

Round Table # 6 – Greater Vancouver & Fraser Valley

May 24, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in the Greater Vancouver & Fraser Valley roundtable for taking the time to share their ideas, identify issues and discuss possible solutions to prevent and respond to criminal activity in their communities.

Roundtable Format

A total of 60 people attended the Sixth BC Policing Plan roundtable in Surrey on May 24th, 2012. Participants included local government representatives, victim service and community support organizations, First Nations and policing agencies. The goal of the roundtable was to capture constructive input from participants towards defining priorities and solutions on policing, crime prevention, and public safety in their community and for the province. To that end, participants were divided into four groups and engaged in four different cafe-style discussions throughout the day, including:

1. Problems with and Responses to Criminal Activity
2. Police Core Responsibilities and Policing and Crime Prevention Resources
3. Crime prevention
4. Public safety

Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from the group discussions:

Focus on community policing is needed to encourage culturally sensitive conversations to occur in order to maximize community involvement. It is important to get culturally diverse members of the community to get involved in providing input on community decisions. Citizens should be engaged in activities to enhance public safety and promote crime prevention.

Supporting children and youth is an important aspect of crime prevention and enhancing public safety. Identifying at risk children and youth in schools who are susceptible to becoming involved in criminal activity or gang violence and providing support services to them is critical. Programs or behaviour that encourage young people to get to know police at a personal level would help young people see police as public safety partners. Programs must focus on youth from as early as preschool to ensure negative influences in their environment do not shape their behaviour as they grow and learn.

Strong media relations are critical to keeping the public informed and engaged in public safety and crime prevention. There is a need to strike a balance between educating the public on criminal activity and celebrating successful apprehension and crime prevention efforts, so that perceptions of community safety are not skewed. Police need to work with local media to create a trusting

relationship and to ensure that whenever possible the public is receiving an accurate picture of the criminal landscape.

Provincial integration across ministries would maximize the effective use of limited resources through the breakdown of organizational silos. Often different ministries are servicing the same clientele, sometimes without knowledge of the programs and initiatives other ministries have. Smart decisions need to be made using community and regional input regarding the allocation of resources to address crime prevention, social services and public safety education. Partnerships on key initiatives between agencies and ministries could be directed or coordinated by the Province.

Restorative Justice initiatives and offender rehabilitation programs are more effective in addressing repeat criminal activity than the traditional court system. Emphasis should be placed on restorative justice and offender rehabilitation initiatives that seek to break the cycle of criminal behavior through providing supervision, support and reintegration of offenders back into society.

Evolution of policing is resulting in a smarter police force with more emphasis on critical thinking and communication skills over physical presence, as the scope of the roles and responsibilities of policing have grown due to the criminalization of social problems. Criminal issues and social issues must be differentiated and handled separately to reduce the strain on the justice system and clarify the role of police. Ensuring that there are support programs that address issues of poverty, homelessness and mental health would allow police to spend more time focusing on crime rather than social issues.

Summary by topic

For each topic, participants were asked to identify key issues, solutions and priorities.

1. Problems and Responses to Criminal Activity

Issues – main types of criminal activities:

- Organized crime and gang activity
- Domestic violence
- Street level disorder created by panhandlers, transients and neglected properties
- Drug trafficking
- Lower level crimes such as vandalism and B&Es which directly affect the most people
- Young people who are exploited by gangs or are taken into the sex trade because they are caught up in the drug culture
- Unreported crimes such as elderly abuse that results in inaccurate reporting of crime statistics
- Closure of support facilities such as the Riverview Institution results in individuals with mental health issues ending up on the streets being managed by police
- Police are spending a large amount of resources dealing with individuals with mental health issues as continuous support programs are not providing adequate aid
- Bullying in schools
- Prolific offenders and the immense burden they create on the justice system

- Proliferation of drugs and petty crime is leading to cultural acceptance/normalization of crime in certain areas of the community
- Perception that people suffering from mental health are part of the problem and the cause of crime
- Many ministries and agencies service the same client base but within silos

Priorities and Solutions:

- Target prolific offenders (e.g., Prolific Offender Program)
- Partnerships on key initiatives between agencies
- The development of collaborative models
- Identify crime trends and conduct crime analysis
- Send out statistics and information on crime prevention to businesses and the community to help them identify and understand what types of crime are occurring and what preventative measures can be taken
- Restorative Justice initiatives are effective in targeting low level crime and first time offenders through intervention for victims and offenders rather than punishment
- Create community-based crime reduction strategies that place ownership and responsibility in the hands of the municipalities that will empower local police to “own” the strategy
- Integrated police teams such as the gang taskforce are effective in managing serious crimes
- Focus on certain issues collectively through media blitzes or campaigns
- Counselling and referral services for youth through schools
- Appoint a dedicated individual to be committed to addressing a specific community issue such as managing chronic offenders
- Information sharing and records management through PRIME
- Build relationships with members of the community through police visibility and direct interaction
- Use a targeted approach to focus resources on specific issues to address them in a timely manner
- Supportive Housing for people with mental health issues, and with FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder)
- Work with communities in providing crime data and information to support police
- Initiatives to educate the community in preventing situational crime
- Encourage Stakeholders to form committees that come up with effective solutions for addressing issues within the community
- Better protect citizens using public transportation, and understand that public transportation may give criminals easier access to more areas of the community
- The scope of what is defined as a mental health issue needs to be more focused to identify those individuals who are not supported by the system
- Ensure information being provided to the public is accurate and up to date

- Establishing public trust in the criminal justice system requires reforms for the system to operate more effectively so the public can see due-process taking place
- Reward efficient, accountable and effective use of funding with secure long-term funding for crime prevention, restorative justice and victim services
- Focus on the root causes of crime
- Remote communities experience challenges that need to be considered and appropriately addressed
- Establish a provincial centre of excellence that identifies best practices in policing
- Find new solutions to separate mental and social issues from criminal issues
- Keep officers in communities longer to allow time to build relationships and become part of the community
- Recognize that one size does not fit all as each community has varying needs

2. Police Core Responsibilities and Policing and Crime Prevention Resources

Issues:

- The scope and complexity of police responsibilities has grown to the extent it is difficult for both involved stakeholders and the general public to define police core responsibilities. There is confusion as to what police are truly responsible for
- The criminalization of social problems transfers responsibility for a wide range of issues onto police
- Currently, all police receive the same standard training, which does not accurately address the varying needs of communities and the different roles police are required to fill
- There is a need to link crime prevention and policing as a lot of crime prevention is left to volunteers and community
- Police tend to be viewed in a negative light because the media don't typically promote crime prevention and instead focus on negative stories
- Dedicating resources to crime prevention can be difficult to justify as the positive impact it has on communities cannot be immediately observed/measured
- Alternative solutions to incarceration should be explored, especially for first offences as detention centres are often where offenders become hardened criminals or resign themselves to criminal lifestyle choices
- Law enforcement is focused on short-term responses to criminal activity. The financial and social costs of crime are far greater than the cost of solutions focused on long-term prevention
- Officers promoted to management or leadership positions should be required to take training courses – such as business admin and HR - to better handle these new roles
- Policing needs to be driven by demand and statistical support in determining how to best utilize resources
- Liability and privacy issues inhibit the sharing of information
- Mental health should not be a core policing responsibility: proper services must be in place so that police can concentrate on criminal activity

- The provincial government needs to take on additional responsibility for mental health issues
- Training for police has to be continuously evolving as society and criminal activity evolves
- Define what can be dealt with at the community level versus provincial policing level
- Strategize and look at how resources are deployed in order to be responsive to the needs identified in communities
- Create better information sharing between education, health, and law enforcement resources
- The cost of policing is increasing and should be reviewed to determine why
- The first things to be cut from the policing budget is crime prevention
- There is a need for more volunteers and recreational activities to keep youth engaged

Top Priorities:

- Restorative justice program needs proper referral process and proper funding so that the program isn't so reliant upon volunteers
- Identify desired outcomes for policing and then begin to develop strategies to meet those outcomes and provide appropriate support to do it – strategies need to be developed across agencies and ministries
- Provide more resources to prevention instead of intervention - whether it is crime prevention, health care, education or other

Priorities and Solutions:

- Youth outreach program such as Operation Lodestar which educates parents about youth recruitment in gangs; helps communities to better understand and invest in their youth to prevent them from succumbing to a criminal lifestyle
- Create dedicated units to address specific issues such as domestic violence
- Car 67 (mental health/social worker and police riding in same car) is a successful example of collaboration between different agencies to address key issues such as mental health
- Provide victim services that can support different cultures and demographics within the community
- Immediate responses are needed in addressing youth who engage in crime to instill the understanding that negative behavior is met with negative consequences
- Make sure the right candidates are identified to take part in restorative justice to maintain the credibility of the program
- Agencies that support restorative justice must see positive outcomes from their efforts
- Police need to take time to build relationships and connect with services and agencies in their community so that they know where to go and whom to approach when they have a question or need help
- There is a need to educate citizens about the various ways they can help in their communities

- Should be spending more resources on early intervention and prevention
- The best opportunity for targeting a large number of youth is in schools – it is the best way to reach children effectively
- Create committees from complementary agencies to discuss specific cases of offenders with multiple needs and requiring a large amount of resources and management
- Develop a community court system for Surrey
- Allocate police resources to communicate and build relationships with both victims and offenders to show that they matter and are supported by law enforcement
- Celebrate accomplishments and the good work being done to shape the public's perception to be more positive
- Empower the community to become more involved in crime prevention
- Make sure the public has access to, and is aware of where they can find information on current and past crime initiatives, strategies and results

3. Crime prevention

Issues:

- Silo organizational structures are inhibiting information sharing
- Prohibition of marijuana is ineffective and may only aid in supporting gang activity
- Policing is too reactively focused and needs to be more proactive in looking at the root causes of crime
- The province is downloading responsibilities onto municipalities who are then expected to provide the funding to support crime prevention programs
- There is insufficient funding for Restorative Justice Programs
- Many crime prevention programs are not measured on results or their effectiveness so there are no indicators if they are working or not
- The criminal justice system is not responsive to Domestic Violence and is not adequately equipped to deal with these cases
- There needs to be more coordination and collaboration of crime prevention and victim services as many services and agency mandates overlap
- There is a lack of available programs for offenders in the community
- There are insufficient resources to support high risk youth
- A delay exists between when victims and offenders require services and when those services are available
- Police are called upon to deal with both mental health issues and criminal issues, blurring the distinction between the two and appropriate responses
- Agencies need to communicate better and define what services are needed in the community
- Continually dealing with chronic offenders is extremely time consuming and resource intensive
- Petty crimes
- The legal system is too bureaucratic making it time consuming and costly

Top Priorities

- Sharing of information and funding between agencies
- Address marijuana prohibition
- Programs where kids are identified early as at-risk and supported appropriately
- Mental Health professionals need to be tied more closely with schools and law enforcement
- More crime prevention and education programs
- Sustainable, long term funding for crime prevention – funding over 3-5 years

Priorities and Solutions:

- Create dedicated positions for officers to act as liaisons in both schools and the community
- The management of prolific offenders, mental health and substance abuse through education and collaborative programs such as Car 67 (Mental Health Worker teamed up with RCMP officer and they attend mental health related calls for service)
- Programs that engage community members such as Block Watch that get people active and involved
- Volunteer involvement in crime prevention programs
- Increased police presence such as the DARE program in schools that gets officers out into the community
- Have officers dedicated and responsible for managing specific crime issues such as domestic abuse
- More community based volunteer programs to ease the demand on law enforcement and social services
- Educate the public on how they can get involved and make a difference in their community, and how their time and energy makes a positive impact
- Legalize marijuana: what are the facts, advantages and disadvantages?
- Develop the appropriate communication channel between agencies for sharing best practices at a federal or provincial level
- Province should take more responsibility for the cost of policing
- Utilize available data to aid in program development
- More programs need to be based on the principles of Restorative Justice
- Universal standards are needed and programs need to be continuously evaluated to ensure consistency and effectiveness
- Changing demographics need to be taken into consideration when anticipating future community needs and funding
- More leadership from senior government is needed to create a stronger more focused vision for the public for crime prevention

4. Public Safety

Issues:

- Perceptions of public safety are often not aligned with actual crime patterns
- The average person has no experience interacting with police resulting in public perception being greatly influenced by the media
- Youth education programs targeting high school students are not effective as they have already been influenced by gangs or drugs; programs should start earlier
- There are few indicators for the public that identify that police are doing a good job and increasing public safety in their community
- The changing face of the police officer is one that now must be a strategic and critical thinker and not just a physical presence
- The cycle of poverty
- When the police board consults with communities regarding priorities they hear feedback on issues that directly affect those in attendance, such as increased traffic enforcement in the community. This may not reflect broader community interests or more serious underlying problems
- Public perception is that the courts are too soft on prolific offenders
- For many segments of the population there is a sense of safety and police becoming more engaged in their communities but it's not so for everyone. No public safety for aboriginal women
- People need to be able to have an outlet to voice their concerns on policing issues
- Lack of reporting crime results in inaccurate statistics and misallocation of resources
- Require more supportive housing for the mentally ill and addicted and better coordinated responses in dealing with these individuals
- If people have a negative experience with police, such as not having them respond to a call, it results in a major blow to public confidence in policing
- Consolidate information on policing and crime that can be accessed by different agencies and/or the public
- Increase visibility of police officers
- Creating more volunteer programs such as Citizens on Patrol
- Educating children and youth (engaging parents as well)
- Having outreach program for seniors and special groups
- Understanding that public perceptions about safety is important and affects behaviour
- It is important for police to work with the media and to maintain good media relations
- Recognize generational differences and cultural differences when evaluating how a community perceives safety
- Ministries that operate within the continuum of care are difficult to work with as they operate within silos
- The public feel that the system isn't working
- there are unreasonable expectations of the judicial system and police

Priorities and Solutions:

- Community involvement, people taking ownership and getting involved
- More consultation between public, police boards and police
- Strategies that help the public to get to know police at a personal level and increase media coverage of positive stories and successes
- Increase citizen engagement to deal with community issues
- Work with vulnerable children and youth
- Public education is a critical component in crime prevention and must be an area of focus. Educate people about local crime patterns, actions they can take to protect themselves/their property, how they can get involved, police role
- Identify system efficiencies and areas where technology could be utilized to increase efficiency
- Improve communications and relations between the police and community agencies
- More accountability should be placed on the citizen and not the government
- Engage marginalized members of the community to make them feel included and important