



## **BUILDING TRUST IN COMMUNITIES: STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**Date:** November 24, 2022

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On November 24, 2022, Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Dennis Murray of Thames Valley Police presented *Building Trust in Communities: Strategic and Tactical Considerations*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the ways in which legitimacy influences community trust, the strategic and tactical considerations for organisations seeking to raise legitimacy, and the ways in which law enforcement can successfully build long-term and sustained trust in communities.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

#### **Presentation**

ACC Murray discussed the importance of building community trust for police services, a process that is a direct outcome of the perceived legal, moral, political, and technical legitimacy of the organisations. Key tactical considerations must be taken into account, such as workforce representation in law enforcement, maintaining professional standards through accountability, and remaining open to both public and internal scrutiny of policy and practices. ACC Murray closed with a case study from the UK, highlighting the ways in which community engagement helped to navigate a challenging event and resulted in increased community trust in local law enforcement.

#### **Question & Answer Period**

ACC Murray discussed some of the challenges presented when building strong and sustained community policies and practices, such as the spread of

misinformation, the retention of new recruits, and the building of trust in historically hard to reach communities, as well as the internal and external measures that police services can undertake to foster increased institutional trust.

## BACKGROUND

### Presentation

ACC Murray discussed the importance of building trust in communities for police services, noting that this is not unique to a particular locale, but rather is universal in nature. He suggested that public trust is a direct outcome of perceived legitimacy, centred on police competence and community engagement. ACC Murray pointed to recent international news headlines that show a decrease in public trust in law enforcement, stating that the media can exacerbate this issue. He stated that laws have the tendency to impose restrictions or mount obligations on individuals and when police services are perceived as illegitimate, the chances of civil disobedience increase. ACC Murray suggested that law enforcement should seek to engage the public in a transparent manner and remain open to scrutiny as a means of displaying legitimacy and building trust.

ACC Murray outlined the principle strategic considerations when seeking to build community trust, a process stemming from the cultivation of legal, moral, political, and technical legitimacy on the part of law enforcement. He stated that communication between police services and the community is a key component, emphasising the need for procedural justice, community partnerships, and an understanding of the impacts of policing on communities. He asserted that services must seek to “police by consent” and ensure fair decision-making, stating that negative preconceptions can be predictive of negatively received contact. He suggested that this can be mitigated by positively engaging the public before issues arise, maintaining these positive public interactions, and demonstrating procedural fairness.

Regarding tactical considerations for law enforcement, ACC Murray stated that cultivating a positive internal structure will manifest in positive ways externally. He noted the importance of workforce representation, stating that recent increases in recruitment are beneficial not only from a resource perspective, but also as an opportunity to create a more equitable demographic within police services. Maintaining professional standards, strong accountability practices, and a progressive culture within law enforcement are key to garnering internal trust and preventing cases of attrition among new recruits, thereby increasing the rates of retention. He reiterated that police services must remain open to scrutiny

internally and externally, as this ensures transparency and the cultivation of trust among members and the community.

In order to successfully build trust among the community, ACC Murray stated that law enforcement must pursue sustained and systemic changes to its internal and external processes. He contended that involving the public—be it through direct engagement with community leaders or via Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs)—and tailoring police services to local needs is essential to maintaining best practices, and that successful implementation is dependent on realistic work plans and consistent accountability and inspection measures.

ACC Murray highlighted a case study surrounding community engagement and trust-building during the COVID-19 pandemic, taken from his tenure as Superintendent in Northamptonshire Police. At the height of public health restrictions, a public event falling outside licensing control was scheduled to occur in the community, garnering severe reactions of opposition from the community members. Though the event, a “travellers’ fair”, was occurring on private land and deemed to be relevant and low-risk, community members were vociferous in their opposition; most notably on social media. As a means of addressing the issue, ACC Murray began a process of engagement with the community via social media, taking care to provide members with honest answers to their concerns. Though the response was initially met with mixed opinions internally, the open communication on behalf of police in combination with a willingness to address scrutiny was appreciated by community members and allowed for perceptions of legitimacy to increase. After the event concluded in a safe and satisfactory manner, the response from both internal and external critics was positive, indicating the effectiveness of policy that fosters trust between law enforcement and communities.

### **Question & Answer Period**

Regarding the impact and mitigation of misinformation on community trust building, ACC Murray stated that the important factor is strong and honest communication, in that police services must ensure that the correct message is being received by the public. Pointing to the situation he encountered surrounding the travellers’ fair during COVID-19, ACC Murray noted that there were unsubstantiated claims and falsified images being circulated widely via social media, and that it was essential for police to address and disprove this information in order to maintain order and build community trust. He stated that this was primarily an issue of better communication practices and community empowerment as opposed to the countering of misinformation specifically.

ACC Murray discussed the importance of instilling the values of communication and community trust in police training, as this enables new recruits to pursue diverse and inclusive strategies in community engagement. He stated that this fosters an environment of deescalation, thereby increasing perceptions of legitimacy in the community. He noted that, in order for these strategies to be effective, it requires the support of all members of a police organisation, and that policy must be action-based versus performative in nature.

Speaking on the difficulty of police engagement in historically distrustful communities, ACC Murray suggested that it requires police initiative and openness to community needs. As opposed to imposing monolithic strategy on communities, police services engage communities in a manner that is conducive to understanding and progress, be it through community leaders, advisory groups, or direct contact.

Regarding effective training measures for police services, ACC Murray pointed to the importance of case studies and the engagement of reflective practices as a means of grounding the information in experience. He stated that these practices foster resilience among police personnel, in that it encourages best practices internal and external to the organisation. He also noted the benefits of recruiting individuals outside of traditional educational structures, stating that this allows for a more diverse recruitment class.

## KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

### Presentation

- Public trust is a direct outcome of perceived legitimacy, centred on police competence and community engagement. When police services are perceived as illegitimate, the chances of civil disobedience increase.
- The principal strategic considerations in building community trust rely on legal, moral, political, and technical legitimacy. Communication is key, particularly regarding procedural justice, community partnerships, and understanding the impacts of policing on communities
- Tactical considerations centre on cultivating a positive internal structure as this manifests in positive ways externally. Workforce representation, professional standards, strong accountability practices, and a progressive culture within law enforcement are key to internal trust and preventing cases of attrition among new recruits
- Direct engagement with community leaders and tailoring police services to local needs is essential to maintaining best practices, and successful

implementation is dependent on realistic goals and accountability measures.

- Social media can be a powerful tool in public engagement, allowing police services the ability to address community concerns in a timely and open dialogue.

### Question & Answer Period

- To counter misinformation police services must ensure that the correct message is being received by the public, and this can be achieved through strong communication practices and community empowerment.
- Instilling the values of communication and community trust in police training is essential, as this enables new recruits to pursue diverse and inclusive strategies in community engagement.
- Case studies and reflective practices are beneficial training tools as means of grounding information in experience. The recent removal of the post-secondary degree requirement for recruits has also helped foster resilience, as individuals drawing on greater life experience are able to pursue careers in policing.



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