

Just 34% have faith in Police – survey

By Elizabeth Roberts

Just 34 percent of Bermuda's residents have faith in the Police Service to solve and reduce crime, according to a new survey.

The news comes after the Government's record on law and order came under fire in the Police budget debate last week, with the Opposition branding crime figures as "appalling".

Broken down by age category the survey, conducted by Research.bm, showed that just 25 percent of those in the 18-34 bracket signalled their faith in the Bermuda Police Service. This rose to 55 percent in the 65-plus category.

A total of 400 people were polled by telephone last month.

Takbir Sharrieff of campaign group Bermudians Against Narcotics (BAN), said he felt the figures were "an accurate and fair assessment". He repeated calls yesterday for a joint effort on the part of the Police and Government to clamp down on drugs, which he believes fuel the majority of violent crime.

Opposition Minister for Public Safety Michael Dunkley said he felt issues such as a lack of manpower and poor links between the Police and Community were also behind the the survey figures. The Police did not respond to an invitation to comment on the survey, and neither did Minister for Public Safety David Burch.

Just 34 percent of residents have faith in Police, survey shows

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The topic of conscription to the Bermuda Regiment has hit the headlines in recent months due to campaigners Bermudians Against the Draft (BAD) issuing a court challenge to the policy.

At present, the Bermuda Defence Act provides that there shall be compulsory military service where voluntary enlistment is inadequate to provide soldiers for the Regiment.

The new survey figures showed that two-thirds of those polled are in favour of the current policy, with the rest either opposed to it or unsure. However, a breakdown of the figures revealed a sharp difference in the level of support depending on age group. The 18-34 year-olds falling into the bracket of those eligible for conscription if they are male showed

57 percent support for current recruiting methods. This compared to 89 percent backing for it in the 65-plus age range.

Commenting on the survey results yesterday, Mark Capes - Acting Governor while Sir John Vereker is off the Island - said: "Conscription to the Bermuda Regiment, as part of recruitment policy, is the law of Bermuda and a matter for Bermuda Government Ministers. But this opinion poll reinforces the clear message, as indicated by successive polls on this subject, that there continues to be broad support in the community for the current recruitment policy.

"Among the reasons for that support will be the widely recognised social role of the Bermuda Regiment in providing a disciplined environment, for training and personal development, for young Bermu-

dians from across the class and racial spectrum. And the enormous value of the Bermuda Regiment to the community in assisting with post-hurricane recovery and other difficult situations, such as the recent fire at Marsh Folly, speaks for itself."

Defence Administrator Larry Burchall added: "My personal comment is that conscription is still supported by a strong majority of the population. In a democracy a 66 percent support level is a very healthy majority."

BAD spokesman Larry Burchall could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The researchers used a sample of Bermuda residents aged 18-plus that was weighted to be representative of Bermuda's population, including expatriates. This means not all of the respondents are

eligible to vote. However, when asked if Bermuda needs a third political party, just under a third, 32 percent, answered yes. Political activist Khalid Wasi is behind an emerging third party called the Bermuda National Congress which hopes to contest the next General Election. He said of the poll: "I'm not surprised. It confirms what I've been hearing and saying. I want to say to that group in the middle that 'we hear you'."

Other figures revealed that 82 percent of people supported mandatory drug testing for members of Parliament. Bermudians Against Narcotics has previously thrown down the gauntlet to Government and those in services such as the Police and Customs to submit to such tests.

The margin of error for the poll was five percent.