

# Increased Police Productivity Needed

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Although no one in authority wants to talk details, the 11.2% proposed pay increase over four years for police services is known. What remains shrouded in mystery is what benefits Police Board negotiators achieved for the public.

Let's hope there are enhancements in effectiveness and productivity. Torontonians will be paying the highest amount in Canada for police services. In return it would be appropriate to see lower crime rates and more efficient use of police resources.

Last year, the average Toronto taxpayer paid \$609.00 for the services of 5 500 uniformed officers and 2 400 civilian members. Should the collective agreement be approved, on average it will add \$19.50 annually to your tax bill. It is by far our largest budget item.

It's a fair question to ask how much value we receive.

To answer this question, the Provincial government asked each major municipality to report using the same definitions. The most recent figures are from 2008. In terms of Criminal Code incidents per 100 000 population, Toronto is about average. Provincially, our rates of solving violent crimes are among the lowest. We have the highest level of police staffing per capita. Among their colleagues in the Province, Toronto's officers each handle the second lowest amount of Criminal Code incidents, possibly caused by a provision in the collective agreement that requires two officers to respond to a criminal incident.

Any way you look at it, there is room for productivity improvement.

To be fair, those defending the productivity of Toronto's police argue that Toronto's large size makes it a unique case. They point to strains caused by millions of commuters and tourists, and specialist units such as providing security for visiting dignitaries and the Marine Unit.

To compare Toronto's levels of crime with other large cities, consider statistics from cities such as Montreal, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Again using 2008 data, trends show that crime is decreasing faster elsewhere.

If productivity is lower than average, and comparable jurisdictions are reducing crime better, then we are left with questions why Toronto's force ought to be the highest paid.

Advocates say that Toronto's cost of living is higher. Assuming our officers live in Toronto, Statistics Canada confirms that living in Toronto is about 4% more expensive than say Ottawa (2009 data). Most of the increase is due our higher costs for shelter and transportation.

The Police Services Board will also argue that it must offer rates competitive with other forces, particularly the Ontario Provincial Police. Otherwise, it says, officers will leave for more lucrative positions. The Board regularly asks the Provincial Government to set police remuneration on a provincial basis, to prevent competition among jurisdictions.

It's impossible to deny anyone the ability to move to a higher paying job. But from the Province's perspective there is little incentive to set police pay province-wide. The Provincial Treasurer is not directly responsible for municipal policing, Provincial bureaucrats would be saddled with the thankless job of contract negotiation, and it would be contrary to Toronto's own requests to give it more authority.

Another reason for high rates of pay elsewhere, not usually mentioned within the City limits, is that neighbouring police forces do not wish to lose officers to Toronto.

As a result, the situation with police remuneration seems to leave Torontonians between two unsatisfactory positions. On one side is the proposition of paying for an expensive but perhaps not very efficient police force. On other side is the risk of losing staff to other forces.

But the Police Services Board does have leverage. Through detailed analyses of its data, the Board is able to figure out how to improve productivity. For example, during the Miller administration, changes were approved for more effective staffing during periods of higher demand. The Police Services Board can propose similar service enhancements in return for a contract settlement.

Whether the Board and current City administration negotiated enhanced productivity will only be discovered when details of the agreement become public.

Given the current productivity and cost of the police, it is a reasonable expectation.