

Crime and Public Safety Survey

Report

Bridgewater Police Department



February 2007

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Crime and Public Safety Survey

Preliminary Report – February 2007

Introduction

During the month of January 2007, the Bridgewater Police undertook a public opinion survey to address issues and concerns with regards to the Bridgewater Police and public safety in the town of Bridgewater. This report offers a brief preliminary summary of the results of that survey.

Policing and public safety are vital to the well-being and security of every community. The Bridgewater Police, as a component of their strategic planning process for the period 2007–9, recognized the importance of listening to our community as business plans are formulated. In order to “hear” the voices of our community, the police are using several activities designed to encourage public input. This survey will be complimented by an open forum with the Chief of Police on the 15th of February, 2007.

Hoping to learn their attitudes, opinions, and specific concerns regarding police performance, we mailed surveys to 2800 persons and also made the survey available online. We received 511 responses, or approximately 18% of those mailed out. The sample size, in this instance and based on total population, allows for data results that are 95% accurate with an error rate of plus or minus 4%.¹

The survey covered the following issues:

- ❑ Crime Perceptions and concerns: we examined issues relating to the perceived levels of crime and community concerns regarding crime and safety. Specifically, the type and extent of perceived local problems and fear of victimisation, and feelings of safety.
- ❑ Police-community relationships: A range of issues relating to police-community relationships were covered in this survey.
- ❑ Satisfaction: the level of public satisfaction in relation to overall perceptions of police, specific personal contacts with police, and police visibility.

Copies of the final report will be made available in March on our website at www.bridgewaterpolice.ca, or by contacting the Bridgewater Police Department at 543-2464.

¹ In calculating percentage(s), a degree of rounding has taken place; therefore, not all percentages will add up to 100.

Methodology:

This survey was conducted over a four week period beginning January 1st, 2007. The survey instrument was based on a study of surveys conducted throughout the Atlantic Provinces by a number of different police agencies.

The primary objectives of the survey were to determine:

- Level of fear of crime in specific neighbourhoods
- Perceptions of crime in our town and in specific areas of town.
- Attitudes towards policing in various areas of Bridgewater.
- Areas of concern where residents would like us to focus attention.

The survey was administered by direct mail to 2800 households, handed out to a large number who requested the survey and was made available through our website. Reports of the survey were mentioned in articles in both local and provincial newspapers.

The sample size of 511 respondents is considered appropriate to achieve a balance between a level of confidence for the results and the time allotted to conduct the survey. In this instance, the sample size allows for data results that are 95% accurate with an error rate of plus or minus 4%.

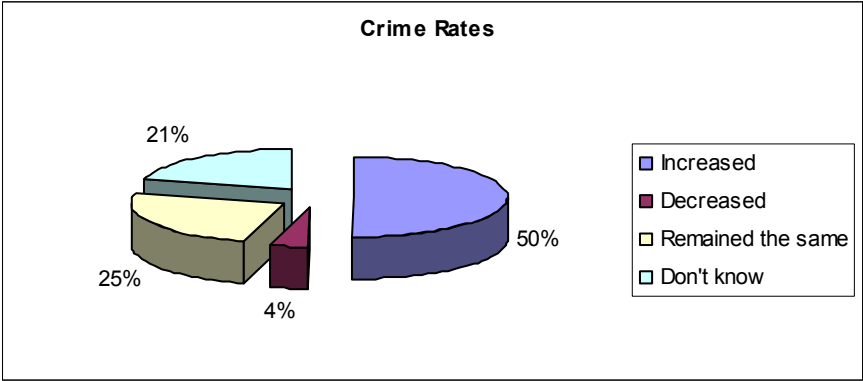
Survey Highlights:

- ❑ 49% of those surveyed think that crime has increased, while 26% feel that it has stayed the same and only 5% think that crime has decreased.
- ❑ 19% of respondents thought Theft/Break & Enter was a major problem 18% of respondents recognized street drugs as a major problem in Bridgewater while 21% saw lack of police visibility as a major concern.
- ❑ When asked if they had contacted the Bridgewater Police in the past year, 73% of respondents said "no".
- ❑ When asked if Bridgewater requires additional police officers, 37% said "no".
- ❑ Police visibility appears to be a problem in Bridgewater. Only 10% said that the police were "very visible". 34% indicated that the police are only "somewhat visible".
- ❑ When asked if the Bridgewater Police were doing a good job at policing the town, 21% strongly agreed and 32% somewhat agreed. 5% strongly disagreed.
- ❑ The average age of the respondent was 58 years and had lived an average of 11 years in their neighbourhood. 52% of respondents were male. 76% are married or in a common-law relationship. 48% of our respondents indicated they were retired.
- ❑ 3% of respondents were from the same postal code area encompassing 14 streets located on the edge of town.

Crime perceptions and concerns:

Patterns of crime in Canada are traced through reports submitted by every police service to Statistics Canada using the Uniform Crime Reporting system. These statistics create a national database that allows for comparisons across provincial, regional, and municipal police jurisdictions. However, perception is an important element when dealing with fear of crime and a sense of personal safety and security. One question of the public survey dealt with perceptions on levels of crime within the town.

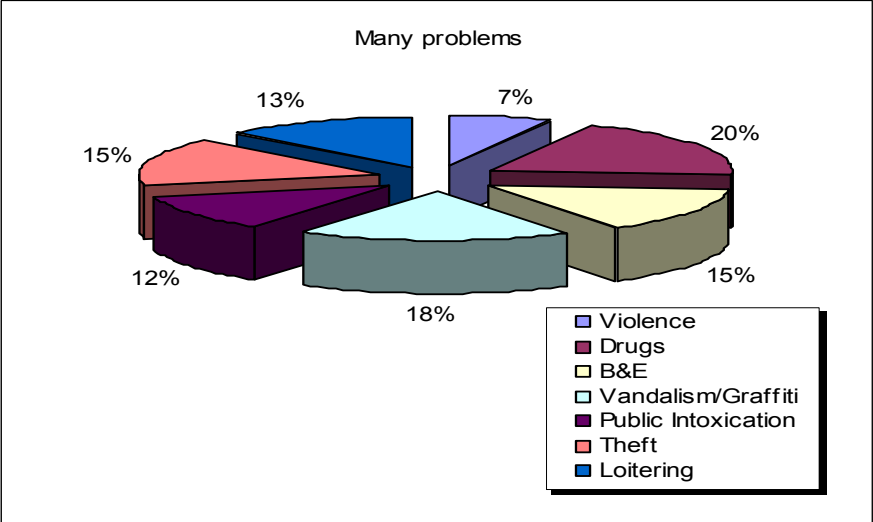
Q. Do you think that crime in the Bridgewater area has increased, decreased or remained the same over the past two years?



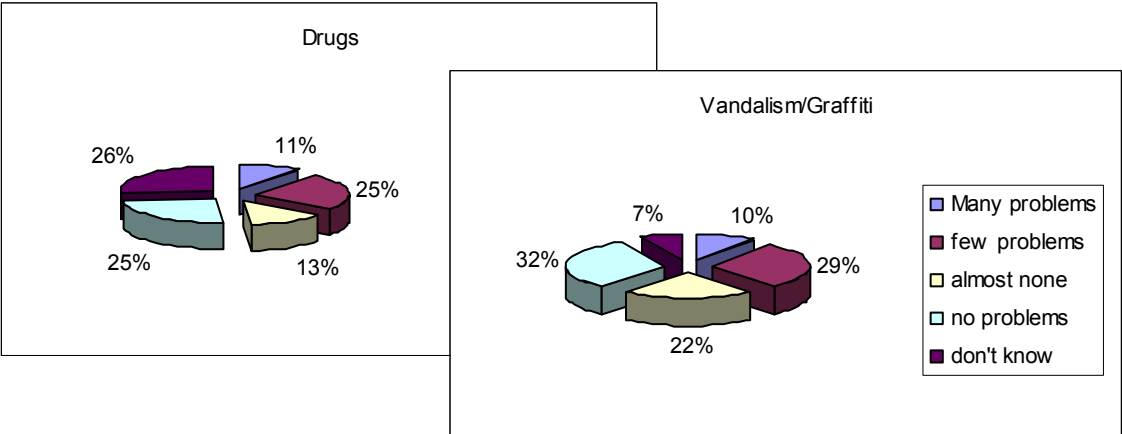
These results indicate that a number of respondents (50%) believe that crime has increased in the town of Bridgewater. This represents an area where the Bridgewater Police can undertake more focussed discussion with various stakeholders, community groups, and individuals to learn more about these perceptions. Certainly fear of crime is one important indicator of the level of well-being in any community, and efforts will be made to explore these perceptions further.

Most serious problems in Bridgewater:

To begin the process of identifying the problems that people feel are the most serious, respondents were asked to select items that reflected their greatest concerns. Respondents were limited to seven problems. The results are outlined below.

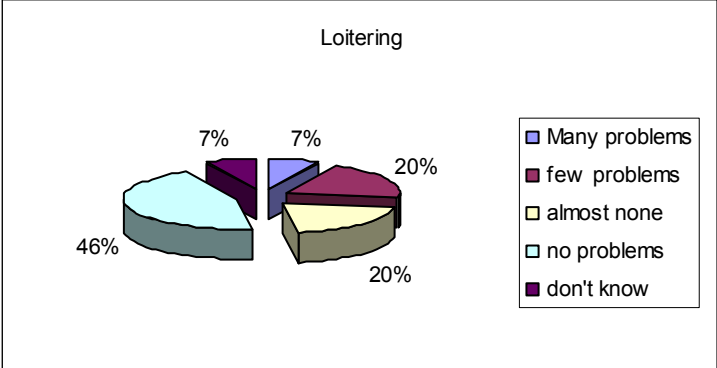


Drugs, followed closely by vandalism/graffiti, are perceived as the main problems in our town. It will be important to maintain close attention to the problems that have been identified as significant among our community members.



Do you consider the following to be problems in your neighbourhood?

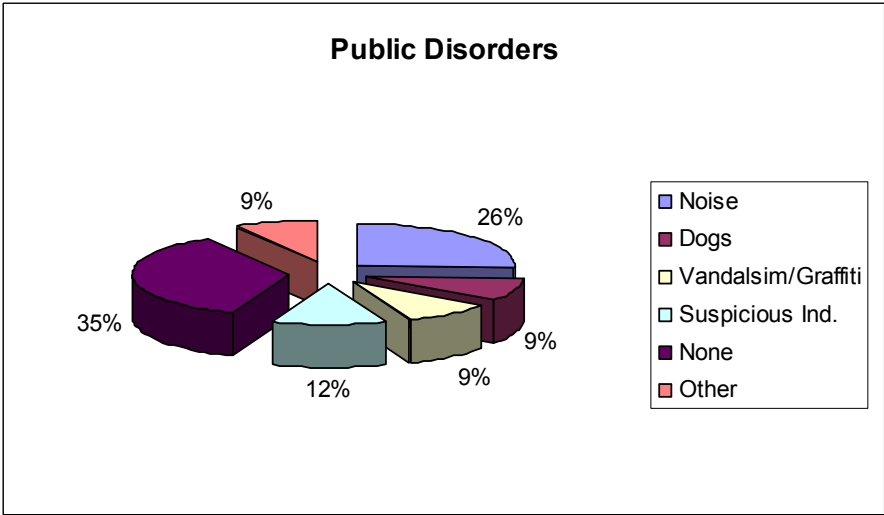
Options available in this survey were: Violence, Drugs, Break and Enter, Vandalism/Graffiti, Public Intoxication, Theft and Loitering. Most respondents felt that there were many problems with Street Drugs. Loitering was seen as being the least problematic.



In the past 12 months have you been bothered by any of the following public disorders?

Options in this area were Noise, Dogs, Vandalism/Graffiti, or Suspicious Individuals.

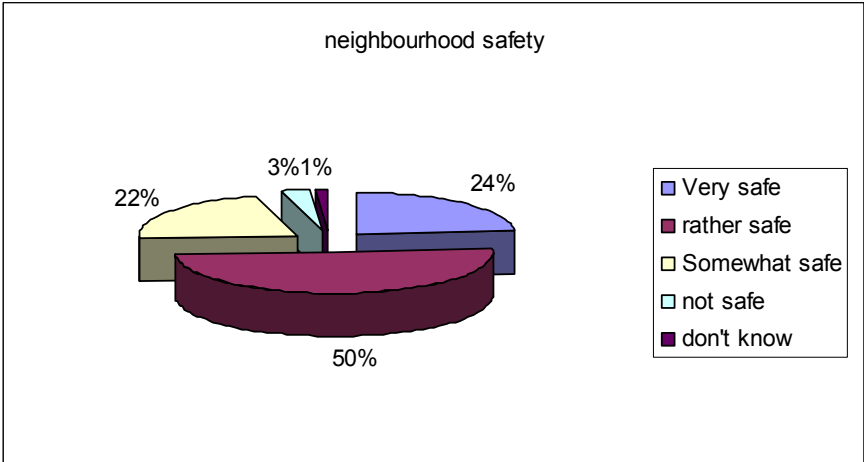
35% of respondents had not been bothered by any of the public disorders listed. Of nuisances listed, 26% stated noise as their major concern. They listed dogs barking and loud car stereo systems as the major cause of noise in their neighbourhoods.



Perceptions of Safety:

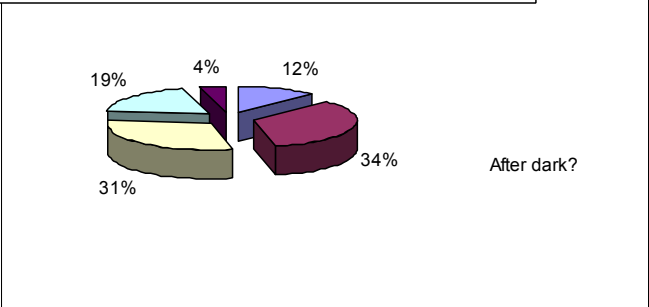
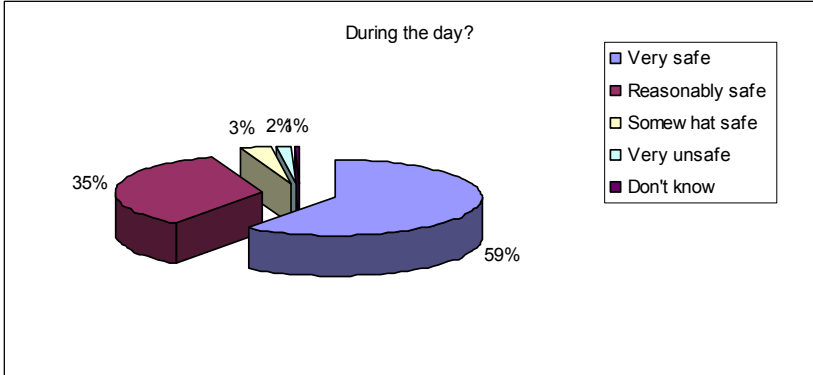
Q. When you think about your neighbourhood, which of the following applies:

50 % of respondents indicated that they feel "Rather Safe". Only 3% felt "Not safe at all" and 24% felt "Very Safe". It will be valuable to compare responses to postal areas to determine in which locations respondents feel most vulnerable.

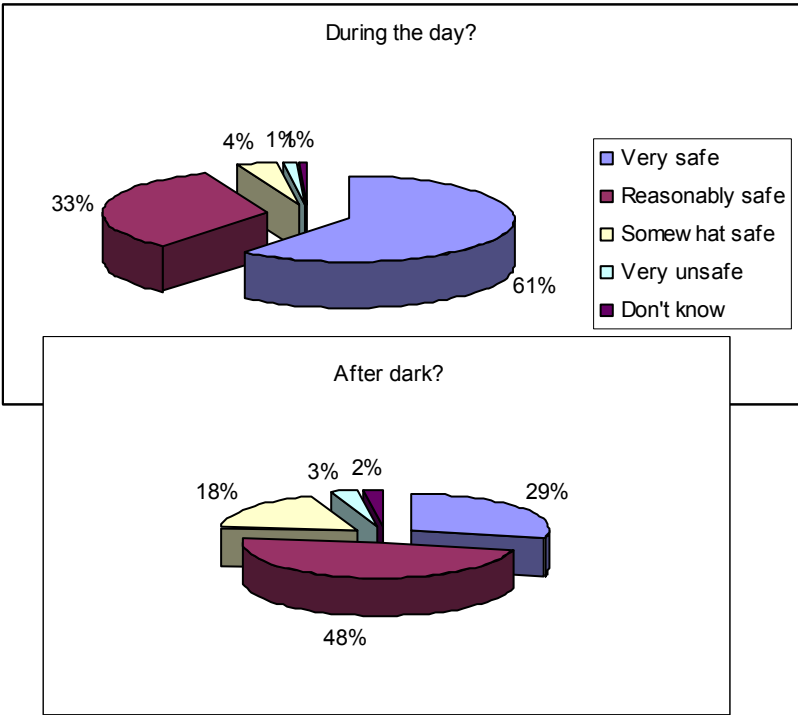


How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood?

Most respondents (59%) stated that they feel very safe walking during the day and reasonably safe (34%) after dark. 19% feel very unsafe going out after dark.



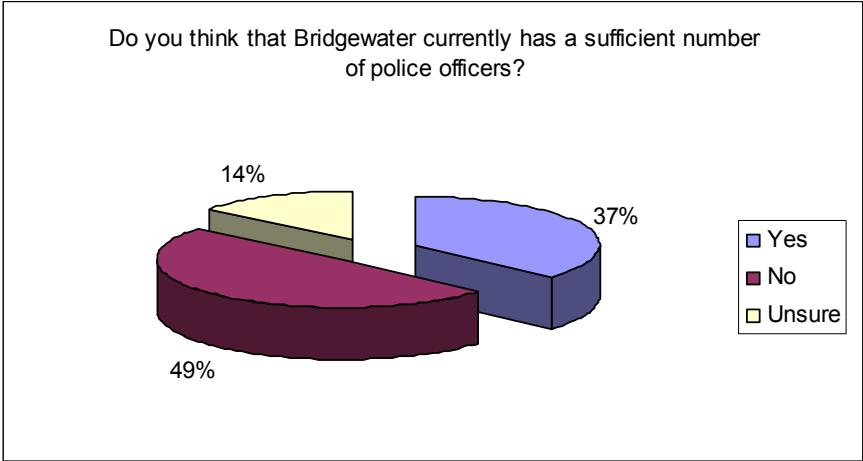
How safe do you feel when home alone in your neighbourhood?



We took this opportunity to ask the public if there were enough officers policing the town of Bridgewater.

Q. Do you think that Bridgewater currently has a sufficient number of police officers?

37% responded that we do not need more officers for the Bridgewater Police department while 49% indicated that we do need more officers. 14% were unsure or did not answer the question.



Policing issues and concerns:

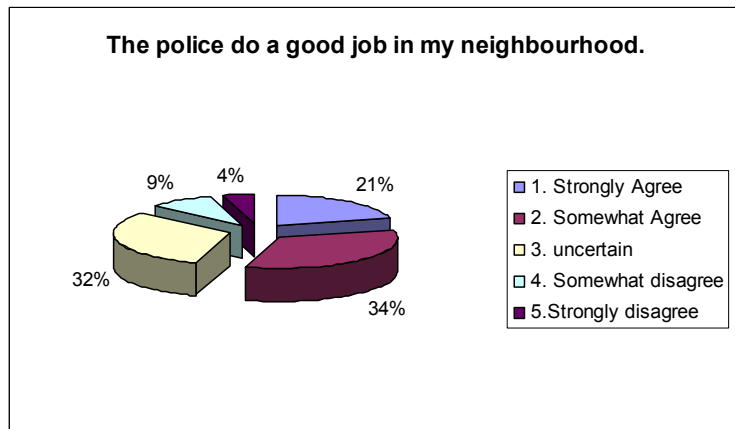
In the past 12 months have you needed to contact the Bridgewater Police Department?

73% of respondents indicated they had not had the need to contact the Bridgewater Police in the past 12 months. Of the 27% who had contacted the police over the past year, the most common complaints were noise, suspicious individuals and vehicles speeding in their neighbourhoods. Many respondents indicated that response time was quick and they were satisfied with the officer's handling of the situation.

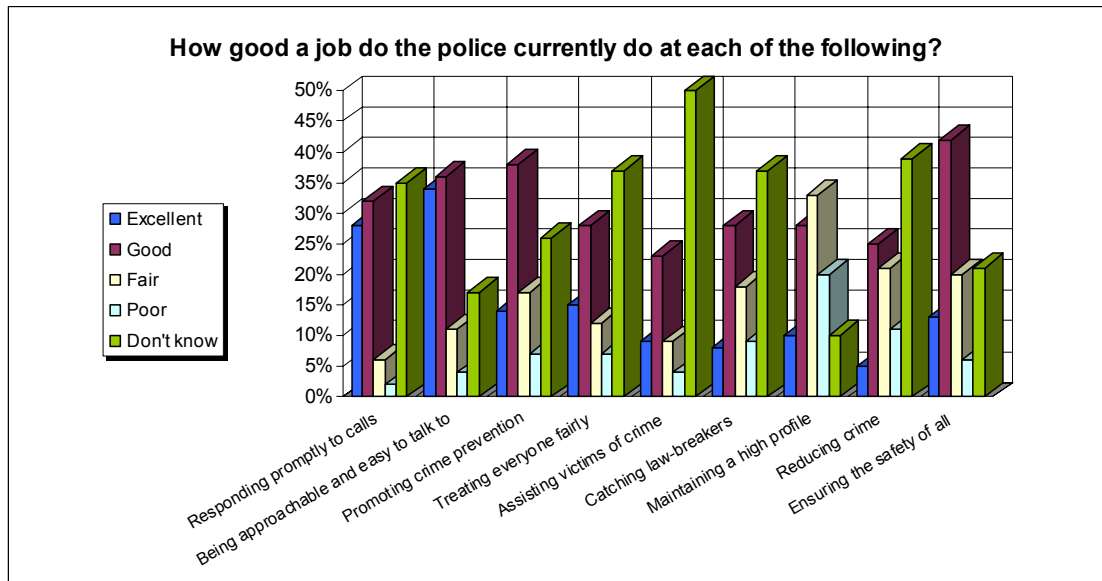
To what extent do you agree with the following comment: The police do a good job in my neighbourhood?

1= strongly agree...5= strongly disagree.

21 % strongly agreed with the statement and 34% of respondents somewhat agreed with the statement. 4% strongly disagreed.



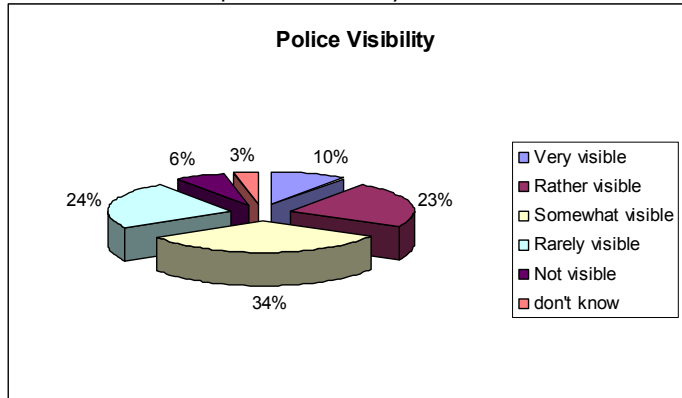
It is important to understand which areas of policing the public feel the officers excel or fail in.



Police visibility issues:

Generally speaking, would you say the police are visible in your neighbourhood?

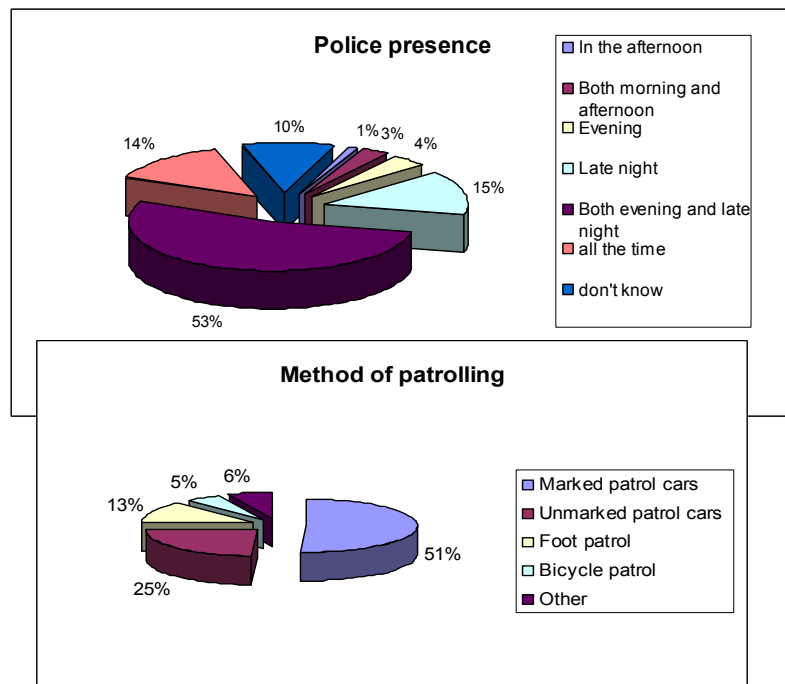
The majority of respondents said that the police were only "Somewhat visible". 24% indicated the police were "rarely visible" and 6% stated that officers were "not visible".



It is generally accepted that crime and the fear of crime are increasingly important issues affecting quality of life. The Bridgewater Police Department must examine and determine best practices for providing a reassuring presence in all areas of town.

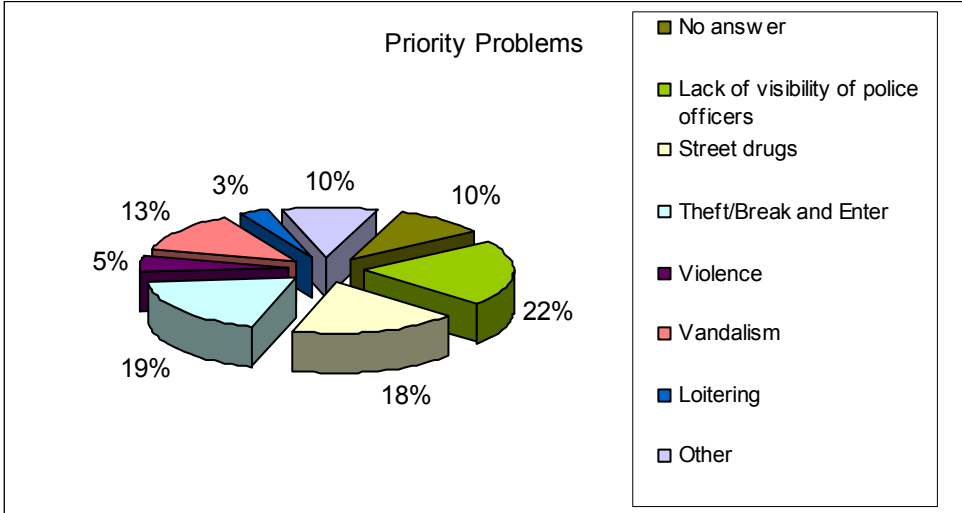
This leads to questions in terms of patrol times and method of patrols that resident's would feel safest with.

Q. When should there be the most police presence in your neighbourhood? What method of patrolling would you like to see more of?



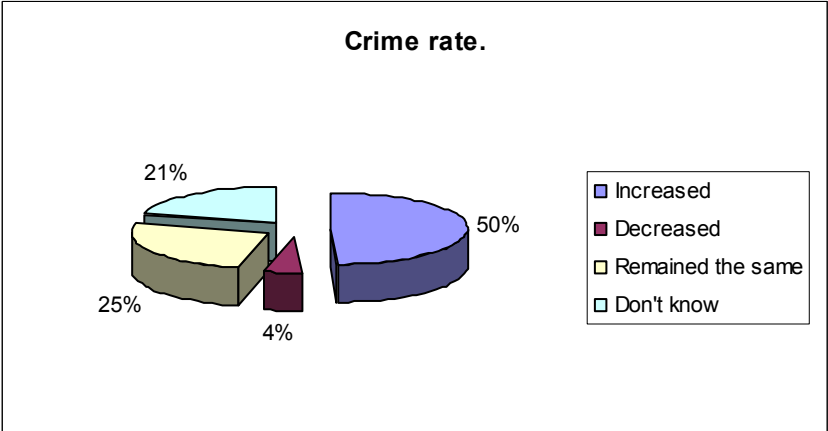
If you were to tell the Bridgewater Police Department which problem they should address in priority, what would that problem be?

The majority of respondents feel that lack of visibility of police officers is the priority problem. Theft/Break and Enter was considered another priority concern followed closely by street drugs.



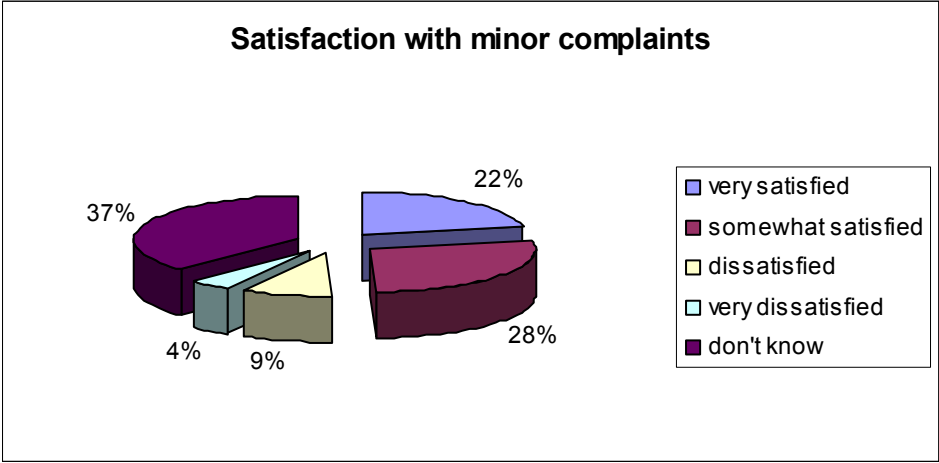
Do you think that crime in the Bridgewater area has increased, decreased or remained the same over the past two year?

50% believe that crime has increased over the past two years. 25% indicated that they felt it had remained the same while only 4% felt it had decreased.



How satisfied are you with the police in the manner with which they handle minor complaints such as noisy parties, loitering, cars squealing tires, etc.?

28% of respondents are somewhat satisfied with the manner in which minor complaints are handled. 9% were dissatisfied.



Conclusion:

This report provides an outline of the results of our 2007 Bridgewater Police Crime and Public Safety Survey. The need to approach the community directly on policing and public safety is an important responsibility for the Bridgewater Police. It is now up to the Bridgewater Police to use the information to improve areas that have been exposed as weak, to educate the public where perceptions are misleading and to continue to seek public input whenever possible.

The next step in approaching the community directly, in regards to safety and crime prevention issues, was to meet personally with members of the community to discuss and share concerns. On February 15th, 2007 there was an opportunity for members of the community to meet with the Chief of Police to discuss these and other concerns. The open forum enabled the community to voice their issues publicly and directly. The Bridgewater Police Department had hoped to receive more information to use when delivering the strategic plan.

The main purpose of the survey and public meeting was to better understand citizens' concerns and priorities for the police and citizens' overall satisfaction with the Bridgewater Police Department. The information will be used in many ways, including as a major input to help determine priorities in the execution of the 3-year strategic plan.

Thank you to all residents of Bridgewater who contributed to this survey.