equitable levels of policing.



“For an incident like [what] happened in Toronto with the [Project South] revelations, it just feels like all of policing has to now regain ground.”

“That relationship, that trust piece is important.”

The board chairs we spoke to generally reaffirmed that trust in local policing remains strong in their communities. At the same time, they understood trust differently. For some, trust was rooted in public engagement; including surveys and community outreach that give residents a voice and show that boards are listening. For others, trust depended on the working relationships between the chief, the board, and the municipality, that are essential to effective police governance.

“I think we constantly are trying to ensure there’s integrity and a public belief in the role and [we] try and ensure that is retained.”

“That public support for policing is so key. You know, public polling is so high on policing, but there’s just a higher standard with the work that police do in some cases.”

“Not to say we’ve lacked public trust in our community, but we’ve certainly built it up a little bit.”

For other chairs, they acknowledged events can refocus the need to build up that trust and belief across the system.

“We’ve gone through a lot in a brief period of time, ... and I think that’s caused some relationship issues, trust issues, that, first and foremost, we need to work at.”

Police are operating in an environment where traditional authority is being questioned more openly. As citizens receive information from more sources with varying levels of credibility, trust in institutions can weaken. For command-and-control organizations like police services, this makes preserving public trust and legitimacy an important priority.

“[The police] role in the community is now a question mark. It’s not what it was historically ... people have taken a stand against historical figures of authority. People are questioning priests and school teachers and police. Their role in the community is, I’m going to say, in transition.”

Citizens are protesting again. We have seen communities across Ontario face challenging protests as global geopolitical ruptures ripple through communities.

“The IoP was talking about the number of investigations they’re doing on protests, like [the amount] you would [be doing] in the 1960s, ... I think that’s going to be another massive thing ... people are getting politically activated again.”

“There’s new more progressive police forces that are saying, and getting direction to say, we’re community-based, we respond to the community. So I think we’re going to see big changes in what police look like in the next decade.”

THE GROWING COMPLEXITY OF CRIME

Ontario communities are constantly changing. The diversity of the GTA and our major cities is reaching more communities. These changes bring opportunity to enhance public safety informed by more diverse perspectives.

“The demographics and the face of the community is changing. There will be tension in that in that regard.”

These pressures are not limited to population change. Chairs also pointed to the unpredictability of the public safety issues now facing their communities, from hate crime to opioids to emerging forms of crime.

“The landscape is changing on a weekly, monthly basis. We have a high hate crime rate. We have an opioid problem that changes monthly. To think that I’m equipped, or anyone is, to see what the future is going to bring us is foolhardy.”

Growing communities present new challenges. Criminal activity is no longer confined by municipal boundaries, and technology-enabled crime can affect communities regardless of size or geography. This raises concerns about whether services have the long-term tools, staffing, and capital investments to respond to these challenges.

“The complexity and the sophistication of crime leads to wondering if we have the technology - in addition to the person power - to meet the needs for what people see to be safety in the community.”

“That complexity socially and in crime is underlying everything. The issues around violent crime and hate crime are ... every service will face that, and it comes up in smaller services, maybe less frequently, but it will increasingly happen.”



SECTION
02

Board Governance
and Oversight



What We Heard

“It’s not a coffee club anymore.”

Our first group of questions invited participants to explain how police board governance and oversight are evolving under the CSPA.

The need for trusted information: As in our previous survey, Board Chairs are focused on ensuring they have the information they need to fulfill their responsibilities. Participants described a governance environment that has become more demanding and complex, requiring deeper engagement with reporting, stronger oversight practices, and greater personal effort from board members.

- While some participants expressed confidence in the information provided by their services, others identified challenges related to information overload, inconsistent communication, uncertainty regarding the limits of the board’s role, and the difficulty of navigating the policy–operations distinction embedded in the legislation.

The need to maintain up-to-date policies: The CSPA put new expectations on boards to maintain policy. Virtually every participant commented on just how big a job that is.

- Some participants, typically those with support dedicated to the board, are confident in their approach to that task. Others report lower levels of readiness, acknowledging they still have outdated policies, incomplete compliance work, and uncertainty regarding the application of provincial requirements in local contexts.

The need to monitor compliance with policy:

Participants discussed the challenges of implementing and monitoring adherence to policies, including gaps in audit processes, quality assurance mechanisms, and ongoing oversight capacity.

- Policy is only of use if it is enforced. Again, we heard varying levels of comfort with the task.

The theme that unites it all is resourcing and institutional capacity. Participants discussed the varying levels of administrative, legal, financial, and policy support available to boards, along with concerns regarding compensation, succession planning, and the sustainability of relying on volunteer members to oversee increasingly complex policing organizations. Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized that effective governance depends not only on legislation and policy frameworks, but also on sufficient institutional support, standardized guidance, and strong working relationships between boards and police leadership.



2.1 Service to Board Information Sharing

Some Chairs expressed overall confidence that they are well informed and have the information they need to discharge their responsibilities.

“I feel well informed.”

“Overall, I would say yes, because the service does provide us with reports on work, all the reports that are required on a yearly basis. The chief is very open with the board. The chief has very good communications with all board members, including myself as the chair. So we can anticipate issues that are coming to board meetings ... I just think there’s a requirement for greater depth in reports that come to the board, for the board to properly examine trends and do its oversight function.”

Those expressing this confidence come from services of every size. Similarly, those who doubt how well they are informed come from services of every size.



“The advantage that smaller services and boards have is a more intimate relationship or closer relationship with the chief and the deputy. I think some of the larger services, perhaps the communication doesn’t flow as easily.”

Positives of scale include the quality and scope of professional support for the board, and the back-office support that the service has to prepare and communicate relevant data in a digestible form to support decision-making and oversight.

Negatives of scale include the sheer complexity of how much there is to know about the range and scope of operations.

Some think they are well informed but maintain some lingering doubts.

“I believe we are, but I have nothing else to benchmark it against.”

“My view is yes, we’re well informed, but there is always a better way to present the information. I think the board is not necessarily given the depth of information that is required.”

“So we know what we know, we don’t know what we don’t know. Right?”

It takes effort, and many report that with the growing responsibilities of the CSPA, they have made efforts to improve their access to information.

“Yes, [we have adequate information] but it didn’t come easily and it’s [still] not complete, but we’re getting there.”

“We’ve beefed up our reporting structure and the amount of what is in our reports and the types of reports we’re getting for the other board members that don’t spend as much time.”

“[Our] PSB has deliberately engineered its information environment to support genuine governance rather than ceremonial oversight. The Chief and executive team provide substantive data-rich briefings. We receive regular reports across the force, public complaints, special investigation unit matters, hate and bias crimes, missing persons, and persons at risk, all published transparently on our website. Our standing committees allow members to engage in in-depth matters before matters come to the full board. The quality of information we receive is strong. Our ongoing work is ensuring that information is structured to drive decisions, not just document activity.”

Many note that, in addition to improved procedures, it also takes time and effort that goes well beyond simply reading the board materials.

“I take it upon myself to be as informed as possible.”

“I’m not just walking into the board meeting and relying on what’s presented in the package.”

“I have a lot of pre-conceived knowledge just based on conversations with the chief, the deputy ...”

“It doesn’t just happen by reading the new act or reading the reports, statistical reports, etc. It’s just that repetitious exposure that suddenly you realize a broader context, the nuances, and wanting to respect the balance of understanding the details, which are often necessary to really get a comprehensive picture so you can determine an outcome or contribute to an outcome on a certain issue.”

Many credit the service for delivering what the board needs, in a usable form, on time and to the level of quality needed to support the oversight and leadership function of the board.

“If I’m not, it’s not because of the chief’s failure. It’s just that inherent need to understand this very complex sector.”

Others are not satisfied with the information they get.

“I know I got lots of information. Now, some of it is contracts, but I’m reading for a board meeting 150 to 200 pages for both our open and our closed agendas.”

“When I first started, I found that it was death by information.”

But they do not all identify the same causes of the problem.

A few believe that their service intentionally obstructs board access to needed information:
We listened to board chairs who feel like their legitimate questions are evaded:

“The natural dynamic where the administration often wants to just give the board the least amount of information possible to make the decision.”

“It’s almost like they don’t want to be pinned down.”

“[The service can] show how all of the stats ... can get right down to the second on dispatching and calls for service and how we’re a data-centric organization. And then when it comes to the board, the data is not as robust and it’s a bit of an opposite story.”

“Not always ... there is the requirement to push back and half the time it really is picking your battles. What areas do I need to push and press with the administration to get what you need?”

Some put the blame on the inability of the Board to properly articulate its questions and stressed the importance of knowing what to ask. One noted the difference between information that is provided as a matter of course, versus information that is only provided at request.

“I never feel like information is withheld when there’s direction given, but that direction would need to be given in order to get a full and complete picture.”

The participant went on to emphasize this was another instance of the need for Board training: the service will faithfully answer appropriate questions, but only if the board knows to ask. So, board members had better know what to ask.

CHALLENGE OF THE BOARD ROLE

Chairs did not only point to the service side of the equation. Many focused on:

- the inherent challenges of the role, and
- the fitness of board members to discharge it.

The challenge of civilian oversight over police is not for everyone: One challenge of the role is that it forces a lay member of the public to adopt a role and fulfill a function that is at odds with the normal inherent power balance between the uniformed police and civilians.

“There’s good people on the board, but it’s fairly weak because they’re just not sure exactly what they can and can’t do. And you’re talking to guys who walk into the room carrying guns, so there’s just a natural predisposition to accept ... It’s a visible power imbalance in some ways.”

The duties and limits of the role are complicated

As is common with most boards, there is a structural imbalance and disparity in expertise between the Board and management.

“I’ve come from a fairly strong background in [broader public sector] governance and my own agency operations ...there’s still so much to know about how you equip a board and an organisation effectively.”

The normal disparity in strategic and operational leadership is exacerbated by the specific limitations on the police board role imbedded in the CSPA.

As is our last survey, we heard that it remains a challenge to navigate the policy-operations dichotomy.

Board members doubt their own ability to navigate the difference between “what do I think I need to know but have not been told yet by my service” versus “what do I think I need to know but that I am not supposed to know because of provincial policy.”

“If you don’t think you’ve got the information, who do you call? Is it interference in terms of asking for that information? Or do you just show your ignorance at a meeting and then realise that, well, actually a number of us are trying to sort that out too, or are you going down a rabbit hole that you don’t actually have the right to go down? But nevertheless, if you have established a really good working relationship with the current chief then no question is too stupid and his lines of communication are always open.”

BOARD COMPOSITION

The predisposition of board members and their attitudes to the role of police oversight:

Some appointees are attracted to serving in the position because of their support for police and policing. This is only a problem if it interferes with their ability to discharge their statutory oversight function.

“I think some people get on these boards and they kind of fanboy over cops.”

“Maybe this is the first time in their life they’re hearing terms like ‘use of force’ or they’re hearing about how an intimate partner violent situation was handled by the police officer and it’s salacious.”

“I know historically, even on our board, there’s been that, ‘Wow, could I see your gun again? That’s so cool’, you know?”

“Luckily on our board everybody is [...] kind of sophisticated.”

“It’s not a skill-based board.”

The selection of board members presents challenges.

By statute, the Board combines provincial and municipal appointees who are required to come together to perform their function. This is not always easy.

“We’ve got a very interesting marriage of municipality and individuals that come from disparate backgrounds together, trying to do what’s best for that community.”

“You actually don’t pick the partners [at the board table]. So it requires a heightened commitment to, listen, understand, work together which very fortunately we’ve had in the persons that have been selected or appointed and those that have been assigned as municipal representatives.”

Boards membership is not constructed through the lens of is skills matrix.

“They’ll call me and say, what’s this item? And what do you know about it? So I give them the background, because as you know, the chair is far more familiar with what’s coming to the meeting than the rank and file, unless they want to do all the research. And sometimes they do read our binders, which can be this thick or this thick ... but sometimes they’ll read all the information and still don’t understand it.”

“A lot better [informed] than I used to be, that’s for sure. I was on the police services board for approximately just over a year before I took the chair’s position. During that time, there was a significant amount of work that I put in to understand not just the role of governance, but also the complexity of just policing in general, and understanding the different pieces of the legislation that affect governance. It did take a while. I feel a lot better in the position and stronger in the position both as a board member, but also as the chair now than I would have even a couple months ago.”

“The structure is such that if you’ve got a savvy police chief, and you are numb and bored, they can just feed you the pabulum and you can eat it.”

Some chairs expressed satisfaction in how their board have come together.

“We have a very dynamic board. Basically, all our members are very engaged and very literate and very motivated to proceed with any type of recommendations.”

TRAINING

Many praised the positive impact of mandatory board training.

“If you don’t take the board training, they won’t let you proceed with your appointment, which is a huge improvement.”

“I think communications has improved, regulation has improved, and training has improved.”

“It’s improved because now there’s mandatory board training, which previously anybody could lobby politically and get appointed to a board that was likely not an appropriate candidate.”

Some identified the positive impact of the Office of the Inspector General in helping the dissemination of training and awareness of best practice.

“I think the Inspector General’s establishment is certainly a good information resource with regard to compliance.”

But we heard there is much more work to be done to improve the quality of the training.

“We had to go through training when the inspector of policing took over... standardized training that we all had to undertake across the province to sit on the board and it was just click and how fast can you get to the end? It really wasn’t useful training.”

“[There’s need for] a robust programme to train boards on decisions you can make and when decisions actually flow into policing operations where you’re getting into trouble.”

“I know the province has done a good job on the training they created in the modules. I just finished training last week for a [different] board that I got appointed to ... We had 80 hours of training. We had 10 days straight of training. To be on this [police services] board, there is nothing like that. [It] is very baptism by fire.”

“It was a good start to have something. But I think it needs to evolve into something more.”

“I’d like to see some more specific training for board chief relationships, building relationships and communication that way.”

2.2 Policies for Adequate and Effective Policing

Chairs reported different levels of completeness in their policy development. Some said they were up to date.

“We had a good set of policies in place before the CSPA ... it was a matter of tweaking.”

“It’s generally not a reinvention of the wheel if you’re missing something.”

“It wasn’t hard for us to catch up and make the policy book complete.”

“We were likely the gold standard for boards in Ontario, and our advisor and others have actually commented on us.”

“I think so, but it’s always got to be a work in progress.”



Others are not up to date.

“By our own admission, all of our police policies are out of date. They’re archaic. They need to be updated in terms of not just referencing to the legislation, but also the language that’s used, just bringing on a different perspective.”

“That’s one of the things we’ve fallen behind on.”

“So the adequacy one, I do think we have that.”

“I wish I could just turn to my policy and procedure manual that was current under the existing act, but I can’t. And that is a bit of a frustration. Obviously, [the policy updates] have been in works for a little while.”

Others said their work is in progress and on track to be completed soon.

“We’ve been given a little bit of grace from our services advisor from the [Inspectorate of Policing], because he knows we’re working on it and he knows we’ve had other challenges.”

“We got a retired leader from another service to help us [with policy updates].”

“We are going to outsource most of it, so it’s not just being done off the side of somebody’s desk ... to have it ... certified, in a way.”

“They are in place, but our big project for this year is updating our policies and procedures. A lot of them are out of date. With our current policies and procedures, we’re very good at understanding where we need to be. So we’re making sure that we are in compliance.”

“That will be something that you see in our strategic plan coming out ... we need to actually review our policies and see where there’s consolidation that’s possible and where there’s updating that’s necessary.”

“Right now it’s in transition. We definitely are looking forward to the completion.”

Others see completion as a more distant outcome.

“We’re in a situation where we have a robust number of policies because some of them were generated out of a situation... they get into more detail than they need, but they need to be reviewed on a regular basis. And there’s a bunch in there that we haven’t gotten around updating yet.”

Some see it as an on-going process.

“It’s a green, yellow, red kind of way of approaching things. And we were tipping into the yellow, but with some of the things that we’ve changed fairly quickly, the chief has gone in and looked at and brought those up. I think we’re in a really good spot.”

ADEQUACY OF POLICIES

“I’m very, very confident we have one of the most comprehensive and rigorous validating policy suites of any board in Ontario. Our adequacy standards policies span every operational domain from law enforcement and emergency response to counter-terrorism, crime prevention, and public order. Our board governance policies address budget and procurement, misconduct, discipline, anti-racism, and ethno-cultural equity, body-worn cameras, and more.” ... “Critically, we have not simply adopted these policies and moved on. We engaged external legal counsel to conduct a thorough review of our entire adequacy standard policy suite, specifically against the new provisions of the Community Safety and Policing Act. That really drives a lot of what we do right now.”

“We do, but if I’m being honest with you, they’re very juvenile. They’re very outdated.”

Fitting policy to local circumstances remains a challenge.

“This is a place where the board still needs more guidance and help to actually understand the requirements at the local level. I think there’s a need to understand the legislative requirements a little more in greater detail.”

“We’re well on our way to getting that within compliance, but it has taken almost a year to do so. As one can imagine, it’s not a light undertaking.”



“I think that’s one of the really difficult areas as a board member ... that policy oversight that you have ... having oversight, maybe it’s a bit like all of us when we were parents, we had no idea what we were in for, what we need, what skills we needed, or how to manage it, but we did have resources that we could turn to to help us a little bit ... maybe that’s what a policy manual is supposed to be, something to help in times of trouble, to give structure and accountability.”

USE OF POLICIES

[Our policy suite] “It’s actually more robust than what’s laid out in the act. Although the first time that the ED showed them to us, ... I thought to myself, ‘and when’s the last time anybody looked at these?’”

Keeping them up to date is a big job.

“The hours and hours and hours of work that took is just beyond what you would expect from a volunteer.”

Audits are helpful.

“I welcome that [audits] because you don’t know what you don’t know, and I’d rather know and make those changes because in the end, it allows the men and women that serve to do their job and in the end us to serve our residents in the best fashion possible.”

More sharing would be helpful.

“An AGM and a legal conference twice a year is not enough time and not enough of a network for this to be shared properly.”

“There is a good network of sharing amongst Big 12 police services.”

“When you’re presenting it to city council, they’re like, the adequate and effective has such a grey zone. You know, is it that you need a Cadillac version or do you need a Honda version or what’s the what’s the service you are, what’s the service the community asking for and what’s the service the community is also willing to pay for? And it’s kind of the board’s responsibility to translate that. And I’m not sure we are, I mean, we do it through the strategic plan and the consultation process and the yearly surveys and the various polling to get a grasp of what the community is asking for.”



2.3 Effective Implementation of Policies

Creating good policies is confirmed when they are tested through implementation. This is a challenge for boards given the governance / operational divide in policing. Many chairs outlined their general approach to this challenge.

“That’s [through] the monthly meetings in which we get a report from the chief, basically on all their operational decisions and reports.”

“We also have a resounding theme in our meetings to make sure that if there’s anything that’s contentious or anything that’s a big issue, I can guarantee that “adequate and effective policing,” those four words come out when we’re in discussions. It’s always in our forefront of our thoughts.”

“I guess that’s ... the burden I’m bearing right now, ... bringing that information forward to the board, and it’s going to be a double check with the IoP that this is what they’re expecting.”

“We’re going to have to test some of them ...just through natural work, but running through some ... scenarios might be the biggest test.”

“We’ve tested some of our policies and the process on proving adequate and effective policing.”

Some services are not confident they have their process and role right.

“If you ask me, is there insufficient understanding with respect to the regulations and transcribing them into the work the board does, I think the work still needs to be done there.”

“It’s just trying to establish what is a realistic understanding for a board member ... Is it merely being able to reference [policies]? Is that actually your fundamental role? You simply can’t know them all. And so how do you ensure that they’re reviewed because you are ultimately responsible for them, even though you’ve given that responsibility to the Chief.”

There is a big gap between the big twelve and the rest of the services.

“We really wouldn’t be good at that. I’d love to know who the role model would be in that regard. Maybe Toronto ...”

“There’s the Big 12 and [everyone else]. The Big 12 are kind of in their own world and have had a lot of this in the past, which leaves the rest of us scrambling a little bit”

A timely, regular schedule for reviews is a first step in getting it right.

“We do our regular policy compliance and monitoring through reports to the board. That’s the main bread and butter of the board’s activities in many ways.”

Some don’t achieve reviews as regularly as they would like, it’s only in response to issues when they are discussed.

“I likely wouldn’t know unless there was a problem.”

“Well, it’s a challenge. Because it’s not the kind of thing where you’re like, ‘well, it’s Thursday, I’m going to just peruse those policies again.’ It comes up, frankly, when an issue comes up. Like, ‘damn, do we have a policy on that?’ Yes, we do. Well, let’s look at it.”

“So often you find you don’t have appropriate implementation of policies or you have a gap when there’s an occurrence and we hope it doesn’t occur that way. I really do think we have to strike a combined committee of the chief or his delegate inspector and a board member or two just to make sure that the sections that are relevant are covered and appropriate as best we can and at least do a little bit of due diligence that way.”

The Chief’s performance review is one tool the board has to reflect on policy implementation.

“Ultimately with the performance appraisal of a chief, the implementation of policies or the lack thereof should be an opportunity to review the consistency with which the organisation is functioning and, hopefully, it does in a way speak to the manner by which policies are ground into operations.”

“Not very regularly, is what I’ve learned. There’s an intention that you look at the suite and see if it’s in compliance annually. But what happens, I’m finding, is that we don’t have an audit and risk management framework in place.”

Some were concerned there was too much focus on creating the policy, but not on evaluation.

“Sometimes the Chief immediately wants to say, I got a policy, I put it in place I can check that off.”

Processes are key: Often, the board leads the review with reports from the service. Board committees can be a helpful way to provide due diligence reviews.

“We do, get lots of great reports, more and more reports, because the chief, their responsibilities in the new act where the chief has to report on things that they didn’t used to have to report on.”

“Our Governance and Human Rights Committee reviews board policies regularly for legislative compliance and gaps. Our Finance Committee conducts budget reviews tied directly to strategic priorities. Our draft quality assurance plan will provide a formal framework for the board to assess whether the service is meeting its obligations. And our standing reports across complaints, use of force, SIU outcomes, and equity indicators gives us continuous line of sight into operational performance. Policy without accountability is aspirational. We have built the accountability infrastructure to make it real.”

“The chief and deputy both have monthly reporting requirements to us, which really hasn’t changed much from prior to the act in terms of what was monthly reported monthly. We’re getting the information every month or every quarter in some cases, depending on the report. That’s required, so you know we’re getting what we need when we need it.”

Some are still working on a process.

“I would say we don’t have a formal mechanism for that. It’s more informal in terms of our communications, communication with the senior management team.”

“We keep pushing for a more robust internal audit function”

“The chief and the deputy worked with us on these policies because they know policing and we don’t. But I will tell you my next ... Job, I guess I would say, is to create a work plan for our board that will go through the act with your policies and identify and the regs to identify everything that needs to be reported so that we can capture all of that going forward”

Maintaining the operational divide: Chairs have to remind and provide guidance to board members who cross the line.

“There is certainly a fine balance without question. We have had on a couple of occasions, both before and after the new act, where there was one board member in particular who likes to wade into the operational side of the conversation. Sometimes I have to pull them back and say, ‘the colour of the napkins is not our problem. We just need to know there’s napkins at the table. That’s all that matters. The colour is up to the chief. We don’t care about the napkins.’”

The challenge is often how do you draft policy to provide effective operational guidance.

“Because there’s two trains that I’ve noticed. There’s the train of it’s not working because it’s worded poorly or it’s just not practical. Or there’s a second train of we don’t like oversight and we believe everything is operations and not governance. So which track are we on? And for me, that’s where the communication comes into play.”

“When [a policy is] challenged, then you’re defensive, and there’s not a willingness to shatter those old mores.”

One chair brought up an example of a violent event involving a vulnerable population. There was clear evidence that the violence occurred, but no witness or victim came forward to share information. The chair questioned what policies or board function could help in a situation like this when the police investigative role is limited.

“And I’m saying your work isn’t done. That should make you say, what the hell is going on in the community that people are scared to come forward? That’s what should happen, and policies don’t do that.”

2.4 Quality Assurance Plans

QUALITY ASSURANCE

23. Every police service board and every chief of police shall implement a quality assurance process relating to,

a) the provision of adequate and effective policing; and

b) compliance with the Act and the regulations.

O.Reg 392/23 Adequate and Effective Policing

Some chairs were unaware of the formal requirement to create a quality insurance process.

“I’m going to be sincere with you. I haven’t got there yet. So that’s a piece that I have to work on.”

“We don’t have one.”

Relying on experts: Chairs mentioned that relying on paying outside experts to get their plan up to the level anticipated by the new act.

“We’re required to have one. And we’re required to enforce it, but nobody’s really giving boards the understanding of how this works. Then when you start flipping around board members every couple years, it becomes impossible. What it does really is it’s forcing us all to have to dig into budgets and hire experts to operate as our secretariats. And we’ve done that.”

Some assume work needs to be done.

“I’m going to say, I’m sure we have one. I haven’t looked at it. So I’m going to put it in the bucket with the others that it needs upgrading.”

“It factors into our work, I would say, very limited way right now.”

Others are on their way to being in a good position.

“We’ve done a gap analysis and I think we’re well on the way to getting those pieces done that were deficient, and then on our way to having a regular cadence of two, three, four, or whatever is the logical thing that people are recommending.”

Scheduling challenges: With board turnover there is a challenge of keeping up with even important policy reviews.

“Even performance evaluation of the chief, there’s slippage. It is supposed to be every year. Oops, it’s 18 months. Oops, two years has passed. Oops, let’s do this right away.”

To help stay on top of things, boards are putting in place tracking programs.

“We’re putting in place a system that will track and make sure that annual things happen annually, that they have an anniversary date ... to keep us conscious of compliance on an annual basis, because that’s a welcome add to the CSPA ... I think it was the shortcoming of boards all over this province in the old days.”

Others are looking at the age-old practice of copying good examples and applying them to your own organization.

“I was kind of surprised there wasn’t more standardization of this is what you need when the act came out given the amount of time that they took after Royal Ascent. So we’re trying to steal from other people. People are trying to ask us for information. We don’t have it either. There’s a lot of sharing going on.”

“We tap our larger neighbours when we need help with certain things.”

Data integrity was raised as one area that a board chair wanted to look into as a way of making informed decisions.

“I think that there needs to be an enhanced quality assurance plan in terms of looking at accountability measures and how that data is being collected so that we can make the proper assessment as a governing board while also meeting the needs of the community.”

2.5 Are Boards Adequately Resourced?

"If [a newly appointed board member] comes in with less experience I don't know if we have the processes in place that it wouldn't be baptism by fire."

Some just have an administrative assistant.

"We have an assistant to our board who just provides administrative support."

Some have support off the corner of the desk from the Municipal CAO.

"We also have a secretary of our board, so we have two resources in theory. He's the CAO of the city. So his knowledge is very in-depth, obviously. We do rely on him for that relationship to the city. But we don't have [staff], and that's a conversation we've been having: what resources are required for the board? How do we share that resource?"

Finding the right support How much support is enough and can you find the right resource if you only need a part time position?

"I don't know if the board needs 40 hours a week. but it's hard to recruit somebody with a specific set of skills and knowledge for 20 hours a week."

Some boards are expanding and looking for an executive director.

"Currently searching for a full-time executive director who's quite capable of doing those [policy] evaluations."

Efficient use of resources was one refrain we heard from some chairs. Can support for the Board be shared with the Service or must it be independent?

"Could we share a part-time resource with the chief?"

"We do know that what our responsibilities are and our duties and that sort of thing. So yes, I do believe we are adequately resourced."

"It's our job to be the critical eye."

"I'm definitely from the private sector when I say this, but I see something like [additional resources] as a justification to create another bureaucratic role that draws unnecessary funds away from the fundamental purpose, which is frontline community safety."

"If our board were to be mandated that we suddenly had to have our own secretary, I see it as creating more conflict and just another layer of bureaucracy that is necessary because now our board secretary has to be the communication piece between the leadership team or the chief's EA. It's just one more place for communication breakdown and one more place for problems to occur. Whereas, right now ... I think we work well because our secretary is the chief's EA. So she's fully aware of what our duties and responsibilities are and what our needs are, but she's also fully aware of what the operational needs are of the service. So she's in a very pivotal role and it works well for all of us."

Another board chair raised the importance of the Chief Executive Assistant position.

"Our long-term EA is extremely valuable. The depth of knowledge as to previous contracts and benefits [is] profoundly helpful. I just hope that we recognise her contribution. Replacing those people is not easy."

Small and mid-sized services have a challenge completing applications for the range of available provincial grants. A board resource could dedicate some of their time to this function.

“We’ve thought in our model for resourcing the person would support the board, but they’d also support grant writing and policy development, the stuff that in theory does belong to the board, because every grant has the board’s name on it ... that is a big burden for the Chief’s office right now...grant writing, grant follow-up, and the reporting out back to the government.”

Some report that they are adequately resourced, or at least doing well with what they have.

“I think we’re adequately supported. There’s nothing really more that we need.”

“We’re punching above our weight in terms of what we’re doing with the resources that we have.”

“Yes, [at] this time we have sufficient resources, because we’ve just added permanent staff to the board.”

Financial resources would add value to board decision making: Boards are not appointed primarily based on a skills matrix. Adding board specific resources to support budget decisions was viewed favourably by some chairs.

“Getting a better handle on budgeting and given the ongoing pressures, given the city hall dialogue that takes place.”

“[We need] a staff member who has the ability to provide input on financial projections who’s not someone in direct conflict of interest with said projections or budget. That’s one of the major gaps that I’ve recognised. A resource that allows the board to make the best decisions without potential conflict of interest.”

A dedicated communications resource could improve board functionality.

“We [do] need help with things like our website refresh and some communications, but [generally] we are adequately resourced.”

“Communication is another one. Something as simple as having a stand-alone website where people can go and pull up the monthly meetings. We [rely on the city] for that and I don’t think that’s the best approach.”

Policy guidance was another resource request.

“We’ve been sacrificing ourselves, but I think the time has come that we need a full-time [resource] who is comfortable interpreting legalese in the Act.”

The Growing Workload: A common theme relates to the growing workload. By all accounts, the burden of work and written material is intense.

“For me, it’s just that never-ending sense that there’s just so much to know.”

“The amount of time to grasp all the information and totally examine the trends. I think we’re trying to create a process where we have greater discussions at committee stages and ensure that we understand the information, are able to ask our questions and [apply] oversight functions within the committee structure.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these burdens are not shared equally among board members as not everyone puts in the effort required.

“I think I’m an anomaly when I talk [about] how much time I spend in this building.”

For some, it is not merely intense, but overwhelming, and as a result, important matters are left undone.

“I can’t make a difference here. It’s just literally putting out fires.”

“I don’t want to do this. I can’t take this. This is way more work and effort. And the amount of time I spend dealing with this, nothing ever gets better.”

“Some stuff has fallen by the wayside and some extra time has been put in on certain things.”

Association support: Some noted the Police Governance Ontario, the provincial association for police service boards, is an important actor in supporting the needs of local boards.

“I really appreciate the provincial association...not only their seminars, but the conferences and the receptivity when I can phone anyone down there. I feel that [...] they're very helpful.”

“The [PGO] was good when the main thrust was education, because we had no education. Now that's in place I think [the PGO] needs to shift gears and focus more on things that boards utilise day-to-day. HR support, such as on WSIB, and contract negotiations. I think we are sorely lacking in that kind of support.”

Should board members receive increased compensation? One board member reflected on the responsibility entrusted in board members and questioned how much value the system places on it given the compensation paid to board members.

“My responsibility to the hundreds of thousands of people that live in this community is to hold the line on municipal taxes. That's quite a challenge to give a guy who you're paying less than \$15,000 a year to - our members earn less than \$10,000. Like think about that for just a minute. \$12,000 a year and here, bring us a budget and negotiate terms for over 1000 people. Really? That's the expertise you're looking for?”

A good quote to end this section on relates to relationships. Relationships matter and they are explored in great detail in the subsequent sections.

“You can't good governance your way out of a bad relationship.”



StrategyCorp's Perspective

Police governance is increasingly complex and time-intensive under the CSPA. Many board chairs say they lack sufficient support to effectively manage their expanding oversight obligations. Participants frequently contrasted the resources available to “Big 12” boards with those at the disposal of smaller boards required to meet the same legislative expectations.

Many board chairs do not always receive information in a form that supports effective oversight and decision-making. While many participants acknowledged receiving large volumes of information, concerns were raised regarding the usability of the information and the ability of the board to properly make sense of it in a way that adds value to their oversight function.

Despite recent improvements in mandatory training, many board chairs report that their members still lack sufficient training in their role. In particular, there is still uncertainty

regarding the distinction between governance and operations, along with inconsistent understanding of board authority and responsibilities under the CSPA.

Many boards are still working to modernize and operationalize their policy frameworks under the CSPA. While there are exceptions, notably among the Big 12, many participants acknowledged they still rely on outdated or incomplete policies.

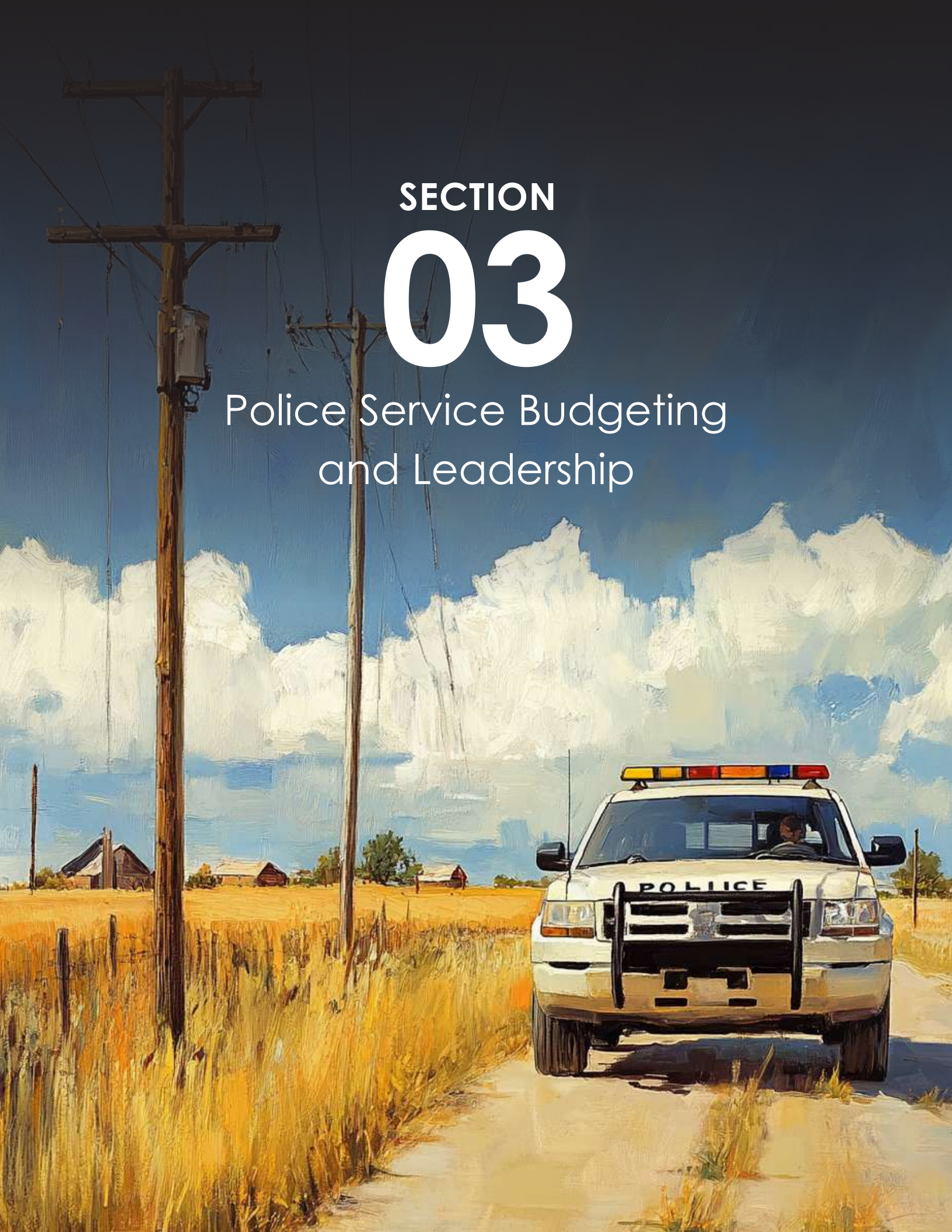
Many boards lack adequate mechanisms to monitor policy implementation, compliance, and organizational performance. Participants identified weaknesses in audit functions, quality assurance processes, risk management frameworks, and ongoing monitoring practices.

What we are watching for as 2026 unfolds:

- More boards establishing structured work plans and compliance tracking systems.
- Enhancement of dedicated board support functions, including executive director and policy support roles.
- Sharing of best practices to make data more consumable and directly linked to board policy.
- Improved reporting structures and stronger review processes that relate directly to outcomes of governance, and not merely document activity.
- Expanded mandatory training, practical scenario-based education, and stronger onboarding focused on governance, accountability, and board–chief relationships.
- Guidance from IoP on how boards can implement an effective quality assurance process.

SECTION 03

Police Service Budgeting and Leadership



What We Heard

In a second series of questions, chairs unpacked the challenges in their most important obligations, including hiring police chiefs and their deputies, negotiating budgets, developing strategic plans, and ensuring adequate resources;

This is core to a police board's responsibilities. If a chair and board can get these decisions right, then governance and community relations challenges can be solved more easily.

3.1 Chief and Chair Relationships

"You ultimately are their boss."

It is important to stay in your lane while also fulfilling your role. At the end of the day, there are roles to play and jobs to do.

"You have to maintain your oversight function. And the chief has to respect that."

"It's not like we're all friendly and everyone's kind of patting each other on the back. I think there's a recognition that, chief, you have a job to do - you have the operations. The board has an oversight responsibility and we will undertake that responsibility. But at the end of the day, our goal is the same."

"It can't be friendly all the time,...the chief and I have that rapport now that he knows that we're partners in all of this, but ultimately, he has a duty to report to me on certain things and vice versa. So it's a fine, delicate line, is the way I look at it."

Some chairs alluded to how they are rebuilding trust and relationships with their chief or creating that trust with a new chief that was recently hired to improve communication with the board and to the community.

"[The new chief] keeps, the board, but also the public informed. The relationship with the chief is awesome. And that is trickling down to the service. Not even trickling. That is an avalanche effect down to the service because the last chief, there were some issues, some trust issues, but the service is working really well and that's because of the board working well with the chief who works well with the service. It's a dream."

"The previous Chief was not a good communicator externally to the community or internally to the members."

"It's better now. We do a lot of regular communicating, meeting every week, really understanding."

Communication trumps all. A challenge can be that chiefs come up through a command and control culture. From there, they shift to reporting to a board that is a collection of politicians, political appointees and community members. Whatever other challenges may exist in a chair-chief relationship, communication can help overcome issues and maintain confidence.

"This chief understands it and he communicates really well with myself as chair. Constant dialogue, constant forewarning of issues that will be coming up. And when they do arise, the board's not caught by surprise."

"The most important thing is communications...if that dialogue is happening, and the information chairs receive is appropriately filtered to the rest of the board members then they're aware of what's happening."



“The more information [the chief] give[s] us, the more we understand their operational requirements and needs so we can be more responsive to budget and oversight.”

Proactivity can mean smoother decision making.

We heard that when difficult decisions are being made by the Board, communication and information sharing needs to happen earlier and more directly. The chief and the chair should be aligned before decisions are brought forward or announced in a meeting, to avoid surprises and ensure there is a shared understanding and transparency of the rationale, implications, and next steps.

“I’m on my second chief now, and in both cases, they’ve always been really good at providing what we need to know to make decisions.”

“He doesn’t wait for us to find out about things, he calls and flags things for us.”

“It didn’t just happen at a board meeting. It was all worked out in advance with the administration. We did it respectfully.”

“He understands this service. He understands the local dynamic and I think he respects that he has a board chair that is pro-policing and is predisposed to be supportive.”

In particular, budget approvals are improving due to smart briefing techniques. Communication from the chief is central to building confidence and support during budget deliberations. By engaging council members early, the chair and chief can clearly explain the rationale behind key requests, address questions in advance, and

ensure there are no surprises before the budget reaches city hall.

“He’s open, he’s honest, he’s transparent. He takes instruction. We review the budget together at various stages. They’ll present a draft budget. I see it before the board does. We’ll walk through it. Then I’ll give my feedback. He may or may not make some adjustments based on my response and it goes to the board. The board will have their input and then we go from there.”

“He makes an effort to meet with every councillor prior to the budget going to city hall. So they’re already fully aware of what’s in it, why it’s there, what we’re looking for, the reasons, the purposes. There’s no surprises. We’ve had a lot of good support.”

Separating the gravitas of a police service from the duty of sound public management:

Some chairs expressed examples of boards being wowed by police leaders. It can be a challenge to hold a chief to account as a municipal official tasked with spending resources efficiently and delivering a service when they regale a chair with stories from the field.

“The historic dynamic was that the police chief was a little bit of a rock star.”

“The evolution I’m seeing is that boards are saying, ‘you’re providing a community service, the same as public health, the same as the building inspectors. It’s just on TV ... and we have different roles. You’re the police chief and you carry a gun, but I’m the board chair and I have a different obligation and a different mandate.”

“It’s a tough relationship sometimes, right? We’re not always happy with one another, but my job isn’t to be his friend. And I think that that’s something that some in the industry forget sometimes. We’re not friends at the end of the day. He’s an employee of the board, and our job is to make sure that we give him the tools necessary to provide adequate and effective policing, and then we hold the service accountable for what they’re doing, provide that proper oversight and ask tough questions.”

Community engagement can help a chief build a successful board relationship if the chief is recognized as a trusted vessel of community knowledge.

“I love his depth of knowledge about the community.”

“I think it creates a shortcut to a number of important dialogues.”

“We have a new police chief and a new deputy, and both of them are long standing police officers from the [local service]. They’re career police officers, and it’s really nice to hire from the floor and to promote from the floor. I have a very good relationship with both of them and they have very good relationships with the board. I feel a sense of transparency from them.”

“On a local level, because of the depth of experience we have with the chief who has served this community for many years, that historical knowledge between him and his executive assistant is tremendous. I’m not sure if it would happen for every chair, but personally, I feel the capacity to pick up a phone and find out information... I have a real strong appreciation for the communication linkages that flow between and amongst us.”

Some chairs wondered how to create strong processes to support the relationship.

“The executive assistant to the police chief and the executive assistant to the board were the same person ... that’s a total conflict of interest.”

“I try to keep an open channel of communications... part of my job as a chair is to discuss items with the chief that don’t rely around operations that are governance-based ... to recognize and understand what challenges the chief is facing and where the boards and the chief or the deputy chiefs may be in disagreement about an item ... so that we can identify those problems beforehand and then try to find a working solution around that.”

3.2 The Strategic Plan

Strategic plans are viewed by many board chairs as more than mandatory planning documents. When done well, they provide a practical governance framework that helps boards organize their priorities, assess the chief's performance, connect reports and budgets to stated objectives, and communicate direction to the service, municipality and public. Several chairs described a meaningful shift from strategic plans as static compliance documents to living tools that shape the board's day-to-day work.

“The strategic plan went from being a perfunctory document that was written and filed to a document which lives and breathes and is referenced all the time.”

Supporting the chief's work: For some boards, the strategic plan has become especially important in clarifying expectations between the board and chief. Rather than relying on informal understandings of performance expectations or progress, the plan provides an agreed-upon reference point for evaluation, oversight, timing, and accountability.

“It is an excellent strategic plan, a vast improvement from our last one. It is really helpful when we're actually doing the chief's performance review at the end of the year because the board is to follow that strategic plan. That's how we do his review.”

“It's very thorough and touches on a lot of different aspects and even the year that we're to handle those. It's just really, really well laid out.”

Building confidence with the public: A clear strategic plan can also improve public reporting. When objectives are specific and understandable, boards and services are better able to demonstrate how annual activities, investments, and outcomes connect back to the commitments made through the planning process.

“What the strategic plan does is it really improves our annual reporting requirements ... when it's a clear and understandable and well-defined set of objectives, you can tie that annual report back to all of those factors very clearly so the public understands it, the service understands it, and again, we can measure our success.”

“I've always said, you don't know where you're going unless you've mapped it out. And so that's going to help this board a great deal. And it's going to help our association as well. It's going to help that dialogue because everybody knows where we're going together collectively.”

The strategic plan can lay the groundwork for budget deliberations when major operational or budgetary proposals come forward. Several chairs noted that strategic plans become more useful when reports and budgets explicitly show how recommendations support the priorities already approved by the board.



“We're finally getting to the point where reports and even the budget is being delivered with direct correlation to the strategic plan. That took a couple of years, but now when we see reports coming forward saying, for example, we want to create a public order unit the report actually includes where this fits into the strategic plan, like it should.”

Some chairs still want to see improvements. Chairs also pointed to current plan gaps and a broader opportunity for more consistent expectations around how strategic plans are used.

“It sits on the shelf.”

“The current one is not adequate for what is expected of us under legislation. I don’t think it’s adequate for what we need and for what the service is becoming in such a short period of time to be the MIP, the most improved player, in policing in Ontario.”

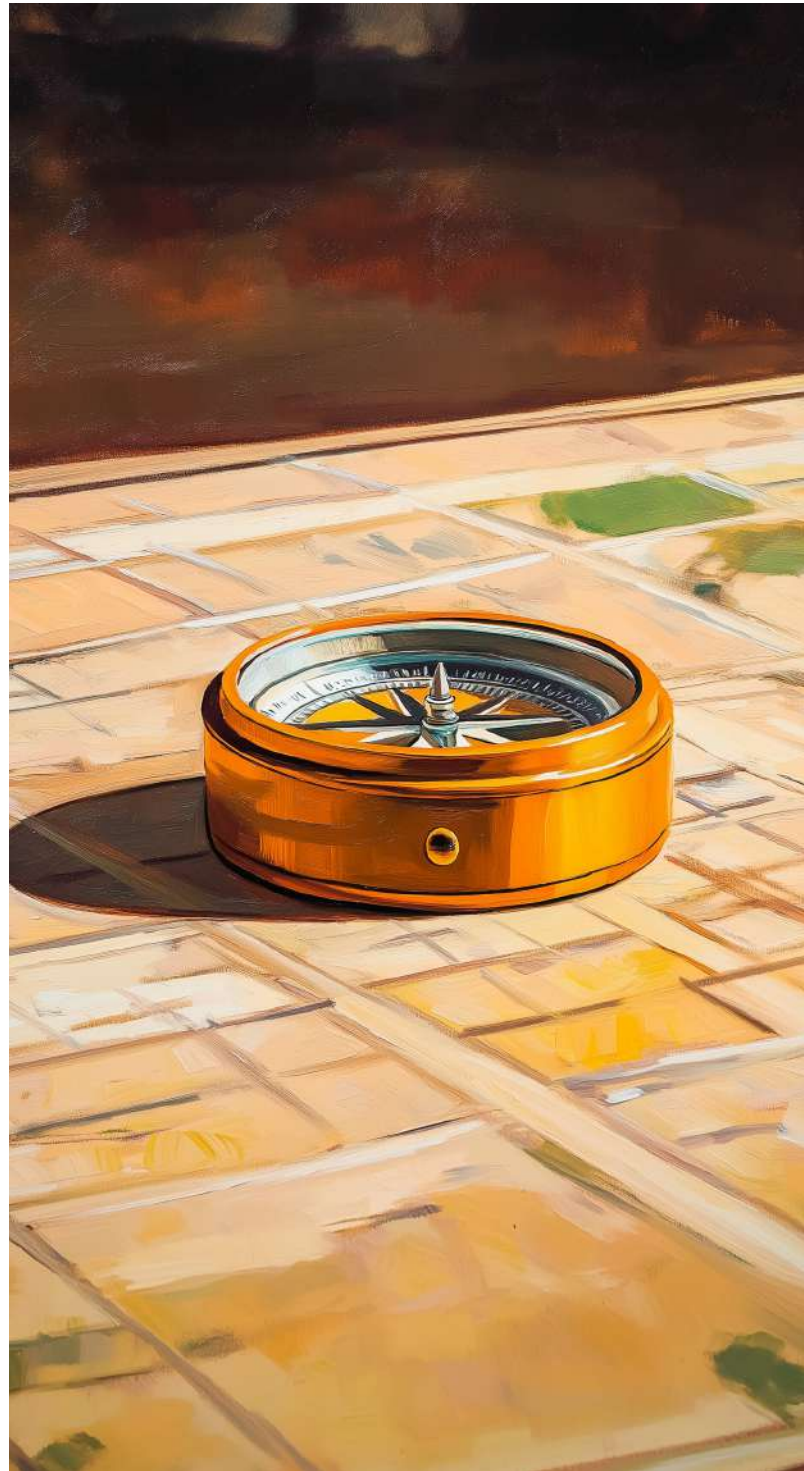
“It was a no-nonsense kind of strategic plan.”

Strategic planning could be a role for IoP support. One interviewee suggested that IoP direction could help make strategic plans more effective by encouraging boards and services to align reports, decisions, and recommendations directly to the plan.

“[If the IoP] moves to a structure that has you align board reports with the strategic plan and show you with every report how it’s aligning with the plan, that wouldn’t be a bad thing for the board, of course, but it wouldn’t be a bad thing for the [Service] either to start thinking more strategically about their decisions.”

Front-line officers are key to most board strategic plans. Officers remain central to police service board strategic plans. You would be hard pressed to find a police service board strategic plan that does not put officers and civilians at the forefront of organizational capacity needs. This reflects a practical reality; the ability to deliver on public safety priorities depends heavily on whether the service has the right people, training, supports, and internal capacity in place.

“The number one point of our strategic plan - we call it our people - is the officers and civilians, ... making sure that our people have the best possible background to provide the best possible police services.”



A good strategic plan paired with the right people driving implementation, can provide direction to the Chief and help the board stay focused on its governance role.

“It is very clear and concise. I really like it. I find it very helpful. And the chief he appreciates it as well. It’s really good direction for him.”

“we’re finally on track and we’ve got the right person on the board to help lead it, that skill really needed to be on the board.”

While some boards may have seen a larger shift in how they developed their strategic plan, at least one board was ready for the more community minded requirements in the new Act.

“I’ll call us a pretty progressive board in Ontario, even under the old act, community-based policing has always been one of our mantras. So [the Strategic Planning requirements] weren’t a big transition because the new act is definitely driven by community-based policing.”

Getting the process right for strategic plan development can be the difference maker in establishing buy-in. For other chairs, the prospect of strategic planning brought mixed feelings. Those approaching a strategic plan refresh looked back on previous planning processes with frustration, particularly when those exercises felt performative or disconnected from meaningful implementation.

“I did strategic plans at the city too and they were an unmitigated yawn. It was the worst night of my life ... talk about a word salad, like just throwing these words on and using different colors of sticky paper doesn’t change the fact that you’re just throwing [words] around ... and then they never seem to connect with the ball.”

Other chairs hoped for the best from upcoming processes.

“I am optimistic from my recent experience that maybe it’ll be a more productive enterprise than what I’ve seen.”

“We’re excited about our developing strategic plan.”

Police services, more than other organizations, can benefit from a sound strategic planning process. It can help guide the board and chief through the important decisions they have to make over the course of a mandate.

“I always tell staff [in my day job], if you’re doing something or you want to go in a different direction hang it on the strategic plan.”

Strategic planning as brand building: A strategic plan can be more than a guide for the board. There are requirements for public engagement. Those steps can be more than just a box-checking exercise. Done properly, it becomes a way to assess community sentiment and strengthen the organization’s relationship with the people it serves.

“We thought we had assimilated what the community was telling us [in our previous plan]. We’re even more so with this one because we feel we’ve increased that engagement for sure.”

“I believe it is going to reflect what the perception of the community is for our needs.”

This engagement also reinforces that the strategic plan is not owned by the board alone. It is a roadmap for everyone with a stake in policing, including the service, members, municipal partners, community organizations, and the public.

“We’re both the creators and benefactors of the strategic plan. And we had to explain that it’s for stakeholders, it’s for everybody that’s involved in policing or paying for policing. It’s to understand the roadmap for our expectations.”

“This for us as a service was actually one of our most comprehensive strategic plan engagement processes in the history of [our service] because we had over 200 invitations, 7 in-person consultations, online surveys, social media outreach.”

“What we did in our last plan, we did a community survey and a member survey. And one of the things we did is we tried to line up the concerns from what the community had and what the membership had. Out of the five top issues that both had, three were the same. So I think there’s a pretty good understanding, not only from the community, but also from the member side as to what needs to be done.”

Growth and change emerged as defining considerations for the next strategic planning cycle. Participants emphasized that the organization is operating in a rapidly evolving environment. As a result, the strategic plan cannot be treated as a static document. It must be flexible, forward-looking, and capable of adapting as new pressures, priorities, and opportunities emerge.

“Our biggest challenge really is looking at how we’re going to deal with the managed growth of the city ... growth is going to be the big cornerstone of our strategic plan.”

“I think that a number of the priorities remain similar, but will require a bit more nuance based on the fact that there’s different legislation now, but also that the needs of the community have most likely changed over the last four to five years. In fact, I can guarantee that they have.”

“The next brilliant idea you and I will be talking about in 10 years isn’t even in somebody’s head yet right now. And the rate of change that things happen now. So you have to be adaptable ... it’s got to be an evolutionary document and we treat it as such.”

“We think we can develop a five-year strategic plan ... I would predict that there’s a very good chance before we roll out a new strategic plan, it will be dated before it’s implemented.”

3.3 Board Chairs Leading Budgets

Board Chairs have been tasked with leading a budget process that will deliver adequate and effective police services. We asked Chairs about the resources they have to do their part in the police budget process.

Increasing responsibility for boards and chairs in the budget process. Changes with the Act mean that boards have an increased level of responsibility. Maintaining adequate and effective service is the overarching principle of the budget process.

“With the act as it is presented today. The ability of a municipality to challenge a police budget ... has brought a new threat to the police chiefs.”

“Our fiduciary duty is to the community. Not the government of the municipality. And certainly not to the police service or its associations.”

Budget approval is not a rubber stamp process.

To make sure these obligations are fulfilled in a responsible way, the chair may need to ask challenging questions to the chief.

“The last thing a chief wants to hear: prove your argument. But a board’s got to be brave enough to ask that.”

If the detail is not there, chairs can be in a tough spot to make informed decisions. Some chairs indicated it is still a work in progress to get the depth of knowledge required to make informed decisions.

“You kind of are [at the mercy of the service] because, so much of it can be very mysterious unless you really, really push at it.”

“The last director of finance always operated by giving the board a one-page sheet to make a \$110 million budget decision... trying to pull out information with people who aren’t there every day, who don’t understand the nature of municipalities, who don’t always know what questions to ask or where to push back... it was really unproductive, but I think it’s better now.”

There is always a negotiation about what a budget need versus a budget want. Like many budget processes there is an expectations game that must be managed between the different players.

“They’ve learned how to pad the request so that they can lose a little bit and they don’t get everything they want and we don’t take as much as we want, and everyone meets in the middle. When it gets to council, it’s usually just a hands up and hands down. It’s a simple vote.”

“My experience is they put in what they want. It’s always way more than they know they’ll ever get. And then we just start cutting from there.”

Comfort with the process: Despite the fiscal pressure and new legislation, many chairs were quite comfortable with their process and the information they received.

“There’s very little friction or animosity with respect to the budget.”

“It’s a good process”

“I don’t feel like there’s many games with them.”

Municipalities are understanding the budget pressures for the sector. While police budgets have seen high percentage increases in many services over the last couple years, boards and councils have been supportive. This could be due to a combination of understanding the need in the community and chiefs and boards improving their budget briefs.

“To give you a bit of a measuring, stick our budget increased the entire tax levy in our region by 2.5%. The entire tax bill was raised by 5% and half of it went to the police budget. We had a unanimous vote by the council, including people who were always very with austerity and not necessarily supporting police.”

“Everybody voted for the budget because they knew this was a very necessary budget.”

Municipal elections on the horizon: Looking ahead to the 2027 budget process, provincial funding is likely to become a more prominent pressure point.

As municipal budgets face growing strain, some boards and communities may increasingly look to the province for support, particularly where local taxpayers are being asked to absorb costs tied to broader public safety, growth, and service-demand pressures.

Chairs noted that the current funding environment can place municipalities of very different sizes and circumstances in competition for the same limited resources, even though their policing challenges are not always comparable.

“That well will run dry, and we very much agree with the issue of the provincial government providing subsidies for the municipality to actually help with future budget deliberations.”

“The process has been a learning experience for everybody. This year’s budget will be better, but it’ll also be different because we’re headed to a municipal election.”

“I think the big thing is that the funding needs to be more, I think it needs to be better looked at in terms of big city versus medium versus small. I mean, when we’re all chasing basically the same fundamental pot of money, the GTA problems are not [small city] problems. And therefore, we shouldn’t have to be competing for the same [dollars].”

You can review reams of detailed information, but trust is essential. Chairs, some with previous business experience, acknowledged that any multi-million dollar organization comes with the need to have confidence in your team and a trust in the process.

“Even when I was the CEO, you’re still not sure you have the information, and it’s even harder for a board, particularly when you have to give out your baby for approval to another entity. I think there’s various steps that make it difficult for a police services board.”

“It’s asymmetrical ... where the police service has the information and then it’s the board that takes it on as its budget ... you’re putting a lot of trust that the service is telling you these are the resources they need and this is why they need them. And then a dialogue does happen.”

The challenges with mayors on police service boards: When a mayor also sits as a board member, the budget process can carry an inherent tension.

The mayor must help oversee and understand the police budget at the board table, while also returning to council with a broader municipal responsibility to assess that budget request alongside other local priorities.

Interviewees noted that this dual role can create challenges around impartiality and role clarity, but when supported by strong information-sharing, trust, and disciplined governance, it can also help ensure the budget is presented to council with credibility and context.

“The often cited challenge when you have the mayor who has to be impartial when he goes to his council meeting and receives the budget request ... there’s a tension there, not necessarily unfavorable, but [how do you] ensure that it’s a positive tension that can get you the right decision rather than a negative tension of combat.”

“We’ve been given good information, sufficient information to the point where we can comfortably present the budget to council. And my witness has been of the mayor to be a man of integrity, demonstrating capacity to respect what has to happen in council as well as what has to happen for the service.”

Some municipalities can find it challenging that their powers of budgeting are different than many other municipal departments. If municipalities overstep, the board and chair need to play an important role in navigating the budget process.

“So it is by far the biggest problem I think all of our boards have now, that disconnect that when we get to our funding source, the regional government, they think they want to play the role of the board.”

Other times it is council members that can be ill-informed or offer contradictory views, adding challenges to budget approval.

“I think the detail is there. I don’t think that they [the municipality] understood it. Because they’re councillors, they figure they know more about policing than the chief does.”

“If you’re saying we’re spending too much on policing, you may be permitted to say that. You cannot say, but in so doing, we don’t think you have enough cops at City Hall. You’re not allowed to tell us that. That’s our job. You can guide us and tell us what concerns you may have, but that’s an operational issue. It’s the biggest challenge all of us are having right now because there’s a bit of pushback from folks trying to get re-elected in a few months.”

Chairs noted that police budgets are heavily shaped by payroll costs, particularly officer compensation, and by broader collective bargaining trends across the province. This creates limits on how much local boards can realistically influence budget outcomes.

“Of course, the negotiations with an association that typically follows trends across the province. So if that is a reality, to what extent do you have to impact the outcome of negotiations at your level?”

“92% of our budget goes to payrolls.”

Chiefs need to put in the work to make the case for the service’s budget needs. We heard that boards often rely heavily on the chief’s expertise when assessing staffing and resource requests. While boards retain responsibility for oversight and budget approval, they recognize that the chief is best positioned to explain what is required to deliver adequate and effective policing. Boards need clear evidence and rationale to assess whether requests are justified. This includes linking requests for additional officers or resources to specific service needs and the standard of adequate and effective policing.

“I have to trust the chief that he is putting in what he needs to put in, whether it be a number of officers or [something else] ... I don’t want to just make do, I want to know what [the chief] needs to do this job right.”

“All of the number crunching is left to the chief and his budget provides a lot of evidence-based information ... he prefaces that we need two more officers because we need them to do this, this, and this, or we need to have our community response officers downtown more. They put the numbers together and then provide the rationale and it’s up to the board to decide if that rationale meets adequate effective policing.”



“You can’t police from home. You got to go walk the beat the first eight or 12 years. You’ve got to do the shift work. You’ve got to work nights, et cetera, et cetera. So many women and men with other opportunities are saying, ‘why would I become a cop?’ I make 100K being a bean counter from home and do all my work just like I’m doing this [interview] from home now.”

3.4 Issues on Resources: Human Resources, Information Technology, and Facilities.

HUMAN RESOURCES

WSIB is still an issue: We heard that WSIB was a major area of concern for several Chairs. While some acknowledged that many claims are legitimate and reflect the real toll of policing, others expressed concern about the way the system can be used and the impact that leaves and on staffing levels, service delivery, and budgets.

“With more city growth, hiring more officers, that’s going to lead to the possibility of more WSIB claims.”

“If we’re talking primarily about staffing issues ... there are a number of people who are not available for full deployment ... this is a trend that’s been going on in a number of municipalities and that has a significant effect on policing for the public, but it also has a significant effect on the budget because now we’re expected to be filling these gaps.”

“There’s still the core group of folks who want to screw the pooch and use the legislation to their advantage. There are some who are legitimate, ... I don’t take that away from them and we have tools to monitor the types of calls people have responded to that flag those who may be at higher risk and have outreach from a support officer proactively.”

Room for increased wellness support: Chairs also connected WSIB and accommodation pressures to broader questions around officer wellness, particularly mental health. We heard a clear view that proactive investment in supports could reduce downstream costs and improve workforce resilience.

“My question is, why hasn’t there been a more proactive approach around the health and well-being of officers, especially mental health? If you invest in good support for officers it pays for itself. Our budget cost for these individuals on leave is going to be [close to \$10 million] in the next year. Pretty significant.”

Breaking down barriers to officers asking for help:

Participants also noted that culture remains a barrier. Though wellness supports may exist, some officers may be hesitant to access them without clear leadership, normalization, and sustained commitment from the service.

“Perhaps this is an unfair assessment of the culture, because I have not been a member of the police, but there does seem to be a baked in hesitance of seeking out these supports. You can only really address that by leadership and by making sure that the supports are readily available. I think that there are many cultural issues in policing.”

“I think last year was the first time, the memorial for officers who have taken their lives. That’s always been a thing, but we never talked about it. That’s a thing now, the number of officers that are under stress take their lives.”

Instilling the right values in officers: Some chairs noted a need to focus on creating a positive work culture and assisting officers in meeting the standards of the service.

“There’s still lots of behavioural issues and things like that that we have to deal with.”

“There are always human resource challenges in a police force if we’re just talking about potential personality conflicts or any other issues that are arising.”

Are recruitment challenges subsiding? We heard mixed views on recruitment. Some chairs reported that their services were currently in a relatively strong position and were able to attract enough applicants to fill vacancies.

“We actually do not have a recruitment problem. Of course, everybody is looking for recruits, but at this point in time, we’ve had enough applicants and candidates.”

“We are likely one of the few services in Ontario that to this point in time is able to fill the spaces.”

“We take a fair number of folks from other services who want to come back [to the community]. We’re very open to that, where that used to be a very closed door ... you had to start at the bottom and work your way up, but they’ve changed their opinion on that.”

Others, however, continued to identify recruitment as a material challenge, particularly given the demands of a 24/7 policing model, and competition from other career paths.

“The difficulty in attracting recruits.”

“There is an enormous recruitment challenge because there’s no getting around the fact that we run a 365 a day, 24 hour a day operation.”



Police jobs are well paying jobs, particularly in smaller communities. One chair suggested that services, particularly in smaller more rural communities, may need to do more to promote the broader lifestyle and community benefits of working there.

“We probably need to do more in terms of making people aware of small-town benefits.”

“The salaries are what they are. I’ve got to make it a more conducive environment where people want to come to [region] to work for us.”

“The most powerful retention tool we have is hiring local people.”

Special constable positions face high promotion rates. For some services, the issue is not simply attracting people, but keeping them. Special constables were identified as one area where turnover can be costly, particularly because of the time and investment required to train them.

“The only smallish challenge we have with turnover is trying to keep special constables. You take a chance with the requirements, they take a long time to train, that’s costly, and they’re using it as a steppingstone to go.”

Police work is often a call to service as much as a job. The reality is that policing is a tough job. Shift work, public scrutiny, safety risks, and changing expectations are making the profession less attractive to some prospective recruits and more difficult to sustain for some newer officers.

“I have people that I had presented badges to that later on have come to me and have said that policing was not what they expected. The environment’s changed. There are more guns on the streets, and there’s that real fear that they’re not gonna come home. I’ve had a few young families say I can’t do it. I personally had people come to me and explain that they’re resigning. Policing has changed. It’s getting much more difficult.”

Recruitment needs to be supported by HR professionals: Some services are still building the internal HR capacity needed to manage a modern police workforce. In several cases, HR has historically been handled informally, or by municipalities. Chairs noted that this model is no longer sufficient given the volume and complexity of workforce issues.

“Human resources is a mess. We have a person in human resources who’s been there for a long time. She needs a lot more support.”

“I think it’s just that, in all sincerity, somebody’s been doing [the role] off the corner of her desk, and we really don’t have an organization or an individual designated to that.”

“Yes, human resources is an issue, and we hired a full-time HR manager two years ago to deal with the number of retirements we had. HR was previously done by the municipality, or as the Chief would say, off the corner of their desk.”

“We’ve got mental illness and anxiety and all these challenges that HR never had to deal with before. Now you’re dealing with that. HR needs more support, more sophistication.”

Generational change and a young workforce are creating training and supervision pressures.

“I don’t know what generation they are, X, Z, whatever the hell they are, but they don’t look at employment the way earlier generations looked at employment.”

“We are getting younger, which in my opinion is a good thing. We still have individuals that will be there for the next four or five years as those younger constables develop skills”

“You’ve got all the baby boomers. We’re losing a ton of officers.”

“Now you have a great percentage of our officers that have 18 months or less experience. So that’s an issue too. It’ll keep getting better, but until that time comes, it’s going to be a draw on all of the other services.”

Women are stepping up: Services are seeing more women enter policing and are making deliberate commitments to support women officers across their careers.

“Rather than hiring experienced officers, we went for new recruits. We’ve also joined the 30 Forward movement as well.”

Enhancing training: Sometimes the pressure from Ontario Police College (OPC) access is impacting recruitment. Current provincial investment should help ease this challenge.

“We get up to 40 per class, just to try to keep up with the new recruits, like filling the new positions and the vacancies that are from retirement.”

“Well, everyone needs more people. That’s obviously something that’s an issue for us. We always need more resources and more people, and frankly, getting them in place is another big issue as we only get so many spots at OPC.”

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information technology was generally viewed as an area of growing importance. Chairs saw technology as essential to modern policing, but also recognized that it brings cost, governance, cybersecurity, privacy, and implementation challenges.

Adding new capabilities: Services are realizing that new technologies can improve efficiency by streamlining public reporting to officer note taking.

“We have cop logic, which of course has been a technology we’ve had for a few years now.”

Can services keep up with technological change? Whether a chair represents a large or small service, the constant when it comes to technology is more change.

“With information technology, we’re in a real state of change right now.”

“Part of this is the change in policing. They’re talking about drones. We’re going to need a guy to be able to operate drones for vertical policing now.”

“I think we react too fast to the new technologies. We embrace it too quickly, we need to think it through from every angle. Especially the cost angle.”

Enhancing back-office IT infrastructure: Some services recognize the need to build in house IT capabilities because police needs are different from municipal needs.

“The city used to handle our IT, though we had an IT manager, but everything ran through the city. We are now in the midst of bringing this all over to the service, It’s going really smoothly. Our IT manager comes from a service where he handled this for many, many years.”

Investment is working: Compared to facilities or staffing, IT was often described as being in a reasonably good position. Chairs pointed to internal capacity, cybersecurity awareness, and the role of technology in supporting investigations as reasons for confidence.

“I have the sense that out of those three [resources, facility, IT], that [IT] is the strongest.”

“They’re pretty good on the cyber stuff ... they’ve got some people that are very interested in IT.”

“That’s something we could just - you never pause on it - but you can leave that one on its own for the time being. I think the IT piece has been solid. Sometimes you mention the things that are the most stressful and then the ones that are going in a positive way, like the IT, go unmentioned. I’m happy with the service that they have in-house for sure.”

Increased costs are worrying: Some chairs noted that, again, cost is a major factor with IT resources

“I think there is going to be a need for investment in this area. And I think body-worn cameras right now is front centre in that dialogue. But it’s more than that. It’s data analytics, a better understanding of trends.”

“Information technology, it’s the lifeblood of our service, but then all the stuff that goes under it, it’s so costly, the redaction, that kind of thing. That’s always challenging.”

AI has entered the chat: Police services will also be able to onboard new artificial intelligence tools. Chairs saw significant potential for artificial intelligence to improve information retrieval, investigative capacity, crime prevention, and operational efficiency. However, they also raised concerns about privacy, bias, ethics, and the need for governance frameworks before AI is deployed more broadly.

“[Artificial Intelligence is] going to become invaluable. simply because of its storage and retrieval capabilities.”

“[AI tools] will lean us harder towards the prevention of crime. Rather than cleaning up after crime because we will be able to - much more quickly - statistically react to bad traffic zones, bad crime zones.”

“The speed with which we’ll be able to retrieve information will be very, very resourceful.”

“I think most of the times when people think about AI, they are looking at it being problematic, but I look at it as it presents significant opportunities and it improves investigative capacity and operational efficiency.”

“My biggest concern is the privacy and bias issues around [AI tools]. When we are looking at it from a bot perspective, the challenge is not just the adoption of it, but ensuring that the governance frameworks and coming up with the policies that govern the ethical standards and the deployment of the AI within our service.”

FACILITIES

“That’s the elephant on the dining table. We have a facility problem.”

Facilities were one of the most consistently raised concerns in the report. Chairs described aging, undersized, and inadequate buildings as a major challenge, with implications for operations, accessibility, staff morale, community confidence, and long-term capital planning.

“Our facilities are too small. Our facilities are not accessible. Our facilities are worn.”

“Our building is very old. HQ is very, very old and it needs upgrades, but they bought a new building a couple of years ago and it’s downtown, which makes a ton of sense.”

“It’s a dump. And you wouldn’t ask city staff to work under those conditions. It’s a deplorable building. It’s been chopped up to accommodate, [instead] we should be proud of something.”

“Our responsibility is to provide a location for our association to do their job that is of today’s standards and that has been lacking.”

Where is the money coming from for new HQs?

While the need for new or upgraded facilities may be clear, the cost of capital can be significant. Chairs pointed to the scale of investment required and the difficulty of securing municipal approval for major police infrastructure projects.

“Right now, the build would cost \$70 million, and they don’t have \$70 million for a new police station.”

It can be a long battle to get the capital funding approved for a new facility.



“The city went through that battle about 10, 15 years ago and it was ugly, absolutely ugly. And they finally pushed through and made the right decision and built a brand new facility and as close to state-of-the-art as they could.”

Public-private partnerships: Some are looking to a P3 model to build new stations.

“We’re looking at private public partnerships to have the private sector build it.”

Growing services are running out of space: In some communities, the need for new facilities is not only about the age or condition of existing buildings. Population growth, increased staffing, and expanded service demands are also putting pressure on police infrastructure.

“I think just the fact that the growth of this community equals growth of bodies that need to police it will continue to just drive the facility need.”



Getting the plan right could help get the funding approved. Undertaking the right planning is a helpful component of securing new facility funds, Master planning, early engagement with municipal partners, and clear articulation of operational requirements can help ensure that police facility needs are understood and incorporated into broader capital planning.

“We are developing a master plan to look into the facilities because we are facing challenges related to capacity constraints. ... we do have space limitation and then we definitely need a new emergency service unit and training unit facility because at the moment they are barely meeting the requirements under the new Act.”

“I’m very encouraged by initial steps that the Chief has done, both informally and formally, to make those in the city aware of the need and a potential reasonable solution. Hopefully we can ensure that something like [a new facility] does become a possibility.”

Chairs also cautioned against assuming that technology will meaningfully reduce physical space requirements for police services.

“The assumption that digital communications will require less space is fallacious.”

StrategyCorp's Perspective

There is a lot to be hopeful for if you care about strong police governance in Ontario. Police service board chairs are seeing improving leadership, better strategic plans, and even staffing challenges turning the corner with some services. New challenges are always just an election, a bad hire, or a crisis away.

With municipal elections set for this fall, boards and chiefs will have to navigate new political realities and reset their plans to navigate budgets and support police leaders. It is clear that boards are raising their expectations of police leaders when it comes to the role they play in the community and in communicating operational needs to the board. Old school is out of favour as police leaders manoeuvre to meet board expectations.

Working in the chief's favour is a legislative framework that is doing what it was intended to do; raise the standard of police governance in Ontario. A key tool that is being used is the strategic plan. We heard very few comments about new strategic plans sitting on the shelf.

Rather, many chairs saw them as an essential document to guide their work with the chief of police, the municipality and their fellow board members.

The timing for stronger leadership and governance in police services could not have been better. That is because the challenges they are grappling with are only getting harder. Technological transitions will test the capabilities and ingenuity of our police services. Many services expressed concern at the capital pressures stemming from delayed funding decisions on new or updated police facilities. Finally, with the majority of costs going to collectively bargained human resources the ability to curb costs without impacting services requires creativity. The results may mean the best approach for chairs is to focus on enhancing community impact rather than cost containment.

What we are watching for as 2026 unfolds:

- Police chiefs supporting their boards with detailed policy and financial information.
- Strong strategic planning processes that result in plans that act as day-to-day guides for board decision making.
- Budgeting ideas that help bend the cost curve while protecting services.
- Budget processes that protect the division between service, board, and municipality.
- Technology investment strategies that maximize purchasing and investment decisions.
- A plan to support new facilities across the province.

SECTION 04

Local Relationships and Community Engagement



What We Heard

In the third series of questions, chairs unpacked the relationships and community alignment that help maintain effective governance and policing. Chairs looked at the role municipalities play supporting or challenging a police service. They provided an update on how services are adjusting to the communities they serve. Finally, chairs commented on the way they engage with community safety and well-being plans.

This section speaks to how police service boards listen to the views of the community in order to reflect back community needs in their work overseeing the police service.

4.1 Relationship with Local Municipalities

Similar to our previous report, we heard varying responses to the nature of the relationship between police service board chairs, the police service, and their respective municipality.

There is a partnership: Many chairs noted a collegial relationship with the municipality, specifically at the council level. Board decisions are respected, collaboration on key issues are coordinated, and strong support for budget occurs in some cases.

“Very good relationship with the municipality and in particular with respect to the mayor and councillors”

“I would say it’s very good. The chief works well with our CAO and meets with him regularly, which is definitely helping. So that relationship with the municipality is good.”

“I personally have a wonderful relationship with City Council.”

“The council generally respects the board’s decision and they generally follow the legislation in terms of what they can and can’t do.”

Working together on social issues: On front-line collaboration with homelessness and mental health: “We have good coordination there.”

Councils are supportive of police budgets: Many chairs noted strong support of admittedly difficult budget proposals to council. The election year may be helping more councils be supportive of strong public safety budgets, but there is always a choice between cost increases or tax reductions.

“We just had the biggest budget in the history [of the community] in a time when nobody wants to raise taxes because it’s an election year and we got a 100% vote for us, so it speaks well of our relationship with the council.”

“The mayor is obviously a champion of this budget. He had to be, especially with strong mayor powers and everything now.”

“The councillors are understanding the importance and the rebuilding of the police service ... if you look at the budget votes they’ve slowly increased, if I’m not mistaken, in the last three years. So that’s one indication of more councillors having a little more faith. We’re far away from that defund the police model that we were hearing sounds of a few years ago.”

“Even the naysayers are quiet because they can’t argue with the results that we are showing.”

Chairs are doing the work to earn support:

Chairs take a proactive approach in communicating with council, particularly when it involves the budget. When the chair and chief have the time to identify what issues specific councillors have and develop strong answers, approvals can go more smoothly.

“Usually, we always hold annual information sessions with regional councillors, because at the actual budget meeting, we don’t have enough time to educate and inform why this budget is like this ... And then we also go into the community and speak to what the budget involves and includes.”

“I mean the chief and I try to meet with each local mayor and municipal council as often as possible. And then we also go to their council meetings to provide presentations about policing in their communities ... to hear what communities are thinking and to also get the opportunity to inform the councils.”

Ideological differences or the desire for more control can lead to tensions between council and the board, even when efforts are made to educate and communicate. The upcoming election cycle also plays a role in enhanced budget tensions with some municipalities.

“And while these kind of initiatives are well received, they often, the deliberations are always tension ... They understand we need more policing, and they always demand more policing, but they always hesitate to approve the necessary funding in this year for us too, and it’s not just for us, I think for most police services, with the need for training from the new CSPA, that included extra strain on already stressed budgets and trying to get council to approve.”

“Because sometimes it’s really amazing how the councils or the councillors are not very aware of what policing actually involves. And they become very emotional and vocal about it towards elections. And so we try to engage them throughout the year and just inform them and maybe do bits and pieces of educating councillors.”

The council-board membership overlap:

Some chairs identified the benefit or perceived challenges of having members of council on the police service board.

“It’s excellent because the mayor sits on the board, as does the councillor.”

“I think that’s going to be an area that we need to manage with astuteness and be strategic about. You know the old saying, no man can serve 2 masters.”

“It’s an interesting position to be in. I have to make sure that my hats are on in the proper order and are clearly noted.”

Mayors on boards: Some chairs had strong feelings about the role of a mayor as chair of a board.

“I do not believe a mayor should ever chair a police board, ever.”

“The mayor was previously on the board back in August when he introduced Strong Mayor Powers, he resigned from the board. Probably a good thing because what was happening, he would sit on the board and vote in favour of a budget. And then when the budget went to council, he voted against it. I think there’s a little bit of conflict of interest there.”

“I didn’t think it was right that a mayor or head of council chaired the police board. I just, I think that that is something that probably will never make it into the legislation, but I think it should be.”

A necessary tension: One chair noted the tension between municipality and board is essential to forcing the types of difficult decisions inherent in public policy oversight.

“I think there’s ... purposeful tension here, where you have an elected entity, an elected body, including the mayor that has some mandate on how much tax increases he or she campaigned on public safety issues and you have the police budget, which represents potentially one 10th of the entire budget of the city in one entity. Like it’s huge, right? It garners a lot of attention.”

Breakdowns in communication can fuel unhelpful debates: Some chairs noted difficulties with the municipality, specifically councillors. Strained relationships and tension typically emerge from the police service budget, community issues, and upcoming elections. Police board chairs are concerned about a knowledge gap that councillors may have, as police operational needs can be complex.

“The relationship with the municipality was extremely terse and primarily the push and pull was financial. The police came forward and said, this is what we need to have adequate and effective policing, and you can pay it or you can pound salt.”

“There are certain counsellors that are a little confrontational right now.”

“The last couple of council meetings, there’s been a lot of ‘see how good I am that I kept your taxes down?’”

“A lot of them didn’t even understand the acronym CSPA for the longest time.”

Different views on how to handle social issues: Municipalities can advocate for an approach to solve a public safety issue that a chief does not believe is the right approach. A board could also have a different view than the municipality or chief. The homeless encampment issue is a common recent example.

“The City passed a bylaw that prohibited encampments on any city-owned property. We battled with the city about that to say, you’re criminalizing poverty if you say they can’t sleep anywhere and you’re not providing an alternative.”



“Historically, police would come and they’d have like 3 slides like, we’re the Police Service. We protect the community. This is the budget ask. And that was it. Like it was like literally three. So city council got suspicious and they said you’re over budget or so there was this great tension. And with the new board, new chief, we approached it very differently. And we said, let’s do a very fulsome explanation of our budget.”

“That has improved our relationship with them, that transparency and openness. There’s still a lot of suspicion. I don’t think they love us.”

“I think we’ve got a good relationship ... there’s ways to improve the relationship with the municipality as well. As an example, this undertaking of the long-term financial plan is a dialogue between the chiefs and the service, the board, and the municipality.”

4.2 Creating a Police Service that is Reflective of the Local Community

Increasing presence: When asked about the police service reflecting the community, chairs shared that steps have been taken, however there is more work to be done to increase representation.

“It’s not perfect, I’m sure we can improve in areas, but we certainly are present.”

“It’s always a work in progress from my perspective that the police service continues to meet and reflect the needs of the community.”

A diverse service: Some police services are consciously progressing toward better reflecting the diversity of the communities they serve.

“they’ve made great strides. I’m really proud of them ... they spend a lot of time going out to diverse groups trying to break down any barriers and trying to encourage [applications].”

“We see the recruitment class when it comes through and the number of languages and backgrounds that the recruitment class is coming from, I think is a positive sign.”

“I can tell you going to every one of the badging ceremonies, the breadth of lived experience when you look at the [new recruits] ... there’s more women, there’s more people of color. It’s looking more like the community we serve.”

Other police services need to catch up.

“We are lacking with regards to female representation and people of colour as well.”

Retention is an issue for diverse hires. Smaller services aim to hire the best candidates, but often they look for roles with larger services closer to their family and home.

“We’ve always, the service has always made an effort to hire diverse [staff and officers], to represent the community, but we often find, and we’ve had it recently in the last six years, where we’ve hired diverse candidates because they were the best candidate, they were the right candidate at the time. But then they leave.”

Getting the framework right: One chair outlined changes their service made to recruitment that is establishing an approach that will generate long-term results. Police recruitment is supported by a myriad of formal and informal processes. Taking a robust look at how officers are hired can result in systemic improvements.

“We did it in a methodical policy-based, well-researched [way] to make sure that it’s sustainable and can continue to compound and build upon itself. Because just making willy-nilly appointments here and there and not fixing the general problem doesn’t go anywhere. And we are going to make sure that any changes we make are long lasting and can withstand the test of time so that they’re not just symbolic, because I believe that doesn’t do anything for anyone and doesn’t make lasting change when it comes to making sure that the service is representative of the community that it serves. But I also want to be clear, it’s going to take time and it’s not something that can change overnight, but we made great inroads and I’m really proud at least of where the board can control in terms of the where we hire.”

“When you put the proper policies in place and you make sure that you’re reaching out and recruiting in the right fashion, you will inevitably get a command team that represents the community.”

Some structural changes can enhance the benefits for women or parents.

“I think one of the areas that we need to improve is women in the service. We’ve done a couple of things [through] collective bargaining; we’ve increased parental benefits.”

Board representation: Even when there is good service diversity, board diversity can be a challenge. When there are only a handful of members, all appointed by different entities, getting the diverse candidates can be challenging. Building trust between community leaders and different community groups may improve board diversity. Some newer immigrants have memories of unaccountable police services from their home countries.

“We have some great people on the police service ... The other problem is with those people in the community that you’d want on the board to provide their perspectives, often don’t want to get involved or be seen as the police because where they came from, police were corrupt. So they don’t want to be involved because anybody that’s close to the police must be corrupt as well.”

A proactive chief can make a difference. Police Board Chairs discussed the service interaction with community, demonstrating an overall positive relationship where Chiefs are active.

“He [chief] is very good at the relationships. He’s out there more than most politicians are. The guy’s weekends are full with community events. He is an ambassador in the community and he is trusted by people.”

“We have open houses annually in June. The last one was held at our new facility that we’re going to be opening in the next few years. But then all of our units come out so the public can meet the dogs and see people climbing down buildings and see the drones. That has been really well received by the public.”

Boots on the ground: Another chair pointed to the front-line as key to maintaining good community relationships.

“The other is certainly the frequency of community police staff on the ground ... we’re so blessed in this community ... they can walk on the street still and have the respect and the accord.”

Innovative approaches to engagement: One service has a tradition of offering ride-alongs for international students to help build relationships. While another suggested school-police engagement is a positive, supporting the provincial government’s encouragement to bring back school resource officers.

“We for many years have had the ride-along programme for international students, which has been of course very well received by the college and by the university.”

“Community engagement. We are active in the schools with the school board and, you know, various community groups. We, I say we do a good job in liaising with those groups and being involved.”

Officers as public health support: Service integration with community health needs is a constant pressure on officer resources. Officers do not just show up to keep the peace. They are often the first on the scene of a mental health emergency where care, not protection, is the primary need.

“The other thing that is positive is our joint partnership with the local hospital, they are present with people with chronic mental health issues.”

“What I sense some of our staff doing, for which I’m very grateful, is keeping an eye on some of those in the community. We’ve seen it with our unhoused population trying to come as a support, as an understanding, as a link, as a connector to other agencies rather than as a law enforcement officer. I think the increasing awareness of our frontline staff to this ancillary role that they can play and the profound difference they can make in a life is very both heartening and important.”

“Very good integration with the Canadian Mental Health Association ... we have social workers that are embedded with police officers. We’ve got nurse police teams where nurses from the hospital ride along and they respond to low priority mental health calls and divert from hospital.”

Use the tools of the CSPA: Diversity plans and strategic plans were both mentioned in efforts to diversify the police service and reflect the local community as well.

“I feel very much a strategic plan is a great way to have obtained input ... it’s like your thermometer check. I think that’s a very helpful thing.”

“The first one would be actually developing a diversity plan and ensuring that there’s the ability of people who want to come and speak at the police services board to do so, which hasn’t really been a thing in the past. But we’re trying to change that.”

“With our strategic plan, the whole board endorsed the diversity and inclusion strategy, then we went further in that with the 2026 strategic plan, under the diversity and inclusion [pillar], we went on to talk about reconciliation, diversity and accessibility for [our] policies and leadership having it reflect the diversity and inclusion strategy.”

“We have some pretty proactive and active standing committees. We were one of the first services in Ontario to have an anti-racism committee, which actually dates back to the early 2000s.”





“Education, policing, fire, hospital, we’re not in a silo. We share what’s going on in the community. And if we work together, we do better for our community.”

4.3 Community Safety and Well-Being Plans

Chairs gave mixed responses on the usage and effectiveness of their municipality’s Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB) Plan. Some chairs view the municipality’s plan favourably.

“Oh, it’s excellent. And I think that would be acknowledged ... externally as well.”

“I am so proud of our community safety and well-being plan.”

The CSWB as a community planning tool: One chair referenced the board seeing more impact from the CSWB plan than the board’s own strategic plan.

“I feel like we touched that more than we touched the strategic plan. I feel like that comes up more in conversation than the strategic plan ... it’s still not a lot ... not like that’s getting discussed every meeting.”

A legislative requirement that doesn’t get results: Some worry about the specificity of their plan and its usefulness.

“You hope that your community wellness plan isn’t so generic that it’s not specific enough to be any good, but in its four pillars, they still seem very relevant.”

“Because we’re really in danger of being just this performative, almost liturgical dance of political correctness that I’m just afraid is not going to work.”

“I think there’s sometimes a lot of spinning of wheels.”

Partnership and Information. A chair from one large service noted that they are seeing the partnerships and data that is driving positive outcomes. If they can continue the momentum, it can be a virtuous circle.

“What stands out about our community safety and well-being plan is the emphasis on the partnerships and then the data-driven decision making ... I would say our community safety and well-being plan is really placing that emphasis on partnerships, data-driven decision making, and better coordination across the agencies within the region for us to better address the complex issues like mental health, homelessness, and gender-based violence. And then I think going forward, we are going to have the continued measurable outcomes so that we continue to carry on with our evidence-based policing.”

No role for boards: Some Chairs indicate that their police boards are not as involved in the process and have been left out of communication with the plan.

“We don’t get much involvement with that. It’s done at the county level. And there’s [only] a couple of surveys being sent out to the general public. I haven’t seen a lot of information, so I really can’t comment on it. I would have thought there would have been more information to the board.”

“I think the health unit took the lead in our community. To me, it just seems like they handle it like it is another thing that had to be done and it sits on the shelf. I don’t think there was great engagement with it.”



“It’s insufficient, if I’m being honest with you. And the development, the police service board and the police service is supposed to be a part of the process all throughout as well as into the implementation, but we weren’t. I think it’s very high level. I would say it’s okay at best. That would be my fair and honest assessment of it.”

Room for improvement: It may not be working well currently in some municipalities, but chairs did seem hopeful for improvements in some cases.

“I’m not sure it’s working as well as it could.”

“I think it’s a little bit bloated with some of the stakeholders around the table that made it kind of unwieldy, but the intent of the CSWB is solid, and I think that we’re better with it than without it.”

“I think it’s falling into the category of being very performative as opposed to very functional and that concerns me.”

Not enough time to prioritize implementation: With CSWB plans coming into force at the same time as the entire new CSPA, there may have been a missed opportunity for police services to prioritize CSWB planning.

“We were dealing with all the changes with the CSPA to such a degree that I think this has lost some of its impetus for proper execution.”

“Time has come to make sure that it doesn’t fall by the wayside and make sure that we study it and see what’s working, what’s not. Look across the province, see what the best practices are and try to rehone it. I think that’s a good practice with any programme like this.”

StrategyCorp's Perspective

Ontario's police services are changing. Technology and social service needs require a range of skills from front-line officers when they are interacting with the public. Those officers require a board to build the right relationships and create the right policy structures to support safety in Ontario communities. Despite some supportive language in the CSPA, there is little that legislative requirements can do to support strong relationships. They require people understanding and fulfilling their duties faithfully. Municipal councils and staff need to support police board budget processes and understand the differences from other municipal departments. Boards and chiefs need to stay attuned to local political context and create the structures to guide effective community partnerships.

New municipal election candidates can be well served by understanding the role of councillor as it relates to the police service board and police operations. Undoubtedly, they will face constituent questions about public safety that

cannot be ignored. The challenge is sharing information and solving problems while still respecting the important checks and balances in our system of municipal governance.

We heard from Chairs that there have been improvements to foster a police force that is reflective of its community, but there is still progress to be made. There were many notable mentions of positive interactions with the community and recognition of community needs by the police boards. There is room for boards to create processes – through strategic plans, diversity plans, or CSWB plans – that support steady and substantive progress in improving equitable policing in Ontario. This planning is an investment in a community's future. StrategyCorp has recently shared some ways to [improve community safety and well-being planning](#).

What we are watching for as 2026 unfolds:

- Municipal council and police service board training that improves awareness of the role of police governance.
- Tiered approaches to engaging with diversity depending on the size and demographics of a service's community.
- More results-based updates to CSWB plans.
- Continued improvement and recognition of Ontario police services' efforts to diversify their workforce.
- More stories being told of police-led efforts that strengthen our communities.



SECTION

05

What keeps you
up at night?

What We Heard

“I think these are challenging times across the entire province.”

In closing out our interviews, StrategyCorp asked police board chairs, what keeps you up at night?

Many of the responses corresponded with what we heard in our first question on the challenges for the next 5 years. Budget and financial costs, mental health and addictions, wellbeing of officers, implications of the new act, trust and the complexity of policing, stood out among the answers.

Some chairs expressed they were at peace with their role and are confident in the system, leaving them with a reassuring mindset when we asked them what issues kept them up at night.

“Keeping me up at night is a difficult thing to do because anything that might do that, we just talk about it and resolve it and move on. And if we can’t, there is formal processes to deal with that.”

“I have not found this service to be so onerous that the issues keep me up at night ... maybe that’s just a reflection of the positive relationship that exists amongst us all. But I suspect the Chief has a few that keep him possibly meditating and cogitating at night.”

“Nothing. I can’t worry about what I can’t control.”

Worried about the new responsibilities: Others demonstrated more concern about potential future issues.

“I’m really afraid the board’s going to screw up. We’re going to do something that we don’t know what we don’t know. And that worries me.”

It’s the money: Unsurprisingly, budget and finances emerged as one of the biggest issues on chairs’ minds.

“Adequate resources going forward ... that concerns me, whether it’s financially or equipment-wise. I want to make sure that our service has what it needs.”

“If [the province wants] to run it, just run it. But if we have no tools to be able to control the cost of the most expensive department of the city, that’s a problem.”

“I think it’s going to be tough for the [city] in the next little while. And ... now you’re going into a municipal election. We’re not sure what will happen after.”

“The cost versus delivery argument is ever widening. And we will have to address it at some point.”

Chairs also shared ideas that could help address budgeting worries, including centralized bargaining.

“Centralized bargaining would be really useful to standardize some of the expenses, some of the cost, and de-weaponize part of the game.”

... consistent grant funding.

“You’d like to know that dollars come from the federal and the provincial governments. You’d like to know that there’s more consistency and long-term flow of those dollars instead of waiting for this program and applying for that program, that consistency of dollars that you can plan ahead that certainly is a concern.”

... and working together.

“There needs to be a group that sits down and works together, and I think that’s happening right now through the [PGO] and the Ministry to look at the cost of policing. I’m the first one to admit that policing costs are huge ... come to the table and let’s talk about how to normalize the cost.”

Community issues: Mental health and addictions keep the police board chairs up at night.

“The general issue of mental health and addiction cannot be ignored in this conversation. And it’s really hard not to bring this up because the calls that our folks are responding to really aren’t policing matters. 70% of them are not criminal matters. They’re responding to mental health and addiction calls. And it’s highly inefficient and highly expensive.”

“The continuation of the homeless and drug crisis and when the provinces and the feds are going to step up and recognize this is a medical, mental health issue and not a housing crisis and stop trying to shove it onto the municipalities ... the amount of time that our special constables and our frontline officers spend with the homeless and the drug issues still blows my mind. And I think that our city has done a pretty darn good job, relatively speaking.”

“I do think about homeless, mental health, addictions. I’ve stayed for the 12-hour shifts. I’ve been out on those calls. So, I see it firsthand, never mind just driving by. The impact that has on service members who deal with it day after day, the same people day after day. That keeps me up and just why that can’t be resolved.”

“If you’re making a drug bust there’s a lot of addiction as well in our community, or those drugs wouldn’t be here.”

Wellness: Chairs are very aware and worried about officer wellbeing.

“I think about my staff and you’re always worried that they’re going to have ... that burnout piece, that they’re able to take care of them, their health and well-being, because our most important asset is our human resources.”

“The last thing that really keeps me up at night is our staff. I’m worried about them and I’m worried about the amount of work they have on their shoulders every single day. I’m worried about the burnout. I’m worried about them having the proper support because at the end of the day, they’re people. They need work-life balance as well. They work exceptionally hard.”

The new Act has created implementation challenges that chairs continue to think about at night.

“I think it’s the amount of expectations that have been placed on us by the CSPA. I think that that’s definitely a concern.”

“If we’re going to continue with a board structure in this province, and it’s going to have any effect, they need to be better trained. They need to have a full understanding of their liabilities and their responsibilities.”



“The boards need leadership. We need somebody or something to lead it because the average board member is quite ill-informed and uneducated in terms of what their job is and what they need to do.”

“So whether it’s Section 220, the helicopters, the lack of support and training, lack of specificity around the implementation of some really excellent policies, these are the things that disturb me as board chair and somebody who has a significant amount of responsibility for the carriage of these.”

Investing in public governance: Adequate resources to undertake a proper governance function is also a concern.

“We’re responsible for so much and yet [have] so little to spend on governance.”

“Governance isn’t a nice to have. It’s a must have. But to do governance effectively, there must be proper resourcing. Otherwise, you’re just on a fool’s errand.”

The relationship with the Province has not made it any easier.

“I think the whole relationship with the province, to be honest with you, and the pace of change, the lack of follow-up and support, and the politics.”

“The last OAPSB Labour Conference, the Solicitor General spoke. And he, for the very first time, any Solicitor General, in my time of going to those things, actually mentioned the stress of budgets on boards. He actually spoke a bit about that. He didn’t make any promises of support, but at least he acknowledged the challenges that we face budget-wise. It’s the first time I’ve ever heard a Minister or Solicitor General speak about that at these things.”

Trust and relationships within the community are critical. Without that, it is difficult to effectively serve and protect the community.

“Maintaining the trust of our communities is something that I think about often, once we lose that, we’re going to find it very difficult to operate within the communities that we serve.”

“We are continuing to navigate times when policing is evolving and decisions about technology are being made and because of things like that, governance has to be proactive to ensure that our board remains disciplined in its oversights and collaborative in its relationships, and then forward thinking and forward-looking in its decision making so that we continue to deliver effective policing and keeping that public trust, because I think public trust is our most valuable asset and protecting it is our important duty.”

The ever-evolving complexity of policing stays in the minds of some police board chairs, particularly the risk of a crisis situation.

“I would say a crisis, some sort of incident that’s beyond anyone’s control ... It happens, right? Just look at what happened with Toronto ... something like that, something that is out of your hands, out of your control, and all of a sudden you’re asked to react.”

Politics can be a problem: Chairs shared the political nature of their job and their opinions of police board governance.

“I’m taken aback at how political this position is.”

“If someone says would you recommend I serve in the police service board? I would say no, do your due diligence, but no, don’t let your ego get involved. Walk away because you have no idea what you’re responsible for. And how many other volunteers on boards are going to be doing that? That scares me.”

“I think one of the issues around why the governance hasn’t been so effective is that the position has been in the past, and perhaps still is, seen as a prestige position ... and I think that having that position or looking at it in that light makes complacency a lot more attractive for people because they don’t necessarily understand what the rules and responsibilities are, and then they don’t want to rock the boat. So they don’t do anything to effect change because they also want their relationships with leadership and the police to be positive as opposed to professional.”

Responsible public sector governance: Moving forward, police boards must be open to change, adopt innovation, and make responsible decisions for their communities.

“We are very open to change. We really believe in transparency. I’m happy to have these conversations. Nobody says we know it all. Nobody, says we get it right all the time. There are best practices everywhere. We want to be very open-minded and progressive and say we want to do better and we need everybody’s help to do better.”

“We are the leaders, but I keep telling people, we can’t sit on our laurels. We have to continue to be the leaders and be innovative and do those things that set us apart.”

“Making decisions as a board and on the board that stand the test of time. The decisions that are ethical, physically responsible and things like that. And that are also responsive to the changing realities of policing. Because for me, I think leadership is about carrying the weight of those decisions that affect both people and communities and taking it seriously. So yeah, the fact that we are carrying the weight of decisions that affect both people and communities keeps me super vigilant.”



Conclusion

Across the 24 interviews of police board chairs, what stood out was a continued desire to strengthen police governance and maintain momentum. The implementation of the CSPA prompted a concerted effort by many chairs to raise the standard of local governance through updating policies, improving relationships, and enhancing processes such as budget approvals.

Chairs invested significant effort that went beyond the scope of regular board governance expectations. It is fair to wonder if that level of effort can be sustained by positions held largely by volunteers. In many cases this additional work led to stronger chair-chief relationships. Chiefs who understand the benefits of effective governance will aim to nurture those deeper relationships. With a municipal election year expected to increase board turnover, maintaining these relationship gains will be important.

Despite the progress towards stronger police governance, questions surrounding the effectiveness of these changes remain unanswered. These new policies will be tested,

leaving small and large services to turn towards the Inspectorate of Policing (IoP) for guidance. Municipalities and the province will continue to struggle with funding pressures, challenging the ability to provide adequate and effective policing. Throughout this period, board chairs will aim to provide leadership and prepare new board members for the work to come.

Board chairs cannot do the work alone. Encouragingly, policing leaders across the province are increasingly recognizing that the sector requires strong partnerships to navigate an increasingly complex public safety environment. This is evident in the joint labour and association conferences that bring together officers, chiefs, and board leaders. Together, these organizations are able to create the conditions for strong provincial leadership on overdue reforms, identifying funding opportunities, and supporting governance best practices through the IoP. 2026 will be an important year in Ontario's work to entrench effective police governance.



For Further Information



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