

Police rate high in public opinion poll
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Vancouver residents and business owners like their cops.

Eighty per cent of residents and 82 per cent of business owners polled in surveys conducted by NRG Research Group are generally satisfied with the service of the Vancouver Police Department.

Satisfaction levels, however, varied in the city.

In policing district three, which includes Killarney and Fraserview, residents complained that police response times to incidents were slower than in the rest of the city.

In policing district two, which includes the Downtown Eastside, business owners gave lower ratings than in other parts of the city to the VPD for meeting safety needs.

Residents and business owners identified the city's gang problem as a top priority for police to tackle. Youth violence, drug use and crimes targeting seniors also need more attention, respondents said.

"While businesses recommended more effort be devoted to gang-related crimes, and they cited gang-related crime as an important problem city-wide, none of the districts had many businesses that expressed major concerns about gang activity in their neighbourhood," the business survey said. "In short, businesses in all districts perceive gangs as a significant challenge for the city, but not in their own district."

Residents' ratings of the VPD's ability to curb street disorder was more favourable (51 per cent) in 2008 than in 2006 (45 per cent) and in 2004 (40 per cent).

The surveys were conducted between Nov. 17 and Dec. 12, 2008 and polled 800 people. The surveys each contained 45 questions and took an average of 15 minutes to complete. The surveys did not specifically ask respondents why they thought there was less disorder on the streets. Disorder includes aggressive panhandling and loitering.

The city began opening some of its five homeless shelters in December and police have since said the shelters have helped reduce street disorder.

Respondents were also polled during a spate of gangland shootings and murders in Vancouver and the suburbs. As the surveys note, respondents gave their perceptions of crime--not an analysis based on fact.

Half of business owners said the VPD does a good job of keeping the public informed about major arrests. But only 36 per cent said the department is keeping the public informed about drug crackdowns and crime prevention programs.

One-quarter of business owners believe the media portrays the VPD negatively while the majority of residents thought local media portrayed the department in a positive manner. One-third of residents polled had contact with the VPD in the 12 months preceding the survey. Of that number, 76 per cent were satisfied with the police service.

On the business side, 41 per cent of respondents had contact with the VPD prior to the survey. Of that number, 82 per cent were satisfied with police service.

The most common recommendation to improve the VPD's service was to increase the presence and visibility of police in the city. The VPD has more than 1,300 officers.

The Vancouver Police Board reviewed the surveys' results at last week's meeting. The surveys, which were commissioned by the department, cost \$27,000, according to the VPD, which has posted the results on its website.