



Community Survey

The summary of an external
scanning component
towards the development of
the 2021-2023 Strategic
Business Plan

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Executive Summary

A sample of the community (N=1053) provided their opinions of perceptions of crime, feelings of safety, policing priorities, police visibility, and police performance through an online survey that ran for approximately one month across September and October 2020. Both universal and snowball recruitment techniques were used in the promotion of the survey. The majority of participants represented demographics that were less trusting and confident in police, based on features identified in the Community Index of Wellbeing (CIW) survey in 2018. This deep dive was purposeful for verification and is seen as a positive in order to bring diversity to these findings and amplify those voices, though the intersectionality of individuals and their identities should also be acknowledged.

In terms of *core indicators of trust and confidence in police*, there is a lot of moral support and willingness to help police if asked, but participants felt WRPS was weaker in providing the same quality of service to all citizens. Similar poor ratings were obtained in the CIW two years ago. It was also a split decision as to whether WRPS was dealing with issues that matter to people in this community. The survey participants rated WRPS as *effective* in providing accessible services, being visible in the community, addressing road safety, and resolving violent crime (a national indicator of trust and confidence), but more ineffective at dealing with neighbourhood issues or concerns and improving safety and security. There is room for improvement with responding quickly to calls for assistance (another national indicator), providing assistance to victims, and enforcing the law. *Top policing priorities in one's neighborhood* continue to be: (1) driving issues, (2) drugs, and (3) break and enters ranking 3rd this cycle.

Participants' *perceptions of police authority* was mostly positive (74% think police never or rarely exceed their authority); *overall satisfaction* with the WRPS was mostly positive (74% think police are doing an average, good, or excellent job overall); and as in previous years, most want *more police in their neighbourhood*.

Next steps include further disaggregating the data to explore whether some groups tended to answer differently than the collective and conducting qualitative analysis. Almost 900 people offered practical insight as to how the WRPS may increase the public's trust and confidence in them. These responses will be sorted by sentiment and theme, best applied at the internal, operationalizing stage (e.g. developing objectives and their corresponding performance indicators).



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Introduction

This community survey is the seventh in a series conducted by the Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) since 2000. Along with other data collection pieces it helps satisfy the stakeholder consultation component of the Strategic Business Plan (SBP) development for the Police Services Board (PSB). The community survey typically asks about perceptions of crime, feelings of safety, policing priorities, police visibility, and police performance.

Methodology

Materials and Research Approach

The survey was online for approximately one month ending on October 9th, 2020. It was hosted on the platform Constant Contact arranged through WRPS' Corporate Communications. The link was promoted on WRPS' social media (universal recruitment) as well as through the focus group invitations (snowball recruitment). There is evidence that it was indeed fanned out by forwarding the original e-mail, by posting on their respective social media sites, and by placing an insert in community e-newsletters. The content replicated some questions from the survey series but with a greater emphasis on trust and confidence in police using nationally endorsed standardized metrics (see Appendix A). This run of the survey was meant to supplement the focus groups as an alternative means of participation rather than serve as a full-scale community survey and thus represents a sample of the community.

Participants

This year 1053 surveys were completed, which is the highest response volume achieved among universal recruitment cycles managed by WRPS. Since there were no forced answers the participation rate for each question may vary. Sampling was not conducted proportional to the regional population, meaning there were no quotas imposed by gender or age across our three cities and four townships. Demographics collected were based on the disaggregated results of the Community Index of Wellbeing survey (CIW, 2018) that asked about trust and confidence in police and pointed towards some populations being less so¹, with participants able to self-identify and select all that applied. The hope was that those voices would be represented in these results to provide some validation/follow-up to the CIW survey two years later, and to reflect some diversity in our survey to better inform the SBP development, though anyone was welcome to participate. Indeed, 69% (N=728) of the respondents self-identified with one or more of the demographics and are clustered around 1 to 6 traits (see Table 1).

¹ PSB Report 2019-180 Trust and Confidence in Police – A “Deep Dive” of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing Survey Results in Waterloo Region

Table 1 – The Intersectionality of the Participants

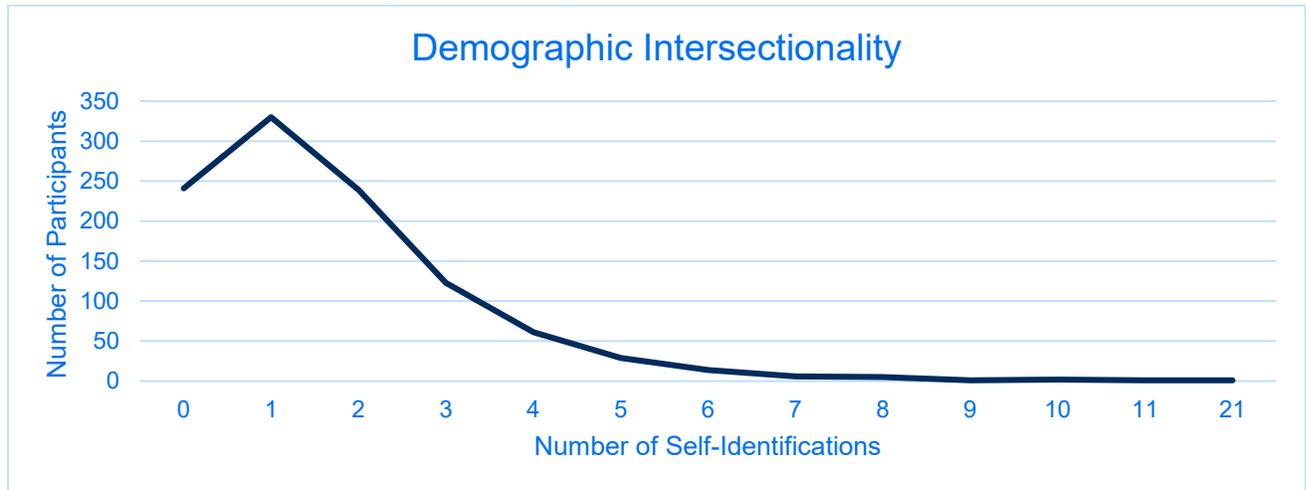
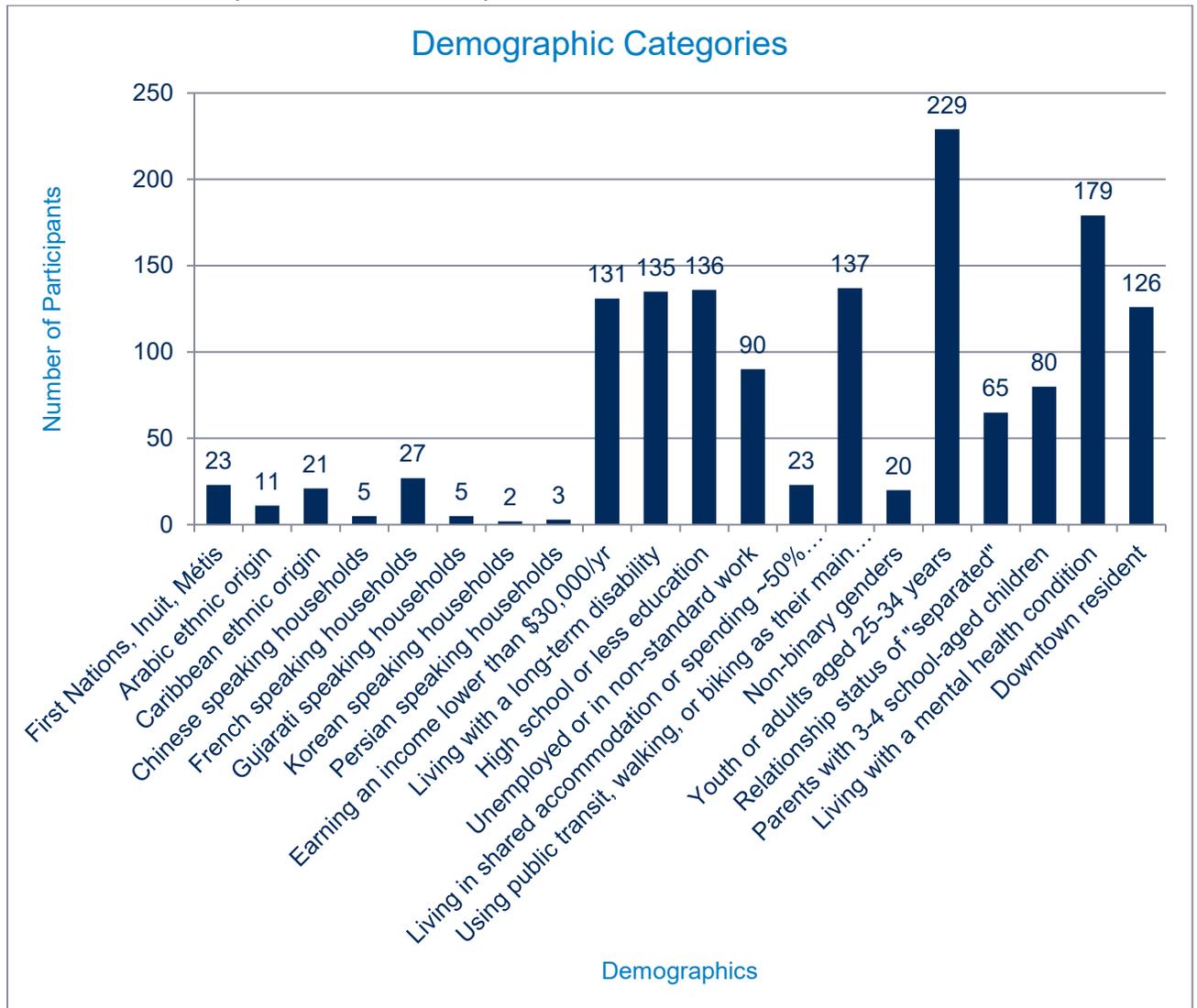


Table 2 – The Composition of the Participants



The demographics the participants identified with are presented in Table 2. The most representation was from youth or adults aged 25-34 years (31.4%). The next highest representation was from persons living with a mental health condition (24.5%), with perspectives from persons using public transit, biking, or walking as their main mode of transport (18.8%), persons having a high school or less education (18.6%), persons living with a long-term disability (18.5%), persons/households earning \$30,000/yr or less (17.9%), and downtown residents (17.3%) also shaping the results. Recall, these identities may intersect.

In addition, 1/3 of participants indicated they had been victims of crime in Waterloo Region sometime over the past three years. This proportion has remained stable since 2014. It tends to influence responses and could explain why the most common interactions with a member of WRPS have been when a crime was committed (32.6%) or speaking with an officer on patrol (29.8%). Meeting at a community or special event still ranks highly with 26.6% (279 people) endorsing that. About ¼ admittedly have not had a direct dealing with a member of the WRPS in the past 3 years.

Results

Core Indicators of Trust and Confidence in Police

A set of questions was developed at the national level meant to become a standard for measuring trust and confidence in police. These items were endorsed after the rollout of the CIW survey in 2018, but align very well, allowing for some comparability over time. Comparability across Canadian police services is not available yet.



When you think about the WRPS, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

The police make decisions based on facts.

- 76% yes

The police treat people with respect.

- 76% yes

The police provide the same quality of service to all citizens.

- Most negative rating, with 55% disagreeing
- 25% strongly disagreed
- The CIW survey (2018) asked the same question and at that time only 49% agreed. Here, again, only 47% agreed.

The police are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community.

- Split decision (56% agree / 43% disagree)

I feel a moral duty to follow police orders.

- 89% positive response
- 47% strongly agreed

I generally support how the police usually act.

- 80% yes

I would help the police if asked.

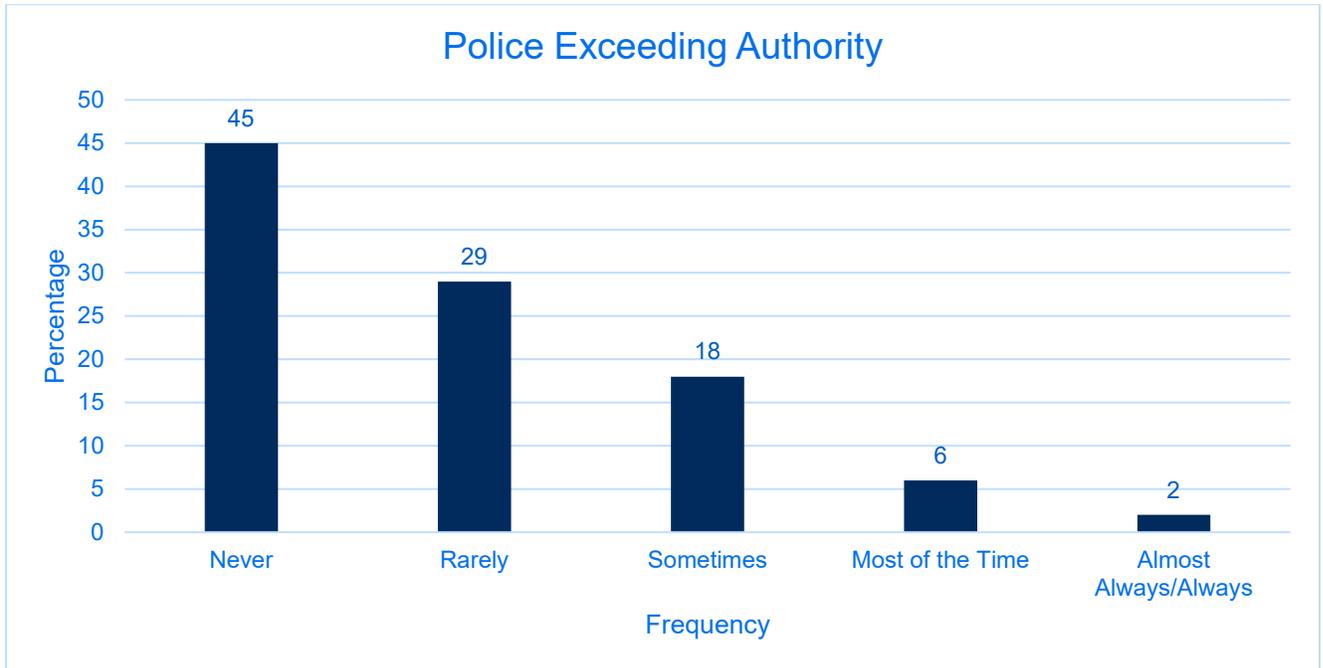
- Most positive rating, with 94% agreeing
- Over half strongly agreed

The sample of individuals also shared their perceptions of authority, specifically how often they would say that the police in their neighbourhood exceed their authority. The results indicate a



very positive distribution with 74% suggesting there is an appropriate power balance, but not without some checks and balances required according to the other 26% (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Perceptions of Authority



Furthermore, survey participants were asked to rate WRPS on the effectiveness of public safety and community wellbeing services provided. Many of these same items were rated between “good” and “fair” in 2017 (some movement in the ranked order), though “dealing with neighbourhood issues or concerns” also received the lowest rating three years ago.



Two items that received the greatest number of negative endorsements, but not enough to tip them as ineffective, included:

- *Responding quickly to calls for assistance*, and
- Enforcing the law.

Note that “Responding quickly...” was one of two items that received a split decision (58% agreed that police were effective, 42% thought police were ineffective). The other item was “Providing assistance to victims” (60% / 40% split). “Resolving violent crime” and “Responding quickly to calls for assistance” are italicized to indicate they are national indicators. The other items draw from previous community surveys. Some did not stand out as overly effective or ineffective:

- Solving crime,
- Providing crime prevention information,
- Consulting with the public,
- Providing services to a range of ethnic and racial groups, and
- Following up on complaints or investigations.

Taking everything into account, most survey participants (74%) would rate WRPS as “good” or “average”. This is down from an 84% satisfaction rating in 2017. As displayed in Table 4 below, there is an approximately normal distribution of satisfaction ratings with only 26% expressing that WRPS is performing poorly or very poorly.

Table 4 – WRPS Performance



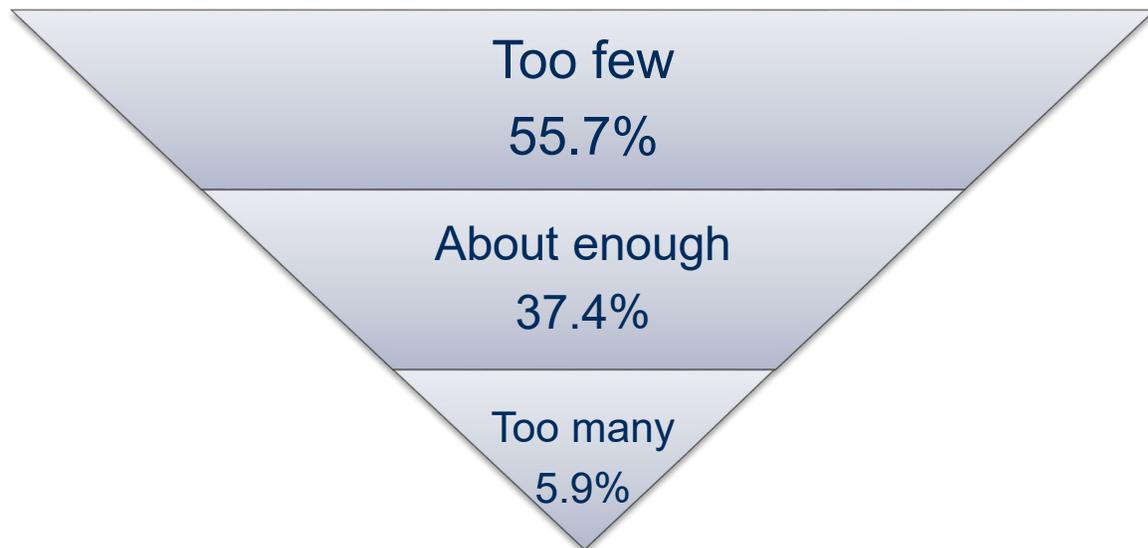
Public Priorities

“What are the three most important policing issues in your neighbourhood?” This has been asked consistently across time. Defined as the area within 15-minutes’ walking distance of your home, participants could choose from a list of concerns or offer their own. Repeatedly, speeding and aggressive driving has been the top priority near one’s residence. Some participants attempted to rank all driving issues at the top (speeding and aggressive, impaired, distracted). Over the past 6 years, drugs have also been a priority issue – use, abuse, and overdose reported more so than trafficking, but this may be influenced by what is observable. The third-ranked issue has changed over time, and this cycle break and enters have emerged as a priority. This is contrary to the downward trend of this crime in Waterloo Region. Note that some participants indicated that their neighbourhoods were safe and thus did not indicate a top three. Others rightfully pointed out that homelessness and mental health were not crimes (indeed this was not a list of crimes) nor policing issues. These items were included on the pick list based on their high ranking in 2017 with the intention of sharing these scanning results at the Regional level. An endorsement of issues that are not necessarily crimes or issues that are more complex and require a coordinated upstream approach would lend focus to Wellbeing Waterloo Region working groups.

The Top Policing Priorities in Your Neighbourhood:						
2007		Speeding and Aggressive Driving		Residential Break and Enters		Youth Behaviour
						
2011		Speeding and Aggressive Driving		Youth Behaviour		Domestic Violence
						
2014		Speeding and Aggressive Driving		Drugs		Having Enough Officers
						
2017		Speeding and Aggressive Driving		Drug use, abuse, overdoses		Thefts, including from vehicles
						
2020		Speeding and Aggressive Driving		Drug use, abuse, and overdoses		Break and Enters



Lastly, the public was asked to think about the number of police they see in their neighbourhood and indicate whether there are too many, about enough, or too few.



More than half shared the opinion that there were too few officers in their neighbourhood implying that they would like to see more, not less, police presence.

Next Steps

Disaggregating the Data

Did the ¼ with no police interactions over the past 3 years answer differently?

Did the 30% who did not identify with any of the demographics identified through the CIW survey (2018) answer differently?

Analyzing the Qualitative Responses

Almost 900 people offered practical insight as to how the WRPS may increase the public's trust and confidence in them. These responses will be sorted by sentiment and theme. The best fit for these suggestions are at the internal, operationalizing stage (e.g. developing objectives and their corresponding performance indicators).



Appendix A – Community Survey content

In order to provide Waterloo Region with the highest level of safety and service, and in preparation for our 2021-2023 Strategic Business Plan, we need to hear from our community members. Some populations had less trust and confidence in police according to the Community Index of Wellbeing in 2018, and we are specifically following up with leaders, service providers, and individuals in those groups through dialogue sessions. For anyone unable to attend those live sessions, we are offering an online survey as a medium for you to discuss what you see as policing and safety concerns, emerging trends, and evolving priorities. Please take about 15-minutes to answer the following questions. All of your opinions will be kept anonymous. If you have any further feedback feel free to contact Amanda Franceschini in the Strategic Services Branch at amanda.franceschini@wrps.on.ca or 519-570-9777 at extension 8430. Thank you!

Demographics

1. Do you belong to any of the following populations? (check all that apply)

First Nations, Inuit, Metis

Arabic ethnic origin

Caribbean ethnic origin

Chinese speaking households

French speaking households

Gujarati speaking households

Korean speaking households

Persian speaking households

Persons or households earning an income lower than \$30,000/yr

Persons living with a long-term disability

Persons with highschool or less education

Persons unemployed or in non-standard work

Persons living in shared accommodation (perhaps in shelters or supportive housing) or spending ~50% of income on housing

Persons using public transit, walking, or biking as their main mode of transport

Persons identifying as non-binary genders

Youth or Adults aged 25-34 years

Adults with a relationship status of “separated”

Parents with 3-4 schoolaged children

Downtown resident

Persons living with a mental health condition

2. Have you been a victim of crime in Waterloo Region sometime in the past 3 years? (Y/N)

3. Have you had an interaction with a member of the WRPS in the past 3 years?" (check all that apply)

At a community or special event

I know a WRPS member personally

I network with WRPS members through my work/volunteering

When a crime was committed



Speaking with an officer on patrol

Speaking with an officer or a civilian professional at one of WRPS' buildings

Public Safety Canada Trust and Confidence in Police questions

4. When you think about the Waterloo Regional Police Service, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

(Response categories: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Agree; Strongly agree)

- a) The police make decisions based on facts.
- b) The police treat people with respect.
- c) The police provide the same quality of service to all citizens.
- d) The police are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community.
- e) I feel a moral duty to follow police orders.
- f) I generally support how the police usually act.
- g) I would help the police if asked.

5. About how often would you say that the police in your neighbourhood exceed their authority?

(Response categories: Never/almost never, Rarely, Sometimes, Most of the time, Always/Almost always)

6. In general, to what extent do you agree that the Waterloo Regional Police Service is effective at:

(Response categories: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Agree; Strongly agree)

- a) Resolving crimes where violence is involved?
- b) Responding quickly to calls for assistance?
- c) Enforcing the law
- d) Solving crime
- e) Providing crime prevention information
- f) Addressing road safety
- g) Providing assistance to victims
- h) Consulting with the public
- i) Providing services to a range of ethnic and racial groups
- j) Being visible in the community
- k) Following up on complaints or investigations
- l) Dealing with neighbourhood issues or concerns
- m) Improving public safety and security
- n) Providing accessible services (in-station, online)

7. Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this area are doing?

(Response categories: Very poor; Poor; Average; Good; Excellent)

- ~~8. Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this country are doing?~~

~~(Response categories: Very poor; Poor; Average; Good; Excellent)²~~

9. In your opinion, what are the *three* most important policing issues *in your neighborhood* (e.g. the area within 15-minutes' walking distance of your home)? [randomize list; except for "other" and "don't know"] force only 3 choices

² Not asked at this time to limit the survey to 10 questions and keep the focus on the local police service.



- a) Assaults and Robberies
- b) Sex assaults and offences
- c) Domestic violence
- d) Elder abuse
- e) Break and enters
- f) Motor vehicle thefts
- g) Property damage
- h) Fraud
- i) Identity theft
- j) Gangs/organized crime
- k) Repeat offenders
- l) Human trafficking
- m) Guns/weapons
- n) Drug use, abuse, or overdoses
- o) Drug trafficking
- p) Mental Health
- q) Homelessness
- r) Driving – distracted
- s) Driving – speeding/aggressive
- t) Driving – impaired by drugs or alcohol
- u) Safety in schools
- v) At-risk youth
- w) Crime prevention
- x) Hate crime
- y) Cybercrime

10. Thinking about the number of police you see in your neighbourhood, please indicate whether you think there are:

Too few

About enough

Too many

Open-ended

11. How could the Waterloo Regional Police Service increase your trust and confidence in them?

