Let's Chat about Priorities: "A Plan Where Everyone Matters"

What We Heard

Report Date: January 2013

OTTAWA POLICE SERVICES BOARD
COMMISSION DE SERVICES POLICIERS D'OTTAWA
Working together for a safer community
La sécurité de notre communauté, un travail d'équipe

OTTAWA POLICE SERVICE
SERVICE DE POLICE D'OTTAWA
Working together for a safer community
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On the cover: On the front cover is a "word cloud" derived from all of the recommendations and insights written on over 300 post-it notes by the participants at the December 4, 2012 open house.

Report prepared by:
Phil Culhane

Lansdowne
TECHNOLOGIES INC.

Custom Made Solutions That Help You Succeed

275 Slater Street, Suite 1001, Ottawa, ON   K1P 5H9
tel (613) 236-3333 / fax (613) 236.4440
www.lansdowne.com

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Executive Summary

With a motto of "Everyone Matters" and a strong focus on collaboration, Ottawa's new Chief of Police and the Ottawa Police Services Board (OPSB) have been keen to ensure community engagement in the development of the 2013-2015 Business Plan. This report summarizes the community and member engagement that has taken place, and seeks to represent and synthesize some of the many voices that were heard, both at the December 4th 2012 public consultation, as well as through Social Media and internal OPS member consultation opportunities over the past several months.

The 2013-2015 Business Plan focuses on four key strategic priorities: Community, Members, Value and Service. Four working groups were formed to develop plans to achieve meaningful outcomes along each of these four priorities. In order to inform their plans, the working groups used an outside consultancy to run an arm's-length public consultation process, and to provide guidance and insight on the use of social media to support additional public feedback on the process.

Through this community engagement process, over 400 comments have been registered, both by Ottawans in general as well as by members of the OPS. The following list, in no particular order of importance, provides highlights of what was represented in the commentary:

- The responsibility for creating safer communities lies with all of us – individuals, community associations, businesses, the media and non-profits – and is NOT the sole responsibility of the OPS. The Police are a tool for creating a safer community, but they should not always be the FIRST or the ONLY tool that is used.
- Greater transparency (personally) from the OPS and OPS members. Many residents expect very high levels of personal transparency on the part of OPS members, including recommending that the personal lives of OPS members be highlighted in local newspapers.
- Anonymity and greater convenience in reporting. Residents want the ability to report incidents with greater and greater convenience (online reporting, forms, tweets, texts), but coupled with that, are asking for a greater degree of anonymity in reporting, so that the complaint or report cannot be linked back to them as individuals.
- Mental health is a concern – and a multi-faceted concern. To what extent should the mental health of the population be a policing issue, and to what extent are they called upon because other, possibly more appropriate but under-resourced elements of the social fabric, are unable to bring resources to bear? To what extent should police officers be expected to be, or to act as, social workers? And finally, and to no small degree of concern, are we serious about taking care of the mental health of our policing population, with their high incidence of PTSD, suicide and divorce? If so, what changes will we make to protect those who protect us?

- Community Police Centres and the Officers within them are perhaps one of the best-kept secrets of the OPS. Seen as tremendously useful in most communities where they are resident, CPCs and CPOs are seen as one of the best potential ways to improve and maintain OPS-Community relationships.
- Engaging the media to report more responsibly, more factually, and in a far less fear-based stance was recommended surprisingly often. Why do we never hear the good news stories, and why aren't the bad news stories framed more responsibly?
- Communications – in the world of Twitter, Facebook and a thousand other online applications, is there a way to make more timely, accurate communications available to the broader community, while protecting the integrity of investigations and the personal safety of victims and officers alike?

These are only some of the themes that were repeated throughout the commentary, around the tables, on the walls and through social media. Perhaps the only thing remaining to be said, as a summary statement, was the number of times it was repeated that the OPS and OPSB should engage in this sort of open collaboration more often.

The goal of this process was to get hundreds of individual data points, from a wide diversity of the community, into the hands of the 2013-2015 Business Plan Working Groups. Thus far, at least, the information transmission has been successful. Every comment has been funneled into a single working document that has been shared with the working groups, to ensure, as promised to the participants at the December 4th session, that every comment posted on the wall would be passed along, verbatim, to the planning teams.

Thus far, at least, this process has seen success. However, these community engagement activities will have been successful if and when, in the words of the Chief of Police, Ottawans see their words reflected in the 2013-2015 Business Plan. Or, in the words of one participant at the Public Consultation, "While the idea of the community chat is wonderful, I will neither be satisfied nor dissatisfied until I see our comments and suggestions in action."

1. Process Overview

As a part of the Business Plan development process, the Working Groups consulted broadly, with outreach to both the general population through a public consultation event and through social media, as well through internal consultations with the OPS membership. External consultations were done both through a very well-attended open invitation event held on December 4th at the RA Centre, as well as through a SurveyMonkey survey after the event, as well as Twitter, Facebook and OPS web site-based dialogues. Several open forums were advertised and held for internal OPS membership to comment on the draft plan as well. Much of the draft structural framework and content was made available on the OPS web site, and feedback was requested through the site and was captured from twitter feeds, forms and emails over a well-advertised, several-weeks time period.

1.1. Public Consultation Event

On the evening of Tuesday December 4, 2012, about 120 members of the greater Ottawa community gathered at the RA Centre for a public consultation on the 2013-2015 OPSB/OPS Business Plan. A broad diversity of individuals was in attendance – university students through to seniors, volunteers from a broad diversity of cultures, those with disabilities, people across income spectrums; in short, a balance of voices of Ottawans who care and who were able to be there. Also in attendance were the Chief of Police, the Chair of the Police Services Board, OPS members, both uniformed and non, and community partners from a broad range of agencies.

The purpose of the public consultation was to generate detailed public insights and recommendations on the directionality of Ottawa Police Services' developments in the areas of Community, Members, Service and Value. Additional comments in any other area of the police service's mandate were also sought, and have been codified separately.

Tables of eight people, including one OPS-member "table host" discussed a chosen priority area, along with any other issues deemed of interest, for 75 minutes, and participants were asked to post comments on post-it notes and to add them to the wall poster that was most closely related to their area of concern/recommendation. Over 300 comments, ideas, insights and recommendations were posted, all of which have been synthesized in this document.

1.2. Social Media Feedback

Members of the public were welcomed to tweet comments to the OPS Working Groups, and a number were received, both in response to OPS tweets during and after the public consultation, as well as more generally during the response period. Additionally, all attendees at the public consultation event were sent an email post-event with the URL for an on-line survey that they could take if they so wished. Forty-four (44) responses, many with multiple comments, were included in the survey responses. All of these social media comments have been included in the overall synthesis of this report.

1.3. Member Consultations

The OPS Working Groups held a number of internal member consultations at various OPS facilities in the city, asking members to review the plan and the intended directionality. Their feedback was captured from email responses, and have been folded into the content of this report. Additionally, the OPS "table hosts" at the open public consultation (1.1, above) wrote some of the comments that were captured on the walls as a part of the public feedback process, reflecting additional member feedback into the information capture process.

2. Process

Each of the public and member engagement activities outlined in 1.1 – 1.3 (above) followed a carefully developed five-step process:

1. Attention
2. Intention
3. Information
4. Insight
5. Action

Following, we will illustrate the process as used for the largest consultation – the large, open public consultation held December 4th.

Attention: an invitation was developed and broadly communicated – through partner agencies, through media and OPS/OPSB web sites and email lists and networks.

This aspect was deemed successful, as the room was filled to capacity, including 10-15% of attendees who simply "showed up" and registered at the door.

Intention: it was made clear to all in attendance, the sponsors, the public and the many table hosts, that the OPSB was looking for insights – for feedback and for thoughts on the overall directionality and specific actions to be a part of the 2013-2015 Business Plan. The consultation was not to be a simple validation of what was already decided. Although a structure has been developed for the Business Plan (based on past feedback (surveys, etc) and analysis), it was made clear that ALL comments were valued – that ANYTHING written on a post-it note and posted on the wall would be passed along verbatim to the working groups who are developing the business plan.

This aspect was deemed successful, as the participants were able to focus on the Business Plan and the Strategic Priorities (as well as other issues), and the agenda was not waylaid or sidelined by an issue of the moment.

Information: The current thinking was shared with all in attendance through a variety of means. Each table had a cube with mindmaps representing the high level structure and several levels of detail relating to the four key priority areas: Community, Values, Service and Members. The Police Chief introduced the plan and the planning process, demonstrating that the evening's consultation lived within a larger framework, and assuring the participants that their insights would dovetail into a larger process. A 20-minute audiovisual presentation followed, and told the story of each of the 4 strategic priorities, providing more context and detailed information to help support the framework provided for the conversations.

This aspect was deemed successful, as the participants clearly identified with the Priority areas, and the visual mindmaps were reported as useful adjuncts to the conversations.

Insight: Through the course of 75 minute conversations, softly enabled (but not "facilitated") by table hosts, participants were led through a question and answer framework that was developed to enable all at the table to share their thoughts about the current issues and challenges, and to determine potential directionality and actions to build a healthier future – jointly by the community and the Ottawa Police Service.

This aspect was deemed a complete success, as over 300 comments were left – the poster for "Community" on the back wall was utterly covered with comment sheets, two-deep in some places. In addition, 100% of those who commented on the SurveyMonkey survey were either "Satisfied" or "Highly Satisfied" with the session.

Action: The action following directly from this community consultation was the development of this report. The content, specifically the original comments, are to be passed directly to the working groups to aid them in developing the areas of the business plan.

3. Synthesis of Comments Received

3.1. Commentary Sources

Comments came from three primary sources and in a number of ways. There was the Public Consultation held December 4th, as well as the ability to submit feedback either through an online survey after the consultation, through a web form attached to content on the OPS web site, and through twitter and email. Additionally, OPS member information sessions were held, and members given the option to submit comments via email.

i. Public Consultation

As shown in the table at right, 309 comments were posted at the public consultation. Note that there were a number of OPS members engaged in this process, and that their comments are indiscernable from those of the general public, therefore the process can be said to be far more inclusive of the OPS membership than the five emails shown below.

Community	209
Value	9
Members	18
Service	45
What Else	21
Most Valuable	7
Total	**309**

ii. Social Media

13 tweets were received, as well as five emails and one online form filled out and sent to the OPS. An additional 81 qualitative comments were included as part of the SurveyMonkey responses.

iii. Member

In addition to the in-person discussions with members at the member consultation sessions, five emails were received from members, along with member comments that were included as a part of the public consultation process (above).

3.2. General Summary

They came, they listened, they talked, and they wrote down their ideas. And they had a lot of things to say. The attendees left over 300 comments. It's fair to say that almost everyone in attendance chose to use their voice, and to leave one or several messages on the walls. And in addition to the above, an additional ~100 comments were received via email, twitter, online forms and through detailed survey responses.

What follows is a basic synthesis of the data. Please note that the following analysis and synthesis was done by a senior business strategist, but one with no direct subject matter expertise in policing, or police-community plan development strategies. This synthesis was

tested against the original comments by working group members with direct subject matter expertise, and the commentary below is substantially consistent with the understanding of these areas by members of the working groups.

3.3. Overview of Comments

Before going into a more detailed assessment of the comments posted, it is necessary to provide some thoughts and synthesis across the 400 or so comments. There was a manageable level of community and organizational commentary, a variable level of understanding of the role of the police officer and of the complexity of offering policing services, and a reasonable to good level of care and compassion taken in developing recommendations and directional statements that were useful for the purpose designed.

In every operational system – human or otherwise – there is also some level of "noise". The trick, of course, lies in figuring out the acceptable noise level, and in detecting and dealing with unacceptable noise levels as they crop up throughout the system. The Ottawa Police Service, as every publicly funded institution, operates within a limited funding envelope, and the expectations placed upon our policing services are extensive and highly complex, from a multiplicity of facets. As one participant said – "stay in the grey – there are no easy answers". It did not appear from the comments received that the participants felt that any part of the OPS-Community "system" was out-of-control or in dire need of overhaul. The comments seemed to reflect incremental and perfective change, rather than the requirement for wholesale transformation or overhaul of some or many elements of the system.

I cannot tell if the job of a police officer continues to get more complex. It appears that many social issues are becoming policing issues because of a gap in our sense of community plus a gap in service providers who no longer have funding to provide previous service levels, but the comments sometimes placed an expectation on the officer that bordered on the unreal. How much community service (free, volunteer work) should be expected of a police officer? To what extent should police officers be completely conversant in every sort of social ill known to humanity?

It would appear that the public has extremely high expectations of their police service. In one sense, that makes sense – we ask them to uphold law and order, and we allow them to carry weapons. But given the concern reflected about mental health issues among police officers, it is perhaps useful that there appears to also be a broader, community-level awareness that perhaps we are asking these human beings to operate at a super-human level. We ask much of our police officers: volunteer community involvement, of continuous open engagement, as well as of pointy-end management of all kinds of social ills. It was interesting to note that the comments expecting more engagement, collaboration and understanding on the part of individual officers were balanced by commentary expressing concerns that we are perhaps expecting too much from these same individuals.

3.4. Key areas of commentary

i.   Transparency

There was a substantial level of commentary on the need for greater transparency on the part of the OPS in general and on the part of officers in areas that we would normally consider the personal life. Many comments spoke of the need for the OPS to report more often, more openly, on failures as well as successes, going door-to-door and holding community gatherings on a very regular basis.

The need for transparency in reporting by public institutions becomes greater with time, but there seemed not to be the counter-balance of the need to protect information that will be going to trial, and the need not to scare a community with information (email blitzes every time there was a break-in or other significant event might not be healthy for a community). They also asked for things like trading cards (like hockey cards) with individual officers on the cards (perhaps CPC officers – collect the whole set), and newspaper and web site advertisements that laid out the personal details of officers. The wish is for police officers to become more human, more recognizable, and therefore more trustworthy in the eyes of the community.

ii.   Anonymity and Convenience in Reporting

There were many comments that sought greater anonymity and greater convenience on the part of the general public when reporting incidents. The community is asking for more, simpler lines of communication that are convenient for them. Police need to offset this need with the requirement for rigour in accepting complaints and other incoming reports of activity. Unless respondents are part of a known, trusted network, how can police be certain they aren't just being "spammed", putting resources far away from where crimes may take place?

iii.   Mental Health Issues

Mental Health Issues were a continuing thread – on both sides of the coin. The mental issues that must inevitably be faced by police services personnel who have to deal with traumatic, pressure-filled situations, in an environment where their every movement and decision is open to scrutiny well after the fact. The divorces, suicides, and other related issues that face police officers was a cause for concern among the participants, and an issue they wished to see addressed.

In addition to the mental health of officers, participants recognized that police officers are unfortunately often the first line of contact with those individuals in society who have mental health issues, and who are creating any sort of disturbance in the community. The theme was an overall ask for a level of compassion in moving these individuals from the police services to more appropriate mental health services as compassionately and as effectively as possible, given of course the need to protect the safety of all involved.

iv.   Media

Many respondents stated that they wanted to see more, positive, media stories, in both the mainstream and the ethnic media. There is the concern that many of the media outlets mostly wish to publish negative news stories, and that this ongoing barrage of negative news will inevitably create a misunderstanding of the role of the police, and maintain lower trust levels between the police officer and the public at large.

v.   Police and Youth

There were many calls for police to engage more broadly, and more continuously, with youth. Many spoke of the need to sensitize children to the existence of police, to humanize officers and make them not "good guys/bad guys", and to de-romanticize police work (offer another point of view from what children see on television and in video games), from a very early age. Police officers are also viewed as potential role models and mentors for youth. Understanding that it takes a special person to want to give up large amounts of volunteer time to work with at-risk youth, many respondents mentioned a wish for such mentors to show up and spend time with their youth, in their communities.

vi.   Community Police Centres and the Officers within – a well-kept secret

CPCs were a surprise to some who attended – the sense was that these are a very useful tool in creating safer, trusting communities. CPCs should be more heavily advertised in local media, they should have longer hours of operation, and perhaps should be more heavily staffed. The number of ideas relating to what CPC officers might do with their time seemed almost overwhelming.

vii.   Who you gonna call?

There was the sense, perhaps borne out by OPS statistics, that members of the public might not know who to call, when to call, and what to call about. When is something a general concern? When is calling 911 warranted? There is the sense that greater communications, about these and about more general contact requirements, would benefit the community. One person suggested a "magnet on every fridge" that clearly and simply told the reader who to call or what to do, and when, would be a valuable communication.

viii.   The Sharing of Responsibility

Perhaps the most useful commentary – coming from both OPS members and members of the general public – were those that recognized that BOTH police officers and the general public – including for-profit businesses along with not-for-profit organizations – ALL make up the thing we refer to as "community" – and that ALL share a responsibility for the sorts of communities we have. I will not suggest that these comments are in the vast majority, but I believe they

represent a synthesis layer on the part of those who understand the shared responsibility for creating a healthy living system.