2026 Civic Performance and Priorities Survey Results

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon's two annual civic services surveys faced persistent challenges: declining sample sizes, excessive length, inconsistent rating scales, and questions that had become unclear or no longer relevant. In 2026, the City replaced both with a single redesigned survey built around three themes: strategic alignment, budget and service preferences, and reputation and performance. This report summarizes the changes to the survey instrument and presents the 2026 results. Respondents rate quality of life in Saskatoon as good and overall satisfaction with City services as moderate. Housing and homelessness, and crime and safety, are identified as the most pressing issues facing the city in 2026. Because the instrument, scales, sample, and majority of questions all changed, the 2026 results establish a new baseline and are not directly comparable to prior surveys.

BACKGROUND

Since 2018, the City used two separate surveys to measure perceptions of performance and inform budget decision making: 1) *Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey* and a 2) *Civic Services Survey: Performance, Priorities & Preferences*.

At the November 12, 2025 meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC), Administration shared the 2025 Civic Services Survey Results. GPC resolved that the information be received.

At City Council's 2026/27 Budget Deliberations meeting, an option was presented to expand the previous surveys including adding ward reports. This option was not adopted.

Administering two surveys created several challenges, including survey fatigue, a lower than desired combined sample size, and confusing interpretations of the results. These features were particularly evident in the 2025 survey.

In early 2026, Administration began working on a renewal strategy, focused on streamlining the survey, making reforms and improvements. Using existing budget allocations, Administration issued a Request for Quote in mid 2026. It received two submissions and awarded the contract to Insightrix Research, a Saskatoon-based research firm.

CURRENT STATUS

As part of Administration's renewal strategy, it examined the instruments, methodology, sample sizes, margins of error, and survey platforms used by several Canadian cities. The scan found no common standard as cities differ in platform, instrument design, and approach.

Administration also reviewed the existing survey questions for structure, scaling, and relevance. A key conclusion was that fielding two separate but related surveys at the same time reduced the value of both. The link between value (what residents receive) and cost (what residents pay) was severed because those questions sat in different surveys. As a result, the findings could not tell Council whether the residents who wanted "more snow clearing" (Survey 2) were the same residents who were "unwilling to pay more taxes" (Survey 1). Administration therefore merged the two surveys into a single instrument, now named the *Civic Performance and Priorities Survey*.

In the new survey, the questions are designed to be durable. They are written to remain relevant regardless of current events, so that results can be tracked consistently over time. The survey focuses on three core areas aligned with Council and organizational priorities:

1. Strategic Alignment — quality of life, quality of services, priority issues, and governance and transparency.
2. Budget & Service Preferences— balancing the budget, satisfaction with 12 core services and preferred service levels and value for services.
3. Reputation & Performance — trust, information, decision making, and service performance.

As a result of those reforms, the consolidated survey is intended to:

- Improve statistical reliability. A single, shorter instrument is expected to improve response quality and completion rates, addressing the lower sample size experienced in 2025. The target, representative sample of n=800 is sufficient for reliability for a city of Saskatoon's size.
- Report results on a consistent, interpretable scale. Most questions use a 5-point scale and are reported as mean (average) scores (for example, quality of life is rated 3.6 out of 5). "Not sure" responses are excluded from the base for each question. At n=800, a mean score on a typical question is estimated to be within approximately ±0.07 points, 19 times out of 20. For the small number of questions reported as percentages (such as the most pressing issue), the margin of error is ±3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Findings are generalizable to Saskatoon's adult population at a 95% confidence level.
- Reduce survey fatigue by eliminating duplicate questions and shortening the survey to approximately 8 minutes, compared to almost 30 minutes across the previous two surveys.
- Manage costs within the existing operating budget.
- Enable individual Ward reporting.

Overall, this redesigned approach is intended to strengthen data quality and provide Council and Administration with reliable input to the multi-year budget process and a consistent measure of residents' perceptions of City performance.

The annual survey may be supplemented by shorter, online-only "Pulse Checks" conducted up to twice a year when needed. These would cover a few core questions

plus emerging topics, enabling Administration to gather timely feedback on immediate issues (for example, snow events, construction, or homelessness) without waiting for the annual cycle, and without altering the core instrument.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Insightrix Research conducted the survey from June 8 to 25, 2026, using computer-assisted web interviewing through its SaskWatch online panel. Participation was limited to Saskatoon residents aged 18 and older, and 807 responses were completed. [1] The sample was quota-matched to Saskatoon's population by age and gender using the most recent Census data, and monitored for alignment with income and neighbourhood distributions. Full results for each question along with detailed tables, are provided in Appendix 1.

Results are presented for the city as a whole and by Ward. Ward-level samples are small (roughly 60 to 100 respondents each), so Ward results are reported without statistical testing for demographic variances and should be read as directional only. Ward results for each survey question are included as part of the detailed report found in Appendix 1.[2] In addition, demographic variances by age, gender, income and home ownership or rental are also included. Appendix 2 provides the raw data by response type for each question that uses a 5-point scale so the distribution across all ratings can be viewed.

Instrument, scoring, and interpretation

The survey instrument is found in Appendix 3 which contains 14 questions (excluding demographic and qualifying items), grouped under the three general themes described in the previous section. Six questions are focused on Strategic Alignment, four on Budget & Service Preferences, and four on Reputation & Performance.

Almost all questions use a 5-point scale in which higher values indicate more positive perceptions. Here, results are reported as mean scores out of 5. A mean reflects the full distribution of responses rather than only the share selecting the top one or two options, and is better suited to detecting shifts in opinion as future waves accumulate. The mean score out of 5 are not intended to be calculated as percentage.

Every scaled question offers a "don't know" option. These responses are excluded from the base before the mean is calculated, so each score reflects only respondents with an opinion. Valid sample sizes are reported with each result.These calculations are shown in Appendix 2.

A few questions do not use the 5-point scale. They are the two 'open-ended' questions (Question 6 and Question 7) and the budget-balancing approach (Question 13) as

[1] CAWI panels are non-probability samples since panelists are pre-recruited from a wide variety of sources. As a result, a true margin of error cannot be calculated but for comparison purposes, a probability sample is used.

[2] At n=800 across 10 wards, each ward is roughly n=80, which puts the CI on a mean around ±0.2

shown in Appendix 3. The interpretation of these questions require additional perspective.

- Question 6 is open-ended and focuses on improving quality of life. Specifically, this question asks respondents to offer one action the City could take to improve the qualtiy of life in Saskatoon. The responses were then grouped into themes by Insightrix and summed to determine their relative frequency of mention. The results are reported as percentages, with 43% of those mentions suggesting that addressing the theme of housing and the unhoused population is what could potentially improve the quality of life in Saskatoon in June 2006.

  Another top mention (20%) was addiction, mental health and social services. Importantly, this theme, combined with housing and homelessness, are two areas where the City of Saskatoon has little to no legislative, fiscal, or operational ability to fix, as these are largely provincial responsibilities.

- Question 7 is open-ended and asks respondents to offer their perspective on the single-most important issue facing Saskatoon. The responses were then grouped into themes by Insightrix and summed to determine their relative frequency of mention. The results are reported as percentages, with 47% of those mentions suggesting that the theme of housing and the unhoused population was the most important issue facing the Saskatoon in June 2026.

- Question 13 is a pre-determined choice-based question. Here, survey participants must choose one preferential strategy, from the choices given, to balance the City's budget. The results for this question are reported as percentages, with about a quarter (24%) prefering a combination of property tax and user fee increases. Another quarter (24%) are not sure. Stop providing a particular service was listed as the next highest choice (21%) but the survey does not ask the participant to elaborate on what service that could be.

Summary of Core Survey Results

Under the general theme of Strategic Alignment:

- Quality of life is a relative strength, but perceptions of declining quality of life exist among some respondents.
- As noted, housing and concerns about the unhoused population dominate as the top issue facing Saskatoon, followed by crime and safety, addictions, and cost-of-living pressures.
- Satisfaction with practicing open and accessible government and transparent decision making are moderate. Ratings are weaker for managing spending.
- Overall satisfaction with core services is moderate.

Under the general theme of Budget & Service Preferences:

- When looking at specific City services, fire and emergency services are clear strengths, followed by parks, utilities, waste services, and recreation facilities.

Road maintenance, public transit, traffic management, and planning have comparatively weaker satisfaction.
- Perceived value for City taxes and fees is moderate.
- Transportation infrastructure is the top priority for increased service. Respondents emphasized road maintenance, traffic management, snow clearing, and public transit among the top priority services.
- Respondents do not share a common preferred strategy for balancing the budget. Combining tax and user-fee increases and discontinuing a service attract the most support among the tested approaches, but uncertainty about approaches to address the issue remains prevalent.

Under the general theme of Reputation & Performance:
- Trust along with governance and reputation satisfaction is mixed. Trust in the City of Saskatoon is moderate.
- Information provided by the City is viewed positively for being easy to understand while satisfaction with providing timely and trustworthy information is moderate.
- Satisfaction with decision making attributes is modest with use of public input into decision making being somewhat weaker area.
- Customer service is a moderate strength within the City's broader relationship with residents.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
Funding for the Civic Performance & Priorities Survey is included within the approved operating budget of the Public Engagement Cost Centre, which includes $30,000 for support survey design, administration and reporting. By streamlining and reforming the survey, it was able to produce additional ward reports within the existing budget allocation.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS
There are no privacy, legal, social or environment implications identified.

NEXT STEPS
The City will conduct the next Civic Performance & Priorities Survey in 2027. Small adjustments may be made to the survey instrument to maximize the number of respondents to all questions along with any other necessary improvements. However, the intent is to minimize any changes for longer term durability and future trend analysis. With each additional annual survey comparisons to previous years will demonstrate shifts in performance and priorities.

APPENDICES
1. Civic Performance and Priorities Survey Detailed Report 2026
2. Survey Item Response Distributions and Summary Statistics
3. 2026 Civic Performance and Priorities Survey Instrument

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