IPCA
Independent Police Conduct Authority
Mana Whanonga Pirihimana Motuhake

THEMATIC REVIEW

Policing in small communities

November 2021

Contents

Summary of the report

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2018, after receiving several complaints about policing in small communities (communities with one- or two-person Police stations), the Authority decided to conduct a thematic review of how modern policing works in these areas.

2. We selected 12 small communities, and interviewed the local officers and residents to find out what was and was not working well for them. From this material we identified the common themes and issues, which are set out below.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue 1 – What does policing a small community involve?

3. Small community policing is quite a distinct role, which differs in some fundamental respects from other policing roles. Small community officers deal with a wide range of issues, including civil disputes as well as crime. The work has sufficiently distinct characteristics and challenges that it requires the development of its own national service delivery model with specific executive responsibility.

4. Many of the officers we interviewed said they enjoy being able to focus on getting to know their communities and on providing a proactive rather than purely reactive policing service. The main challenges of the role include officers feeling like they are constantly on call, and remoteness making it more difficult for officers to access relief, backup and sometimes training opportunities. Some officers also struggle to deal with conflicts of interest within their communities, both perceived and real.

5. In some cases, officers become involved in matters beyond the usual scope of dealing with or preventing crime. We found there were few guidelines about what type of work officers should and should not do. We do not think there should be fixed rules on this, as every community has different needs. However, we believe Police should provide more guidance and stronger supervisory direction on the scope of the officers' roles in each community so there are clear expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Police should develop a national policing service delivery model for small communities with specific executive responsibility.
2. Police should refresh the generic Position Description for small community roles to ensure that it is specific about the potential scope of police duties in a small community environment, including possible involvement in activities not related to crime and law enforcement.

3. Each small community officer and their supervisor should then agree on the general scope of the officer's duties in that particular community (within the overarching guidance of, and within the context of performance agreements under, the Police High Performance Framework).[1]

Issue 2 – How are specialist tasks handled?

6. Officers told us they usually received specialist support for matters like critical incidents and family harm when they needed it. However, in the more remote locations, officers were occasionally left to fend for themselves with investigations that specialists should have handled. There was also a real lack of adequate access to inter-agency services to respond to family harm incidents.

7. We found there were varying approaches to road policing in particular. This was an area where many officers perceived they were at risk of alienating themselves from the community if they enforced the law too strictly. On the other hand, officers saw youth work as an opportunity for preventive policing. Rather than using Youth Aid officers, many officers preferred to handle youth offending themselves by way of informal resolutions.

8. As with the scope of the small community policing role itself, we do not think there should be fixed rules about the extent to which these officers undertake specialist functions. However, Police should always endeavour to provide officers with specialist support for critical incidents, and should provide more guidance on how best to handle matters like road policing. They should also ensure that officers have the appropriate training and skills for the specialist tasks they do undertake.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The extent to which officers are expected to undertake specialist functions on a routine basis should be included in the agreed scope of duties for each small community officer.

5. To the extent that officers are required to undertake specialist tasks, it should be a pre-requisite that they receive the necessary training to do so.

Issue 3 – How are conflicts of interest managed?

9. Many complaints we receive about policing in small communities relate to conflicts of interest, particularly when members of a community believe their officer favours some people more than others. Officers in small communities are less able to avoid such perceived conflicts, because often there is no one else to hand the matter over to.

10. We found that officers were generally able to recognise obvious conflicts of interest, but many struggled to grasp the problem with more complex situations and did not know how to manage

[1] The Police High Performance Framework, which was introduced in 2016, is described by Police as fostering a culture and style of leadership that encourages them to act with initiative and judgement and enables staff to be the best they can be. It is delivered through five frameworks that embed an integrated, end-to-end performance process underpinned by Police core values.

them. There were inconsistent approaches to this issue, sometimes even between two officers in the same community.

11. Police therefore need to include in their 'Managing conflicts of interest' policy more comprehensive guidelines on the management and supervision of conflicts of interest in small communities. The new guidelines should address the extent to which officers should be appointed to positions in communities where they have family connections or the two officers in a two-person station are a couple.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Police should include a new section in the existing 'Managing conflicts of interest' policy about how conflicts of interest in small communities should be managed and supervised.

7. The policy should: a) include criteria for developing conflict of interest management plans; b) be covered in the induction and training of new small community officers; and c) be included in the desk file for small community roles.

8. It should also include guidance on when officers should be members of community organisations (as distinct from attending in uniform in their official capacity). Supervisors should consent to officers being members of community organisations (such as Boards of Trustees) only after careful consideration of conflict of interest issues and agreement with the officer as to how they are to be handled.

Issue 4 – Is there sufficient support for small community officers' safety and wellbeing?

12. Safety was a concern for many of the small community officers we spoke to, because they are routinely required to attend incidents alone and in remote locations. Most had strategies for accessing support from other rural officers nearby, or from within the community when necessary.

13. Safety concerns are exacerbated by the presence of black spots which prevent officers from contacting their Communications Centre in the event of an emergency and exposes them to undue risk.

14. Many officers preferred not to wear firearms, but some were more inclined to do so because they knew backup was far away. A small number of officers had problems with living in Police houses, because they feared for the safety of their families after repeated incidents.

15. This issue highlights the need for small community officers to have the right personality, have strong communication and risk assessment skills, and be properly inducted into the community so they know the people they are dealing with. However, we also think Police should provide more proactive welfare support to officers and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Police should find a technological solution as soon as possible to enable officers (and particularly sole officers) to contact their Communications Centre from a black spot in the event of an emergency.

10. Police should provide regular welfare support to small community officers and their families.

Issue 5 – Are small community stations adequately resourced?

16. Some of the officers we spoke to were concerned about workload and burnout, and the lack of adequate support, especially in one-person stations. However, we are not in a position to determine whether overall resourcing levels are appropriate. Clearly some stations were much busier than others in terms of reported offences and recorded occurrences, but these are not the only considerations in determining the required level of resource.

17. In the Authority's view, there is a need for a national resourcing model, even simply as a starting point or guide, to ensure each small community has a sufficient number of officers and relievers. Consideration should also be given to the development of an annual relief plan for each station.

18. It is also vital that Police stations and houses are included in all long-term district plans for maintenance and upgrading, and are appropriately prioritised, and that officers are supplied with the equipment and technological support required for the job. This is not always occurring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. There should be a national resourcing model to support decision-making about whether a station is required for a particular catchment and to determine adequate levels of resource for a station when it is established.

12. The district deployment model should also provide for additional relievers to cover leave and periods of increased demand such as holiday periods, and possibly an annual relief plan for each station.

13. Police should explore the possibility of building more permanent relieving capacity for small community roles.

14. The physical state of all small Police stations and houses should be included in all long-term district plans for maintenance and upgrading, so that a properly prioritised upgrading schedule can be developed.

15. Districts should review all station equipment to ensure that officers are supplied with the equipment and technological support required for the job (see also Recommendation 9).

Issue 6 – Are the recruitment and selection processes for small community officers suitable?

19. Community members had high expectations of their local officers. We found that, as well as a good amount of policing and life experience, it was most important for candidates for small community policing roles to have the right personality for the job.

20. We therefore think Police should look at reviewing the selection criteria for these roles. They also need to give officers who are interested in these roles regular opportunities to relieve in small communities, so they can find out if they are suited to it and will thrive in that environment. Overall, Police need to engage in better succession planning so they can fill rural positions with suitable officers more quickly.

21. We support the inclusion of community representatives in selection panels, and believe this should be standard practice across the country. Police also need to involve the preferred candidate's partner and family in the process, organise for them to visit the community, and provide them with detailed information about what the role and the community are like. Then they will know what to expect and can decide whether the job will work for the family as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Police should plan for future appointments in small community roles (including but not limited to selecting relievers who might be interested in that sort of role).

17. Wherever practicable and relevant, the interview panel should include appropriate community representation (including iwi representation), although the ultimate decision should still rest with Police.

18. The incumbent of the other position in a two-person station should be involved in the process and able to give prior input into the selection.

19. Criteria for selection should be developed in each case, including an assessment of *"fit"* with the community and any potential issues in dealing with conflicts of interest.

20. Officers with family connections to the community should not be precluded from being appointed to one-person stations. However, an appointment is unlikely to be appropriate if the family have a significant presence and influence in the community. If they are appointed, particular care needs to be taken to ensure there is appropriate and detailed training, and the adoption of detailed and agreed processes for ensuring that potential conflicts of interest and other problems are avoided. In the case of a one-person station, these written processes should generally be much more detailed.

21. There should be no prohibition on two officers in a marriage or partnership being appointed to a two-person station. However, if this occurs, there should be a plan for managing conflicts when they arise and an alternative avenue for community members to make a complaint about one of the officers.

22. As part of the assessment process, Police should where practicable enable the preferred candidate and their spouse/partner and family to visit the community before final selection. Detailed information about the role, the community and the associated risks of the job should also be provided.

Issue 7 – Are proper induction processes in place?

22. We found that inductions for small community officers were often poor, especially for those in one-person stations. There is widespread support for more comprehensive inductions, including providing better information about the community and its particular safety issues and risks. Inductions need to address common small community issues, such as conflicts of interest, as well as the more practical matters of how to run the station. It should also include inductions and/or information for spouses/partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. Police need to develop better, more systematic induction processes.

24. This should include overlap with the outgoing officer whenever possible (ideally two weeks, although a much shorter period may be sufficient if the incoming officer has already been a reliever or it is a two-person station).

25. Police should prepare a desk file for each station (including telephone system, file management, custody procedures, general demographics, community contacts, at-risk families, and safety issues). There should be procedures to require regular updating of the file, or at least updating before an incumbent leaves the position.

26. Relievers should also receive an induction and have access to a full desk file.

Issue 8 – Are the terms of deployment for small community officers appropriate?

23. While small community officers could usually be flexible with their rostered hours, they often felt they were on call for more hours than were set down in their contracts. We also found there were some tensions between officers arising from differences in allowances, particularly in respect of housing. We think that, as a general rule, Police should cease to provide Police houses, although an exception may be required in a particular community if no suitable rental accommodation is available.

24. There were very mixed views from community members and Police about whether small community officers should be on fixed terms and subject to rotation. While some prefer their officer to stay as long as they want, others believe terms should be limited due to the stress of the role, and the danger of long-serving officers becoming complacent and *"too settled"* in the community. On balance, the Authority favours fixed terms with the option of an extension if the community and Police believe that is appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

27. Small community officers should generally be subject to rotation. Police should renegotiate the Collective Employment Agreement with a view to instituting five year fixed term positions, with the possibility of an extension.

28. Police should cease to provide houses for accommodation purposes unless no suitable rental accommodation is available in a particular community.

29. Supervisors should be required to specify the extent to which, if at all, Police vehicles are available for private use.

30. Police need to develop a deployment model that properly reflects the demands of small community stations (and complies with the Collective Employment Agreement).

Issue 9 – Do officers have sufficient access to training and support?

25. Many officers believed they lacked training specific to their role, and thought they were being left behind in respect of the training received by officers in cities. Some found online training ineffective, and faced obstacles to attending regular training days in person due to distance and

lack of relief. There is therefore a general problem with lack of access to training. It is even more important that this be properly addressed if our recommendation that there be fixed term contracts is accepted.

26. As well as addressing these obstacles, we think Police should develop training that is specific to small community roles with greater focus on communication, engagement, mediation and managing conflicts of interest, among other things. This should be reflected in Personal Development Plans for all small station staff.

27. Police should also encourage, develop and properly resource a rural support network for small community officers under the leadership and guidance of a designated manager, who would have responsibility for elevating any common district small community issue to district management and any national issue to Police National Headquarters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. Police need to enhance opportunities for small community officers to access general training both to maintain general skills and to further career development.

32. Police also need to develop a specific training programme for small community roles.

33. This should include the development of a properly resourced and supported online rural policing network, under the leadership of a designated manager, to foster a community of practice and mutual support. The designated manager would have responsibility for elevating any common district small community issue to district management and any national issue to Police National Headquarters.

34. All small community officers should have Personal Development Plans.

Issue 10 – Are officers receiving adequate supervision?

28. We found some supervisors were good at providing oversight and support, with regular calls and visits to their officers. But others only contacted their officers about job-specific queries, and neglected to discuss wider concerns regarding the particular issues in their community.

29. We believe that supervisors should be more focused on and directly engaged with the community, and should regularly seek the community's feedback regarding the policing service they receive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

35. Supervision should be general (that is, not confined to review of or questions about individual cases) and should involve regular interaction with the community as well as between supervisor and officer. It should include discussion of any potential conflicts of interest.

36. For this purpose, the supervisor should have a presence in the community.

37. Performance reviews ought to include community feedback about the effectiveness of the officer's involvement in community development and crime prevention functions, and mechanisms should be in place to facilitate this.

Issue 11 – Are small community members easily able to contact their local officers?

30. Difficulty contacting their local officers was an enormous source of frustration for community members and was their most common complaint. Many said Police took too long to answer calls or respond to messages, which discouraged them from trying. Some believed this resulted in crime being under-reported.

31. We think Police need to review their processes for handling calls when small community officers are unavailable or off duty. Greater use of volunteers in small stations could help, and we believe Police should look at how they can address the safety concerns. Police also need to better educate small communities about the best ways to contact their officer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

38. Police should better promote and fund the 105 reporting line so that wait times are reduced and community expectations are properly managed.

39. Supervisors should exercise closer oversight of the way in which calls for service are responded to.

40. Police should establish a volunteer system during ordinary office hours for assisting with inquiries at stations and staffing the station when the officer is absent. This should include appropriate safety measures.

Issue 12 – Do officers effectively communicate and have sufficient visibility in their communities?

32. Small community officers used a wide variety of ways to reach out and stay in contact with people in their communities. However, some communities thought their officers did not have enough of a presence. We think Police should provide more guidance to officers about how best to communicate with their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

41. Police should set more specific expectations about the extent to which officers should communicate with their local communities, and the means by which it is appropriate for them to do so (for example, via Facebook page, newsletters, visibility in the community). There should not be a blanket prohibition on the use of social media on a local basis, but this should be permitted only within strictly defined parameters and when the officer has the required skills to do so.

CONCLUSIONS

33. During this project we found that the communities we visited largely backed their local officers and valued their work. We were also impressed by many of the officers we met. However, we found some key areas where the officers need more support, as described in the summary of issues above.

34. Police recognise these problems and have begun working to address them with a project of their own, the Rural Policing Enhancement Project (RPEP). We have agreed with the Commissioner of Police that we will monitor the progress of that project. We will also monitor the Police's implementation of:

a) any recommendations that come out of the RPEP; and

b) the recommendations we make in this report.

Introduction

35. In recent years, the Authority has received several complaints from people in different 'small communities' (communities with one- or two-person Police stations) about the way their local officers dealt with them and with others in the community. The complaints related to perceived favouritism and bias on the part of the officers, and Police's failure to properly address potential conflicts of interest. We dealt with these complaints individually, but found there were some general issues with policing in small communities that we needed to examine further.

36. We therefore decided, in 2018, to conduct a thematic review:[2]

    a) to develop a better understanding of how modern policing works within small communities;

    b) to identify what is working well for these communities and where improvements to service need to be made; and

    c) to identify whether further training and support is required for officers in these communities to help them do the job more effectively.

37. The purpose of the review was not to examine any individual officer's conduct or performance, but to look at whether Police are providing a good service and giving officers enough support to do their job well in small communities.

38. We wanted to consider these issues from the perspectives of both the officers and the small community members. We selected 12 communities from the 94 nationwide that have a one-person or two-person station and spent time interviewing the local officers and residents to learn about their experiences with policing, and identify the unique challenges they face.

39. We visited the following communities:

- Kohukohu;
- Rawene;
- Hikurangi;
- Great Barrier Island;
- Coromandel;
- Piopio;

[2] Section 12(1)(c) of the Independent Police Conduct Authority Act provides that: *"The functions of the Authority shall be to take such action in respect of complaints, incidents, and other matters as is contemplated by this Act."* Section 12(2) of the Act states: *"In the course of taking action in respect of any complaint the Authority may investigate any apparent misconduct or neglect of duty by a Police employee, or any Police practice, policy, or procedure, which appears to the Authority to relate to the complaint, notwithstanding that the complaint itself does not refer to that misconduct, neglect, practice, policy, or procedure."*

- Tolaga Bay;
- Kotemaori;
- Murchison;
- Chatham Islands;
- Tuatapere; and
- Stewart Island.

40. This selection of communities provided a mix of one- and two-person stations, with different characteristics and crime levels, spread throughout the country. Some were especially remote and isolated, while others were closer to towns. Many were in farming and/or forestry areas. Four were holiday destinations where the resident population, and consequently the demands on policing, substantially increased over summer.

41. As well as the local officers and their supervisors, we spoke to about 10-15 people within each community, including business owners, farmers, teachers, and community board members among others. We identified these people through Police and other sources. We also found further people to interview by asking those we had already spoken to for relevant contacts.

42. In addition, we arranged a number of marae meetings to explore the relationship and interaction between the officers and local iwi.

43. We asked the officers about their backgrounds and experience with small community policing; the nature of their employment contract and allowances; the benefits and downsides of the role; what was and was not working well; how they interact with their communities; and the type of support and training they receive for this role. We also assessed their understanding of how conflicts of interest can arise in a small community and how they should deal with them.

44. We asked the community members about their interactions and experience with the local officers (past and present); the extent and type of role the officers play in their communities; what kind of policing approach the officers take; how integrated into the community the officers are; and their views on conflicts of interest and whether officers should only serve fixed terms.

45. We then used the information we had gathered to identify common themes and issues, which we discuss and analyse in this report.

46. We note that we were regrettably delayed in writing up the results of our fieldwork, due to the pressures of other demands on our business. However, the delay has resulted in the release of our report coinciding with work Police are doing in this area through their Rural Policing Enhancement Project. We have therefore had the benefit of testing our issues and findings with the team working on that project, and of drawing on some additional information they have collected.

Key issues identified in the review

1: WHAT DOES POLICING A SMALL COMMUNITY INVOLVE?

What attracts officers to small community policing roles?

47. Many officers told us they were attracted to policing a small community because of the opportunity for closer community relationships and a more preventive service. They felt they could help people more in a small community than they could in a city. As one put it:

> *"I always felt like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff [in the city], and I kind of felt [that with] community policing I can actually get involved in the community and help a smaller community…. I felt like I could be more beneficial in an area like this…. It makes your job a lot easier once the people have got to know you."*

48. Another described it more colourfully:

> *"There's not many places where you can get in touch with your criminals and have them come and see me rather than me go and hunt them down."*

49. Officers said they liked the fact that they could work on an incident from beginning to end, compared to policing in a city where they only saw a small part of an incident and might never find out what ultimately happened to the people involved.

50. Some officers also relished the chance to come up with their own strategies and set their own priorities, for example deciding to target a particular issue within the community. Rather than being a *"slave to the radio"*, small community officers appreciated having more freedom to choose what to focus on and how to structure their working hours:

> *"Out here we're self-directed, we respond to what we see as being a need and we can actually see a change in the community from our efforts, so that is what I get a kick out of anyway."*

51. Many officers also said they prefer a rural lifestyle, and believe it is a good environment for their family.

What kind of work do officers in small communities do?

52. We found that the nature of the officers' work, and the pressure on them, varied substantially. Some were almost totally preoccupied with crime-related inquiries or resolutions, but the majority saw this as only a small part of their work. They described their job as *"dealing with absolutely everything"*, including all types of crimes and community problems as well as emergencies. Data on the annual number and type of incidents and prosecutions in each community we visited is included in the appendix of this report (see page 75).

53. Most of the communities we visited said they had problems with alcohol and drugs, and the crimes associated with them. These included family violence; drink-driving; disorderly

behaviour; and theft of stock and fuel as well as farming and forestry equipment to fund addictions to methamphetamine (*"P"*). Illegal hunting was also a problem in many areas.

54. As well as addressing criminal issues, officers reported that they selectively deal with a wide variety of community issues, which might be described as civil. In particular, many referred to neighbourhood disputes (such as fencing issues or driveway disputes) frequently taking up a lot of their time. One described how it was hard to justify what they had done in a day when they had been *"just totally dealing with a 'neighbours at war' situation trying to keep both parties happy"*. Another described the job in the following terms:

> *"Essentially you seem to get involved in everything which can be a pain in the bum, but you seem to be the first call for most stuff. So if someone has a problem, even Animal Control problems, they ring us first and we're generally having to say to people very politely: 'You've actually rung the wrong person, we can't deal with your wild pigs unless you want us to come out and shoot them after work.' So, you know, you go and speak to Animal Control, but generally we're first port of call for most stuff, a lot of advice and a lot of preventive stuff…. That preventive policing thing is nothing new to us, it's been what we've done for years."*

55. In a city, Police generally dismiss these types of problems as not being Police business. But in smaller communities, other public services to assist are often not readily available. Officers tend to see handling these matters as part of their *"problem-solving*" role within their communities, because otherwise they cause ongoing friction and: *"Out here if you don't deal with it it's going to become a policing problem."* In essence, their primary focus was on prevention, even if they did not perceive it or describe it as such. One officer contrasted their job with urban policing by saying that, whereas the latter puts a patch over something and moves on, the former deals with incidents and problems from start to finish.

56. Some officers also saw themselves as *"the face of government"* within their communities, and considered it their duty to help people who came to them for advice: *"When there's nobody else to call, we are it. We either give an answer or point in the direction they need to go."*

57. The extent to which this type of work was undertaken depended to some extent on the criminal caseload in the area. But one officer, who estimated that he laid about 100 charges in a year, said he still spent 30% of his time dealing with non-crime issues.

58. As well as dealing with crime and civil disputes, some officers took on a much broader role within the community. In a couple of isolated stations, the officers acted as a whole variety of public services: certifying documents; acting as a bailiff; Search and Rescue and Coastguard; agents for the NZ Mountain Safety Council; providing lectures on firearms safety; acting as fishery officers; being the island ambulance using their four-wheel drive; and being the rural firefighters. They also ran community events, such as organising an annual marathon as a fund-raiser for one of the local schools and running a children's hunting course.

59. While it may be desirable, and perhaps inevitable, that the work of an officer in a small community is outlined in broad and ill-defined terms and that he or she is prepared to act as a *"24-hour social service"*, this causes difficulties that often go unrecognised and unaddressed:

a) It may give rise to unrealistic expectations by the community. To the extent that members of the community believe that officers are general community problem-solvers, they may call upon the officers to deal with situations that are beyond their expertise, and may expect the officer to assert an authority or exercise a power that they do not possess. When that does not materialise, members of the community can readily form a perception that the officer is being selective, *"taking sides"*, and playing favourites. We were given examples where precisely that had occurred.

b) It can lead officers to intervene in a way that would not normally be seen as appropriate Police practice and may be contrary to formal Police policy. For example, some officers considered it part of their job to serve trespass notices if they saw it as a sensible way of addressing a dispute between neighbours or a community problem. Indeed, one officer went so far as to say that he always served a trespass notice upon request, because *"there is nobody else"* to do so. Another said it was an *"explicit"* part of the job to serve trespass notices. However, this is not recognised in Police policy, which allows officers to serve trespass notices only if Police involvement is required for safety reasons.

c) It can too easily create a conflict of interest that may go unrecognised and undeclared. We were given many examples by communities of officers acting in a way that created a perception of favouritism and bias, or of failing to act when they should have because they were too embedded in the community. Sometimes their mere involvement in a civil dispute, regardless of the nature of their actions, gave rise to the perception of a conflict, because they were seen by one or other of the parties to have taken sides. This issue is discussed further in paragraphs 125-167 below.

60. The specifics of the officers' roles in each community were not set out in any document; their position descriptions were generic and, although the advertisement for the role would describe the job in more detail, it was usually quite brief.

61. This is appropriate. Position descriptions are not intended to be individualised; supervisor expectations and performance expectations for each officer should be separately specified in accordance with the Police's Strategic Performance Template and discussed in one-on-one meetings.[3] However, we found that in practice there was little supervisory direction about what the role should consist of, and not many guidelines regarding what type of work officers should and should not be doing. There was also little attempt to educate the community about what they could expect of the Police. As a result, officers generally tailored the job to suit the demands for service in their particular area, and their own preferences about what kind of work they wanted to do.

62. All of this points to the fact that small community policing is a quite distinct role that differs in fundamental ways from other policing roles. In the Authority's view, the present model, under which responsibility for the manner of delivery of services is almost entirely devolved to district level, is inadequate. The work has sufficiently distinct characteristics and challenges that it requires the development of its own national service delivery model with specific executive

[3] Police use the Strategic Performance Template (SPT) to document performance expectations.

responsibility. That would need to allow for district flexibility to cater for local circumstances, but it would provide a national framework for decision-making. As recommended below (Recommendation 11), this should include a national resource allocation model. It should also encompass a number of the other service delivery issues canvassed elsewhere in this report.

What are the challenges of policing a small community?

63. Most officers said they routinely work longer than their contracted hours. They also reported being constantly at the beck and call of the community, who visit them at home or want to raise issues with them when they see them. One officer put a positive spin on this:

> *"I genuinely love my job and if someone comes up to me, I see it as I've done my job well enough that that person trusts me, he believes in me and has come to me for help, so rather than sit there and go: 'Oh it's my day off, go and see somebody else', I take a lot of pride in that and I think I've done my job and I'm really happy that you've come to see me and that's how I deal with it."*

64. However, many officers said it is difficult for them to get any downtime and it can feel like they are on call 24/7, especially in a one-person station. This is exacerbated by the fact that they are known by everyone, so members of the community who want to talk to them generally feel free to do so whatever the circumstances in which they come into contact. We were frequently told about officers constantly being waylaid in the supermarket. One former officer told us how he and his partner became members of the local country club, but only went there for dinner twice because people were *"constantly in his ear"*.

65. In a nutshell, we were repeatedly told of the difficulties officers confronted in separating their professional life and their personal life. Some community members acknowledged this, noting that the off-duty time of officers was not sufficiently respected.

66. In addition, if issues arise that require ongoing attention, officers in small communities do not have the luxury of finishing an eight-hour shift and passing the work on to the incoming shift:

> *"The other day it was Waitangi Day [and] I ended up doing about 16 or 17 hours on that shift, [because of] just lack of support and backup. I ended up dealing with a fatal car accident and things like that pretty much by myself and trying to ask for help because I had road closures, I had fire, ambulance, people to talk to, trying to call in serious crash guys and just trying to do it all…. I was a little bit dark on that."*

67. The extent to which officers receive backup cover from a neighbouring town or city varies. One area was sufficiently close to a city that urgent calls for service were generally responded to by patrol staff from that city, and the local officer was only called if required as backup. In other areas, patrol staff from a town might be dispatched to attend an urgent rural job outside the local constable's regular shift times. However, officers told us this is less common than it used to be, due to staffing shortages.

68. Moreover, most of the small communities we visited are very remote, and the distances involved make it difficult for Police to provide cover while the local constable is off-duty. In two-

person stations, the on-duty officer is called and they contact the off-duty officer if backup is required. But otherwise, the local off-duty officer is the first port of call. They then have to assess the situation and decide whether to attend on their own or wait at the station for backup to arrive. This adds to the 24/7 nature of the job and has implications for officer safety, which we discuss further below.

69. Many of the other challenging aspects of the role are discussed in more detail below, including:

- the difficulty of accessing specialist support in some cases (see Issue 2 – paragraphs 89-123);
- finding the right balance between being part of the community and policing it (see Issue 3 – paragraphs 125-167);
- having to work alone the majority of the time, and the safety implications of that (see Issue 4 – paragraphs 169-193);
- limited provision of relievers (see Issue 5 – paragraphs 196-226); and
- occasional impediments to additional training and professional development (see Issue 9 – paragraphs 306-327).

How is the role different from policing in an urban environment?

70. Our interviewees told us that the main distinguishing feature of the role, as opposed to policing in cities, was the need for the officer to fit in with and be accepted by the community. In order to achieve this and be effective in their roles, officers (and often their supervisors) saw it as essential that they had the aptitude and willingness to become fully involved in the community and be passionate about it (an issue we discuss in more detail below at paragraphs 125-167).

71. However, fitting in may be very difficult. Residents told us that small and remote communities can be insular and unforgiving, and even people who have lived in a place for decades may still be considered outsiders if they are not *"from"* there. Some believed it took up to a year for a new officer to settle in, while others thought it took several years at least.

72. Small community residents also tend to be very protective of their family and each other. This can make policing tough because, as one officer told us, *"You're only as good as the information you're getting"*. Another officer said:

> *"We hear a lot about P [methamphetamine] but we're really pushed to try and get people to come and give us information. We keep telling without that information we can't really – we don't have anything to act on and it's really hard. People don't want to say anything. They don't want to be that person to dob someone in."*

73. The need for the officers to be accepted and supported by the community inevitably affects their style of policing. Many of our interviewees said that *"big city"* solutions were unlikely to work in their communities, which looked negatively on officers who came in *"wielding a big stick"* and applying the law too strictly. Most officers acknowledged that they rely on their

community to do their job effectively, so they are reluctant to upset them too much over minor infringements. More generally, they noted that, when they are dealing with individuals in a confrontational situation, they cannot afford to alienate them because they will have to deal with them again in future.

74. We therefore found that officers generally had a more flexible approach to policing than 'city' officers, and were more likely to use warnings and informal resolutions for relatively minor offending. One told us:

> *"I don't like to just go around with a big stick whacking people sort of thing… if there's an opportunity to make right something that's happened and it's appropriate then that's what I like to do."*

75. This is understandable and generally in line with community expectations. Many members of the community reported to us that new officers tended to take a stricter view of enforcement or, as one person put it, be *"over-exuberant"* or *"officious"* by comparison with those who had been in the role for a while. They noted that new officers take time to learn that small communities like to police themselves and that flexible, informal solutions are required unless serious offending is involved. As one community member put it, a small community *"expects advice first and then enforcement afterwards"*.

76. However, flexible policing runs the risk of creating a perception of inconsistency and unfairness in policing. That is because an officer's use of solutions such as warnings and informal resolutions may come under scrutiny from the community if they feel that the officer is biased in favour of or against particular people (see Issue 3 for more discussion of this).

77. Both the officers and the community said the officer's reputation was hugely important, because often *"perception is reality"*. So, while most officers saw informal resolutions and warnings as common-sense preventive policing, some were more aware than others of the dangers and of the need for clear communication about what they were doing and why. As one officer put it: *"people need to know where you stand, where your lines are"*. One officer emphasised that he was careful with these decisions and documented them:

> *"Any alternate resolution like that will always be written up as such and so it can be vetted. It's not just a simple way of getting rid of this job so I don't personally have to do anything."*

78. Many of the small communities we visited expected their officers to be proactive rather than purely reactive. Most officers were engaged with, and in some cases led, community projects to deal with the problems facing their community. One example of this was an officer who created a trust to fund security cameras for rural roads. The community involved greatly appreciated this, and reported that it had *"phenomenally"* reduced the crime rate. Other examples included officers:

a) speaking at a hui to educate the community and address their concerns about methamphetamine use;

b) being involved in programmes to increase driver and gun licensing; and

c) regularly meeting and working with local community organisations offering social services.

79. Some communities acknowledged it was up to them to take responsibility in these areas and 'own' their own problems, with support and consultation from Police rather than leadership. Where this occurred, it helped to ease the pressure on officers.

How do Police foster the Crown-Māori relationship in small communities?

80. Many of the small communities we visited have a high Māori population, and the Chatham Islands are also home to the Moriori. In our discussions with various hapū in each community, we found their thoughts and concerns about policing generally mirrored those of others in the community. They were often complimentary of the role that officers played in the community and their efforts to engage with and consult Māori. But they were concerned about difficulties that individuals had in contacting Police and in some communities the poor visibility of the local officers.

81. In addition, there were a few issues that were particular to Māori and were raised in more than one community.

82. First, many wanted Police to involve them in the appointment and performance reviews of their local officers. While others also supported community involvement in the appointments process, some Māori saw it as a corollary of effective partnership that they be involved in, or at least consulted on, appointments. We discuss this further below (see paragraphs 247-249).

83. Secondly, we were told that there should be a consistent practice of welcoming a new officer to the community via pōwhiri. While this occurred sporadically, it was not always done.

84. Finally, on some of our marae visits we were told that officers were occasionally reluctant or unwilling to become involved in social issues that were of concern to the local community and often the drivers of crime. For example, in one area we were told that the officer was not culturally responsive and did not become involved in or even visit the marae. We were also told that, when he was invited to attend a meeting to plan strategies for addressing high methamphetamine use, he did not respond.

Summary of Issue 1 – What does policing a small community involve?

85. Small community policing is quite a distinct role, which differs in some fundamental respects from other policing roles. Small community officers deal with a wide range of issues, including civil disputes as well as crime. The work has sufficiently distinct characteristics and challenges that it requires the development of its own national service delivery model with specific executive responsibility.

86. Many of the officers we interviewed said they enjoy being able to focus on getting to know their communities and on providing a proactive rather than purely reactive policing service. The main challenges of the role include officers feeling like they are constantly on call, and remoteness making it more difficult for officers to access relief, backup and sometimes training

opportunities. Some officers also struggle to deal with conflicts of interest within their communities, both perceived and real.

87. In some cases, officers become involved in matters beyond the usual scope of dealing with or preventing crime. We found there were few guidelines about what type of work officers should and should not do. We do not think there should be fixed rules on this, as every community has different needs. However, we believe Police should provide more guidance and stronger supervisory direction on the scope of the officers' roles in each community so there are clear expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Police should develop a national policing service delivery model for small communities with specific executive responsibility.
2. Police should refresh the generic Position Description for small community roles to ensure that it is specific about the potential scope of police duties in a small community environment, including possible involvement in activities not related to crime and law enforcement.
3. Each small community officer and their supervisor should then agree on the general scope of the officer's duties in that particular community (within the overarching guidance of, and within the context of performance agreements under, the Police High Performance Framework).[4]

Police response to this issue

88. Police say their Rural Policing Enhancement Project is intending to clarify the small community officer and supervisor roles.

2: HOW ARE SPECIALIST TASKS HANDLED?

Do officers in small communities get enough support for critical incidents and serious offence investigations?

89. Most officers told us that they had some training in critical incident management, but they still expected to receive specialist investigative support. By and large that occurs; they generally receive help with handling critical incidents from their nearest town or city. Officers close down the scene as much as possible and do whatever they can to manage the incident until the relevant specialist investigative staff arrive.

90. Even then, the officers see themselves as having a role to play as the local constable:

> *"We'll get involved you know, and talk or tell them who they need to talk to, or even some of the community would rather talk to us, tell us stuff but they won't tell the guys in town. We had a murder there, a guy who ran someone over, and he turned up to the police station and hopped in the back of the truck before I even knew what had happened. He was like, 'Yeah that was me'."*

[4] See footnote 1.

91. However, there are three significant qualifications to this general picture.

92. First, some officers complained that, apart from the specialist areas of Adult Sexual Assault and Child Protection, staffing shortages in the Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) mean they are increasingly dealing with all other serious crime themselves, with assistance as required from other stations. It is not possible for us to assess how often this occurred. Clearly very serious offences such as homicides, aggravated robberies and grievous assaults are typically handled by CIB, but our impression is that other offences of moderate seriousness (such as injury assaults and burglaries) are often handled by the officers themselves.

93. Secondly, some officers complained that there may be a significant delay before specialist assistance arrives, and until then they are left to manage the scene on their own (although they may be supported by the local Volunteer Fire Brigade to cordon the scene, for example following a fatal road crash). This may be simply an inevitable consequence of geographical distance; we are unable to assess whether avoidable delays occur.

94. Thirdly, there were occasional complaints that requests for assistance are sometimes ignored, and officers in the small station are left to fend for themselves and do the best they can. For example, one officer in a remote community complained of a lack of support for investigating a fatal crash and a major fire, and explained:

> *"Basically, I think they couldn't justify the cost of sending someone over to deal with it and then they bounced it back to me for investigation. I baulked at that because you're talking about a serious arson here. I've had no CIB training. I've done one CIB module and a basic investigator's course and that's it. That was many years ago. Bounced it back to my supervisor with my concerns and still got no traction there and they've basically said: 'No, we're not coming out…'. I have been still in negotiation with my supervisors around the response to that because I'm still not happy about how it's been handled and so essentially it's not been investigated properly at this stage.*
>
> *…I think there's quite a few people here who are actually quite disappointed that it's not been dealt with properly. I feel like the Police have let down the community in that regard, with that one and that reflects on me as well – I feel it reflects on me, yeah, so I'm not happy about how that's been handled."*

95. Regarding having to investigate a fatal crash himself, the officer said:

> *"I've not had any training in it, but [the serious crash report done remotely] came to the same conclusions so I think I did a good job. But it also mentioned in their reports that they're a bit critical of how we handled it and I thought, 'Well, stuff you', if you're going to say, 'You did it wrong' you should have come out and done it yourself, you know?"*

How do small community officers deal with road policing?

96. Officers generally kept to a minimum the extent to which they formally enforced road policing laws (with the exception of testing for excess breath/blood alcohol, which almost all saw as a core function). This is because they believed active road policing enforcement potentially

damages their ongoing relationships with members of the community (see paragraph 73). A retired officer reported to us that, while he had regularly inspected vehicles for warrants of fitness and sometimes issued 'pink sticker' non-operative orders,[5] he had issued only three infringement notices for speeding in 14 years, because doing so more often would have *"affected [his] relationships with the community"*.

97. The risk of alienating people was well demonstrated in one community by the officer's practice of issuing infringement notices for illegal parking in the town. Community members saw this as petty and unnecessary policing and commented that it was a widespread source of grievance.

98. For this reason, many officers considered it better to leave most road policing to the specialist road policing units driving through their area, or to relievers (see paragraph 216). One noted:

> *"I can't be policing hard all the time, yeah, and so sometimes when I ask for a unit to go out and assist in those sorts of ways it can be quite beneficial that it still leaves me as the community guy that people can come and see…. There's going to be good people within the community that do get picked up by operations like that which are the people that I rely on for various things. That's just the nature of the job."*

99. In contrast, another officer said he saw being out on the road as a key part of his job, and an opportunity to be seen and meet the people in his community:

> *"You get to know who's about, you get to know everybody and I do think it's really important. It slows down people, it deters people from speeding as well as a golden opportunity to say 'G'day' [and introduce yourself]."*

100. Variability in the extent to which officers engaged in road policing even extended to differences in approach between the officers in a two-person station. In two areas, we found that one officer frequently undertook traffic enforcement, while the other tended to avoid it so as not to alienate the community. This had not necessarily been discussed and agreed between them, and had certainly not been discussed with or endorsed by the supervisor; it simply evolved as they defined for themselves the nature of their job.

101. When officers did undertake traffic duties, their approaches also differed from urban areas, and varied between one officer and another depending upon their personal views of how to do the job and the nature of their community. Most gave a warning and/or directed the person to address the issue rather than giving them a ticket. Their view was that it is better for people to spend their money on fixing the problem rather than paying a fine. In some of the more remote communities, it is extremely expensive to get a warrant of fitness or a licence, and this can factor into the officers' responses:

[5] 'Pink stickers' direct that the vehicle is not to be driven on a road, and signify that the vehicle is not up to Warrant of Fitness (WOF) standard. They are removed once a mechanic has repaired the vehicle and issued a new WOF. Some officers use pink stickers as an alternative to infringement notices, to encourage people to spend their money on repairing their vehicle rather than paying a fine. However, officers may issue an infringement notice if they catch the vehicle still driving with a pick sticker.

"[As part of diversion] the person would have had to go and get their full licence which effectively was kind of setting them up to fail to begin with anyway because out here you can't get your licence, there's huge costs involved."

102. If a safety issue made the vehicle unfit for the road, they usually exercised their discretion by issuing 'pink sticker' non-operative orders rather than an infringement notice. But officers in a couple of the most remote communities were conscious of the fact that it was often difficult for people to make their vehicles totally compliant, and even if the fault gave rise to some safety concerns, they were reluctant to take enforcement action. One officer summed it up as follows:

> *"Many of the vehicles out here wouldn't meet a warrant of fitness and there's no way they'd ever meet it. Do I then take a firm line of enforcing that and basically take away all the cars off the island? And reduce the people down to walking everywhere or finding alternative means of transport? And then alienate myself because they'll be quite upset with the loss of vehicles and the transport out here is a big issue. There's no public transport.*
>
> *I've pink stickered a couple of vehicles because they had no brakes. I have to bear in mind that there is only one garage here and they don't have all the facilities – like they can't do wheel balances. They don't have the tools for it. So it's hard to enforce something – you know, put a pink sticker on a vehicle – basically saying that you've written that vehicle off the road because it's not safe but there's no way for them to get it safe.*
>
> *If it's brakes and things, they can fix that. But if it's not got window wipers or they haven't got taillights because they keep getting smashed out by the rough roads – I've gone through so many tail-lights myself. The back window on my truck's fallen out and I've had to replace it with something I've made myself because they just don't have the parts out here and the cost to do that is exorbitant so you make some allowances based on practicality, I guess.*
>
> *So I balance the law and safety versus, I guess, community need and getting myself alienated or getting that backlash from the community if I was to go in too hard on that in a great rush. I'm building up to it. My long term plan is to have the vehicle standards improved but I'm building up to it as a step by step. I'm not just going in and attacking everything at once."*

103. In respect of drink driving, many officers said they visited their local pubs on busy evenings to set expectations and warn people they would be out patrolling that night, so they should make other arrangements to get home. Some community members said that *"nobody dares"* to socialise at the pub anymore, while others thought their local officers tended to *"look the other way"* too much.

104. In one community, policing of drink driving had been neglected before new officers came along and decided to target the problem. The community said the officers had started to change people's attitude towards drink driving with their actions. In contrast, in another community, the officer believed that trying to enforce drink driving laws by stopping people at random would inevitably lead to allegations he was picking on some people and not others, because *"everyone drinks and drives"*.

105. Overall, there was a great deal of variability in the way officers handled road policing. There is a lack of guidance for officers, so they have to decide for themselves how to deal with it. While each community is different, we think Police should provide more guidance to officers so their approaches to road policing are based on rational principles rather than the instincts or preferences of individuals.

How involved are small community officers in firearms licensing?

106. Since we undertook our fieldwork, Police have been reviewing how firearms licensing work should be undertaken. However, the only significant changes to date have been the introduction of a centralised online system for receiving licence applications, and a requirement that all decisions about applications and renewals be made by a senior sergeant rather than a district arms officer.

107. The result is that, once a file has been created and sent to a district, the processing of applications and other firearms licensing issues in urban areas is generally dealt with by an arms officer. The arms officer is supported by contractors who undertake vetting ('fit and proper person') checks by way of home visits and interviews with applicants and nominated referees.

108. We found that in small communities, unless there were specialist arms officers nearby, the officers dealt with most of this work themselves. Some were also qualified as firearms instructors and ran safety courses. Officers said these were burdensome tasks, because most communities had a hunting culture and there was a lot of interest in firearms. We do not anticipate that this will have changed much as a result of the online application process.

109. The only work officers in small communities did not routinely do was the vetting checks. Like their urban counterparts, most contracted independent persons to undertake vetting checks, with one arguing that it was not core Police business to do so. But we found some local officers have started to do more of the vetting work themselves.

110. Partly this arose because of the cost of contracted vetters. But a few officers also saw advantages in doing such work themselves. As one explained it:

> *"It's fantastic in some ways because I get to see some of the good people, I've got good reasons to go to good people's houses rather than bad reasons to go to bad people's houses so it gives me an insight to go and see them, see who's at the house, say hello, talk to them, have a look at the lay of the house, and that side of it's fantastic. The downside is that sometimes it can be overbearing and you might get six of those at once that take four and a half hours each and then you've got all of this community work that you've got to do that you can't so you end up getting pushed for time."*

111. These officers recognised that home visits for vetting purposes also served intelligence purposes; it enabled the officer to have a dialogue with the person in their home setting, identify any concerns they had and assess potential risks.

112. The inconsistencies in practice in this respect mirror the broader inconsistencies in firearms licensing practice highlighted in the 'Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019'.

How do small community officers work with young people?

113. In urban areas, Police work with young people is undertaken by two specialist units: Youth Aid officers (who deal with children and young persons suspected of offending); and School Community Officers (formerly Youth Education Services), who partner with schools to provide education programmes.

114. We found that officers in most small communities dealt with children and young persons suspected of low-level offending themselves. In fact, they preferred to use 'alternative action' plans themselves to address youth offending when appropriate, rather than sending files to Youth Aid:

> *"We actually get to do a lot of that sort of stuff now like, you know if some of the youths get in trouble we'll make them do a bit of community work, you know cut some firewood or pick up some rubbish or actually address what's going on…. Obviously if it's not done properly you're going to get yourself in trouble so the victim's view of it is pretty important if there is one."*

115. However, if they perceived the need for ongoing intervention, they referred the case to Youth Aid for follow-up.

116. Support from School Community Officers (SCOs) was patchy, and we were told they hardly ever came to the small community areas. This is not necessarily confined to rural areas. Even in urban areas, we understand that it is now uncommon for SCOs to visit schools routinely unless the school's profile indicates a particular need. However, the consequence is that small community officers themselves are responsible for whatever interaction with the school occurs. Indeed, some saw a core part of their job as including regular school visits and interaction with staff and students. Many officers said they enjoyed this aspect of their job and it was good for the kids to know who they were. As one put it:

> *"I sort of try and do the odd visit [to a remote school] when I get a chance just to show the kids 'I'm here to help you'. I say: 'Hey, if you've got sports days or anything like that, let me know', and if it ties in I'll try and do something, same as the school [nearby], and I try and do it with all the schools but it's a matter of finding the time to."*

117. Some officers were also involved in charity programmes like Blue Light,[6] or in other community initiatives for youths which helped them establish good connections. In one community, the officers were helping young people get their restricted driver's licence:

> *"They're sitting on their learner's and getting tickets, so we were rounding them up, making sure they've got something in their belly before they went and drove,*

[6] Blue Light is a registered charity that works in partnership with Police to deliver an extensive range of youth programmes and activities.

you know you'd have to buy them breakfast and then drive them around in town with them for a couple of hours…. it's not just about their driving, you actually get to find out what's going on their life because they're just, you know you just don't take notes of all their problems, you give them a bit of life advice and you get a good relationship and then suddenly the whole family think you're pretty neat."

To what extent do small community officers have support in dealing with family harm?

118. Small community officers said that family harm cases go through the same process as family harm incidents in more populated areas, in the sense that they are recorded by way of a Family Harm Report, with a subsequent assessment of the need for follow-up action:

> *"Those that do come our way we treat just like we do in town. It's you know templates to follow. It's an investigation at times when there's an allegation of physical violence or psychological harm et cetera so there's still investigation."*

119. However, because of geographical distances and limited resources, there is less likely to be follow-up by a specialist Family Harm Team than in an urban area. Local officers generally end up dealing with and, if necessary, investigating family harm incidents themselves.

120. Some officers work with local organisations like Women's Refuge if they have a representative in their community. In one area we visited, a supervisor was working to set up a cross-agency group to address family harm and take pressure off the small community officers. However, it is clear that officers are generally very constrained in the extent to which they can access inter-agency services; they are often left to their own devices in attempting to resolve the issue, and rely upon their relationships and knowledge of the community to do so.

Summary of Issue 2 – How are specialist tasks handled?

121. Officers told us they usually received specialist support for matters like critical incidents and family harm when they needed it. However, in the more remote locations, officers were occasionally left to fend for themselves with investigations that specialists should have handled. There was also a real lack of adequate access to inter-agency services to respond to family harm incidents.

122. We found there were varying approaches to road policing in particular. This was an area where many officers perceived they were at risk of alienating themselves from the community if they enforced the law too strictly. On the other hand, officers saw youth work as an opportunity for preventive policing. Rather than using Youth Aid officers, many officers preferred to handle youth offending themselves by way of informal resolutions.

123. As with the scope of the small community policing role itself, we do not think there should be fixed rules about the extent to which these officers undertake specialist functions. However, Police should always endeavour to provide officers with specialist support for critical incidents, and should provide more guidance on how best to handle matters like road policing. They should also ensure that officers have the appropriate training and skills for the specialist tasks they do undertake.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The extent to which officers are expected to undertake specialist functions on a routine basis should be included in the agreed scope of duties for each small community officer.

5. To the extent that officers are required to undertake specialist tasks, it should be a pre-requisite that they receive the necessary training to do so.

Police response to this issue

124. Police say the handling of specialist tasks should be managed through clear expectations, good supervision, use of online support, and training. As noted above, the Rural Policing Enhancement Project is working on clarifying the small community officer role. The project has also identified the need for a rural-specific component in Police training to support rural officers in their work and to increase the understanding of policing in rural environments for all officers across the organisation.

3. HOW ARE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST MANAGED?

What constitutes a conflict of interest in a small community?

125. Conflicts of interest are potentially always an acute problem in small communities where everyone knows everyone else. Many of the individual complaints we receive regarding small communities relate to this issue.

126. Police policy requires all officers to be alert to potential conflicts of interest and to declare all *"actual, potential or perceived"* conflicts to a supervisor. Supervisors must then work with the officer to assess the risks involved and find appropriate strategies to manage those risks. In most cases, the solution is to avoid the conflict by the officer:

    a) *"abstaining from involvement in the decisions or actions that could be compromised by their other interests"*; and

    b) *"avoid[ing] activities where they could be seen to be at an advantage because of information or other resources they have access to because of their role with Police."*

127. An *"actual"* conflict of interest arises when an officer acts in the performance of their official duties in a way that benefits themselves or favours one person or group over another. A *"perceived"* conflict of interest is when people believe an officer is acting in this way, whether or not they actually are. In other words, conflicts of interest arise when actions appear to be lacking impartiality and therefore biased.

128. A conflict is much more likely to be perceived in a small community than in other settings and is much more difficult to manage, because of the officer's visibility and the community's awareness of what officers are doing on and off duty. They live in what one officer described as a *"goldfish bowl"*, which requires that everything they do in both their official and private capacity must be seen to be *"squeaky clean"*.

129. The policy makes clear that an officer must alert their supervisor as soon as the potential for a conflict is identified, so there is time to develop appropriate strategies to manage it. If the officer waits for the actual or perceived conflict to materialise, it will often be too late.

130. The potential for a conflict is particularly acute, and perhaps less likely to be recognised and properly addressed, when an officer has grown up, and/or has family connections, in the area. For example, when we questioned an officer about how he would handle a scenario where he was running a road checkpoint and found a family member had an expired warrant of fitness, he said it was *"a tricky one"* and did not seem to know how to answer. He also admitted that he had struggled to recognise conflicts of interest in the past.

131. It is not easy for an officer in this situation to avoid the perception of bias. If they are generally giving out warnings rather than fines for expired warrants, they can either:

a) give their family member a warning like everyone else, leading to the potential for members of the community to accuse them of treating their own family with leniency; or

b) give their family member an infringement notice to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, and thus treat them more harshly than the rest of the community.

132. In either case, the officer's perceived impartiality is jeopardised.

133. The enhanced potential for conflicts of interest in small communities is by no means confined to those with pre-existing roots in the community. They are likely to arise from any relationships the officer, or their family, forms with others:

> *"I think the biggest risk would be when you start building relationships with your community. If you started to become quite close to a certain group of people in the community, that will be perceived negatively by others."*

134. This type of conflict becomes more likely the longer the officer stays in the role. Many different community members gave us examples of officers (past and present) who they believed had been too lenient on people they were close to, had failed to respond appropriately to situations involving their friends, or had taken action because their friends asked them to. Some of these scenarios, real or perceived, included:

a) an officer giving his friend, a former Police officer, a warning for hunting illegally and then refusing to take any further action when he did it again;

b) officers getting too close to *"ratbags"* in the community, for example an officer refusing to deal with a young person who was causing problems because he had gone to school with the officer's children;

c) an officer not dealing with an incident properly because his partner and the complainant's partner did not like each other; and

d) an officer serving a trespass notice on behalf of a friend.

135. Problems can also arise if the officer becomes involved in sports or other activities within the community. Most community members strongly argued that the officer needed to become involved in the community and support local organisations, and that this helped them to fit in. They particularly appreciated the fact that officers in isolated communities were sometimes the primary organiser of Search and Rescue, Marine Radio and the Coastguard. But others recognised the dangers, and spoke of the need to avoid the appearance of favouritism that could arise from personal relationships. They noted that officers can become too close to the people in their group or organisation and let them *"get away with anything"*. One community member referred to a former officer who had caused division in the community by associating himself with particular groups; others avoided those groups because *"the cop was in them"*. Another told us, in relation to an officer in a rugby team: *"Everyone knew that there were two sets of rules – one for the rugby players and one for everyone else."* Some people also objected to officers hunting and fishing in the area they police, as this puts the officer in competition with them.

136. A community may also perceive a conflict of interest when an officer acts in a way that seems to favour one party over the other in a dispute. We heard many stories from community members who believed the local officer *"played favourites"* depending on their knowledge of the people involved, including using warnings and informal resolutions with some people but charging or fining others for the same offence.

137. These perceptions, of course, are not necessarily reality. Sometimes people do not like having the law enforced against them and develop an imagined grievance and sense of unfairness. However, perceptions matter and need to be managed, because they undermine the legitimacy of policing if they gain traction and become widespread.

How do officers manage conflicts of interest in a small community?

138. Most of the officers we spoke to could recognise an obvious conflict of interest. Many chose not to socialise at the local pub, because they thought it would make it more difficult for them to enforce drink driving laws. And, as directed by Police policy, they passed any matters involving their family or close friends to another officer whenever possible because it was obviously inappropriate for them to be involved. This is usually easier in two-person stations, where one officer can simply hand over the incident to the other (unless the two officers are in a relationship).

139. However, almost everyone we interviewed acknowledged that it is difficult for officers in a small community to manage conflicts of interest. Many described the role as a *"balancing act"* between being accepted by the community and keeping a professional distance, especially for the officers who were staying for a long time. The conundrum is simply that, on the one hand officers need to forge relationships to keep locals on side, but on the other hand they need to avoid becoming so embedded in the community that their actions are tainted, or are seen to be tainted, by those relationships. One officer voiced this tension by saying that, while he needed to be part of the community, he always kept in mind that he may have to arrest the people he is mixing with.

140. Ultimately, officers need to demonstrate that they will act impartially and do their job in a fair, transparent and consistent manner. There may be good reasons why an officer wants to treat someone differently for the same offence, but if the community does not understand the context for that decision, they are likely to get the wrong impression and feel they are being picked on by the officer. In some cases, it may be that the community does not know the whole story and gets the wrong impression about how an officer is dealing with someone. An officer in a one-person station told us he was aware the community thought he was treating a particular young woman too leniently, but actually he had charged her with many offences and she had gone to court. However, it was difficult to correct the perceived conflict of interest without breaching her privacy, and he could not hand over the matter as no other officer was available to deal with her.

141. This sort of difficulty unsurprisingly leads to differences in approach to forming relationships or even using services within the local community. In one community, the two officers had different approaches to the issue of whether they should use the mechanic who ran a local garage and was involved in a boundary dispute with a neighbour. One took his car to another garage further away to avoid appearing to take the mechanic's side in the dispute, while the other took his car to the local garage anyway, even though *"everybody says that I'll take sides with him"*. He said he did not do it out of friendship, but because it was cheaper. Nonetheless, he did not appear to recognise that, if people thought he was taking sides, that would become a problem for him. Having said that, it is worth noting that in many small communities, an officer would not have the luxury of choosing to go somewhere else because there is only one garage available. They would therefore be unable to avoid the perceived conflict of interest, even if they wished to.

142. Some officers said they tried to avoid the appearance of conflicts of interest by keeping everyone *"at arm's length"* and not socialising within their area. One officer who had been in the role for a substantial period even told us that he and his wife had been careful not to make any real friends in the community or to socialise on a regular basis, because this inevitably gave rise to conflicts of interest that could not be appropriately managed. Another emphasised the need to wear his uniform and keep it clean and tidy, in order to maintain a professional façade. He said:

> *"We have attended community events and things like that but I am also very mindful of – if we're to receive a private invitation to dinner from an individual… I would start questioning 'Is there a motivation behind that? How will that be perceived by others in the community? Is this person looking to gain favour or will others think that I am providing favour?'. … I think it kind of tends to have me erring on the side of caution and being quite standoffish with the community. Am I doing myself a disservice, I'm not sure yet, but the community, do they feel that I'm too remote? I'm not sure but I'm always trying to be available as the policeman."*

143. Similarly, an officer who was keen hunter told us he had decided early on not to hunt in his own area, because he identified that it was very likely to cause him problems when he was dealing with poachers (in that they would see him as being in competition with them). He also refused a role on the local school's Board of Trustees because:

> *"There was a fraud job that came in with someone investing some money into an overseas account from a person who was on that board at the time, so I had to investigate that. I did that and at the conclusion of that I was asked 'Would you like to be a part of this', and at that time, after dealing with that matter, I thought personally that was inappropriate, let everything go for a while and I'll just keep working with you from afar."*

144. Others, however, found it difficult to understand why it was important to avoid perceived conflicts of interest as well as actual ones. If they believed they had handled an incident objectively and appropriately, they did not see it as their problem when others thought they had favoured one person over the other or treated them too leniently. But these perceptions can harm the officer's reputation, whether or not they are well-founded. They need to be addressed, because ignoring them will allow them to continue to grow. When the community consistently interprets the officer's actions as protecting their friends or *"favoured ones"* at the expense of other people, their opinion of that officer and Police deteriorates rapidly.

145. There were also marked differences in view about the extent to which officers should be involved in, or belong to, community organisations. All, of course, recognised that they sometimes needed to become involved in community events, or attend community meetings, in their capacity as a Police officer and wearing Police uniform. Indeed, in some communities they will be required to play a key role in civil defence emergencies and, in that capacity, to work closely with other government agencies and council officials.

146. However, there was no common approach to private involvement in community organisations in a governance capacity. Many saw it as inappropriate for an officer in a small community to be a member of the local Council, Community Board or school Board of Trustees, because these types of organisations may have issues in which the Police may need to become involved. A Council or Community Board may be making divisive decisions that cause community conflict, or they or their staff may require investigation for criminal offending, such as fraud. A school may similarly have staff or pupils whose actions require criminal investigation. If an officer is closely involved with that process, they may be (or be perceived to be) put under pressure to deal with it in a particular way. By the same token, there is a risk that they will use their position inappropriately to influence the way others deal with it.

147. Others, however, took a different view and saw it as part of their role to become involved in, and sometimes to lead, community organisations and activities (see above, paragraph 78). They argued that:

    a) they had a right in their private capacity to become involved in community affairs or to belong to community groups that fitted their interests;

    b) it was part of the process of becoming embedded in and accepted by the community; and

    c) they often had training and skills to undertake civic functions that would otherwise be inadequately supported.

148. One officer, who was very highly regarded by his supervisor and by everybody in the community we spoke to, was actively involved in a number of different groups – as chair of the school Board

of Trustees, as a member of the Parish Council and as a member of the Health Trust. But he was conscious of the risks of a conflict of interest, and the fact it was a two-person station in his view enabled him to manage the risks. In contrast, another officer who was on a Board of Trustees appeared not to be conscious of any potential for a conflict of interest. He related an incident of threatening behaviour by a student and stated that it was advantageous that he was able to deal with it as both the Police officer *and* the Board of Trustees member.

149. Most officers maintained that they needed to be able to live normal lives and form relationships with other community members, and if they did not do so they would be perceived as not fitting in. One officer told us:

> *"I can still be a big part of the community and police the community but that's just how I am or I feel, yeah. I go into domestics and I see that they don't have any food. I'll go fishing or whatever and I'll take the kids and they can catch it and that doesn't mean to say I'm not going to lock up Mum or Dad in two weeks' time because we gave them some fish, we've still got to do it and there's a respect there as well…."*

150. Another officer said:

> *"It's very important from day one to establish with your community who you are so they understand where your line in the sand is… you are limited in the sense of the people that you do get close to because you've got to have friends outside of the job, otherwise it would be a very lonely place – but also recognising that if there's any indiscretions with those people that it's forwarded to another member and I'm quite strong on the sense that these outstations should be two persons minimum."*

151. We also had feedback from community members that they did not think it was realistic for officers and their families to stay completely aloof and have no friends, as it was better for them to be part of the *"rural network"*. They rightly drew attention to the fact that rural policing could be hard for an officer's family and that, if they were prevented from forming community relationships, recruitment and retention would become an even bigger problem than it already is.

152. We agree. The officers' effectiveness in the job often depends upon strong community relationships and support. However, they need to carefully consider how their involvement in community organisations and particular activities will be perceived by the community, and to limit that involvement if necessary. Clearly, this was an issue that prompted strong and diverse views and varied ways of doing the job. Officers worked out how to manage the issue themselves in light of their own operating philosophy and the nature and expectations of the community.

Does Police policy sufficiently address how to deal with conflicts of interest in small communities?

153. The Police's 'Managing conflicts of interest' policy is generic and is implicitly intended to be applied in the same way by all officers regardless of the area in which they work. But the reality is that its application in a small community environment is difficult, and the considerations are often more nuanced.

154. Officers in many one-person stations simply do not have the luxury of declining to deal with a situation that in an urban area would immediately be seen as giving rise to a conflict of interest. Backup may be some distance away, and the community will require the officer to deal with it. Generally, Police expect that if the officer perceives a conflict of interest, they will raise it with their supervisor, and the supervisor, if he or she agrees, will deal with it themselves or make arrangements for someone else to do so. But this depends upon a recognition of the existence of a conflict and, as noted above, our sense was that, while some officers were conscious of potential conflicts (including perceived conflicts), many officers simply did not have a good grasp of the risks in this area. More significantly, the potential for a perceived conflict is so pervasive that it would be unrealistic to hand over responsibility for every such situation to a supervisor, who will often be situated some distance away.

155. In two-person stations, the generic policy is more applicable. That is because, where a conflict is identified, the officer can decline to deal with the matter and instead hand it over to their colleague (unless they are in a relationship – see paragraphs 241-245 for further discussion on this).

156. Sometimes, of course, there may be a critical incident that requires immediate attention and the second officer is not available. In that event, as in larger stations, the officer with the conflict can deal with the matter, and declare the conflict to a colleague who will then take over the file at the earliest opportunity.

157. But even then, the close-knit nature of a small community, and the strong working relationship between the two officers, may mean that this does not sufficiently address the perception of a conflict. We were presented with a number of examples, whether real or imagined, where both officers were alleged to have acted in a biased way because of the relationships of one of them.

What should Police do to better equip officers to manage conflicts of interest in small communities?

158. In one community where conflict of interest issues arose some years ago, we were told that an officer investigating those issues recommended developing what was described as a *"conflict of interest matrix"*, intended as a guide to decision-making by the officers. However, the officers themselves knew nothing of that recommendation, and it seems to have never been acted on.

159. Many of the officers we spoke to during this project said they wanted clearer guidelines on how to deal with conflicts of interest in the context of a small community, and greater support from their supervisors in this respect. They also identified this as an area in which they needed special training before starting the role. Some even suggested that it would be helpful to have a phone number they could call for advice.

160. In our view, therefore, Police need to add specific guidelines on the management of conflicts of interest in small communities to the existing policy. This should include guidance by way of a range of examples and associated procedures. We accept that some flexibility is required to cater for the varying nature and expectations of the communities themselves. But the variability in both the recognition of conflicts, and how they should be handled, cannot be attributed to that need for flexibility. The current *laissez-faire* approach to this issue exposes Police to the risk

that people see policing as unfair, which then has significant implications for trust and confidence in policing.

161. The new guidelines should address the extent to which officers should be appointed to positions in communities where:

a) they have family connections; and

b) the two officers in a two-person station are a couple (see paragraphs 241-245 for further discussion).

162. In addition, because the approach to and resolution of potential conflicts of interest is often a matter of judgement, there would be benefit in developing a virtual network of all officers in such stations, so that there is mutual support and an avenue for consulting peers when the need arises (see further discussion at paragraphs 320-323 and Recommendation 33).

163. As for membership of local authorities and boards, Police policy already requires officers who intend to offer themselves as candidates for local authorities to inform their district commander at the earliest opportunity. Among other things, they must discuss the potential for conflicts of interest if the officer is successful. Policy also provides that officers in their role as an elected member of a local authority should not become involved in, or vote on, any issues that concern any policing matters. Officers seeking election to school boards or other community boards must also apply for approval from their manager.

164. We think this policy provides a suitable framework for addressing conflicts of interest. However, this too is an area where officers would benefit from more guidance on the extent to which it is appropriate for them to undertake such roles. Supervisors in particular should be required to ensure that they actively and continually manage whether officers are in any such roles, and if so the steps they need to take to deal with the inevitable conflicts of interest that will arise.

Summary of Issue 3 – How are conflicts of interest managed?

165. Many complaints we receive about policing in small communities relate to conflicts of interest, particularly when members of a community believe their officer favours some people more than others. Officers in small communities are less able to avoid such perceived conflicts, because often there is no one else to hand the matter over to.

166. We found that officers were generally able to recognise obvious conflicts of interest, but many struggled to grasp the problem with more complex situations and did not know how to manage them. There were inconsistent approaches to this issue, sometimes even between two officers in the same community.

167. Police therefore need to include in their 'Managing conflicts of interest' policy more comprehensive guidelines on the management and supervision of conflicts of interest in small communities. The new guidelines should address the extent to which officers should be appointed to positions in communities where they have family connections or the two officers in a two-person station are a couple.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Police should include a new section in the existing 'Managing conflicts of interest' policy about how conflicts of interest in small communities should be managed and supervised.

7. The policy should: a) include criteria for developing conflict of interest management plans; b) be covered in the induction and training of new small community officers; and c) be included in the desk file for small community roles.

8. It should also include guidance on when officers should be members of community organisations (as distinct from attending in uniform in their official capacity). Supervisors should consent to officers being members of community organisations (such as Boards of Trustees) only after careful consideration of conflict of interest issues and agreement with the officer as to how they are to be handled.

Police response to this issue

168. Police say they intend to enhance their conflict of interest training with more rural-specific content.

4. IS THERE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR SMALL COMMUNITY OFFICERS' SAFETY AND WELLBEING?

Do officers have enough access to backup?

169. Because officers are generally on duty alone (even in a two-person station), they frequently attend or are dispatched to jobs alone. Where the matter is a routine inquiry, this does not pose any particular concern. Indeed, single-officer inquiries are common in cities and towns as well. However, when the matter concerns a high-priority call for assistance, officer safety becomes an issue. Officers pointed out that this type of call in a city is always attended by two or more officers:

> *"You get sent to those by yourself, whereas in town you'd be sent as a two-up [incident response car] and maybe the sergeant would tag along and maybe someone else would come along, whereas out here you get sent by yourself and it seems to be accepted for some reason, 'Oh they can go and deal with it' and that sometimes is a bit of a worry for me."*

170. Officer safety was therefore a concern, if not a preoccupation, for many officers. One officer explained what it was like for him to attend incidents alone:

> *"You go out to a farmer or a rural area and you're on your own and that guy could flip and nobody knows where you are other than Comms and there's no backup. So, you know, no immediate backup but like half an hour later well I could be dead by then…. The way society is now you don't know who's on that drug or those drugs…. Whereas before I could tell you half the town that was on drugs, now it's probably three-quarters of the town are on some sort of drug. The rural area is the worst area because we don't know who's living out there anymore. You know you've got gang members living all over the place and some of them*

are pretty bloody bad and you go to a job and you don't know who's there and something happens there's no comeback. You know it's all right if you have an idea that this is what you're going to, but a lot of people you don't know. You do a thorough check on the computer and everything, but it doesn't tell you what their personality is like when you get there."

171. Some community members also told us that people became reluctant to call Police to an incident if they did not think their officer could handle it alone, out of concern for their safety.

172. If a small community officer does decide they need backup before they can attend an incident, that support is sometimes very far away, especially for those on remote island communities. Even on the mainland, the nearest town can be over an hour of urgent duty driving away. And if there are staff shortages in the town (as there regularly are), officers in small communities know they are unlikely to receive any help unless something *"fairly serious"* happens. One officer reported that there were occasions when he was going to a remote area and asked for another car to come out and assist, but the sergeant in town told him they could not spare anyone. That made him a little bit *"on edge"* and *"nervous"*, especially when he was going to a black spot area with no radio or cellphone coverage or any area with significant gang activity.

173. Black spots are a common issue in small communities, and they prevent officer safety alarms (which track the officer's location) from working as well as phone tracking applications. Officers are supposed to notify their Communications Centre before entering such areas, so they can plan to re-establish contact with them or look for them if they go missing. However, it was not clear that all officers were doing this regularly.

174. In one area we visited, Police had just approved the use of a special forestry radio (paid for and provided by the forestry company) in the local officer's Police car to help them communicate during serious incidents. Police are currently exploring a number of other technological initiatives, including the use of satellite phones. We think it is critical that this work be concluded and a technological solution found as soon as possible.

175. In the meantime, due to these challenges, it is crucial for small community officers to have exceptional risk assessment and decision-making skills (see paragraphs 228-236 for further discussion on the skills required for the role). One officer told us:

"If a job comes in over the radio, or I get a job come through here, I'll analyse it… what's the risk, how many people, those were all the sorts of things, what sort of job, is it a hunting job, do they have firearms, is it a domestic, how many people are likely to be at the address, is he connected to the gang, am I going to find gang members there, I'll do a quick assessment…."

176. It is also vital that an officer has a proper induction, is introduced to key members of the community and is warned about the high-risk people and areas (see paragraphs 261-271 for further discussion on induction processes). Officers who had been in the role for longer were more confident in attending incidents because they usually knew the people involved and therefore were able to assess the risk to their safety:

"I'm getting to the stage where I kind of know who the families are and I am comfortable going to those jobs because I do know them and I know that they know who I am. It's almost a job that the longer you're in it gets easier. So when I first came here I was like 'I don't know who they are that live just down there', whereas now I'm slowly getting to know them and they're getting to know me, whereas in town they'd just deal with a different person and you're just a blue uniform turning up whereas out here they actually will answer by name. They might ring up on the phone and ask for me or [the other officer]."

177. This was even more likely to be the case if the officer had been raised in the area and had longstanding relationships and the respect of those who he or she was called to deal with.

178. Some officers said they had an arrangement with other nearby small community officers to support each other, by teaming up if they were going to an unknown address or worried about safety. This reportedly worked well as they were all fairly experienced officers.

179. A volunteer rural constabulary (akin to the voluntary rural fire service) was being mooted by the then government at the time we began our fieldwork, and we therefore asked all officers and community interviewees for their views about whether this would assist in providing officers with better backup and a more timely response to calls for service. There was widespread opposition and very little support. Most thought that their very limited powers and training would make it very difficult to determine what task they would be able to do; safety issues would be immense; the logistics of organising and supervising them would be challenging; and conflicts of interest, intimidation and potential vigilantism would be significant problems. We agree that there would be major challenges and risks in introducing a volunteer rural constabulary, and that there are more effective ways of addressing the issues that gave rise to the suggestion.

180. For example, most officers said they could already get emergency backup from people in their own community, such as the Rural Fire Service or Māori wardens. The Rural Fire Service members we spoke to indicated that they often also saw themselves as having such a backup role, and gave examples of when they had been called upon to assist. This even extended to assisting the officers to eject trouble-makers from a club during the evening.

How often do small community officers need to carry firearms?

181. Most officers we spoke to were reluctant to wear firearms to incidents, even when they were on their own and did not know the precise degree of risk. Although some acknowledged that they could often justify wearing one, they tended to think that the disadvantages of doing so outweighed any benefits, particularly when they knew the people they were going to be dealing with. This was for three reasons:

a) they believed their prior relationship with people meant that the chance they would pose a serious risk to their safety was much lower than it would be in the city, because they could more easily begin a dialogue with them and *"talk them down"*;

b) the carriage of firearms might actually make that dialogue more difficult by potentially changing the nature of the interaction they had with the person and increasing rather than reducing the degree of risk; and

c) if they did end up chasing someone or having some sort of a fight or a scuffle, the person might get the firearm off them and pose a greater threat.

182. A small minority, however, took a different view. One officer in a two-person station, for example, said he always armed himself if he was going to a job alone at night or on a late shift, because backup could be at least 45 minutes away (although he qualified that by saying he would not arm himself for a routine traffic matter). His colleague, in contrast, said he hardly ever did so.

183. Some officers in areas where illegal hunting was common said they were more inclined to arm themselves due to the risk they would encounter people with guns. One officer said:

> *"The instances of me notifying Comms that I'm armed is higher here than in town. Responding to unlawful hunting incidents here is a lot higher than in town, I'm attending on my own. They're armed, I'm going to be. So that's what happens. Fortunately they give us those tools. They also allow me to make the assessment myself."*

Are small community officers living in Police houses more at risk?

184. In some small communities, the officer lives in a house that is either attached to or right next to the Police station (see further discussion of this at paragraphs 207-211). This often caused either the officer or his family to feel somewhat vulnerable.

185. For example, in one remote area, the officer expressed concerns about having a cellblock attached to the house where his young child lived. He described incidents where his child had encountered someone outside the house who was waiting for a ride home after being detained overnight, and where he had unexpected visitors walking through his backyard to visit someone who was being kept in the cell for a few days.

186. He was not the only officer to have this problem. An officer in another community had moved his family out of the Police house after repeated incidents:

> *"We started having some real big problems with my kids growing up answering the door to people, traffic guys bringing back drink-drivers and kicking the walls and yelling and screaming, waking the kids up and the straw that broke the camel's back for me was there's a well-known paedophile, he's deceased now, I came home and he was in the yard with my kids and my wife didn't know he was there. I didn't know how long he'd been there for and I just thought I can't keep doing this like this, there needs to be some boundaries."*

187. His family now lived in a nearby town, and he only stayed in the Police house every other week when he was on call for the area. He said Police did not offer any support for his wife on this issue.

Do small community officers have enough access to wellbeing support?

188. Many officers spoke of the strains of the role, which included:

a) feeling like they were on call 24/7;

b) constantly being under a spotlight in the community;

c) intrusion on their family life;

d) threats to them and their family; and

e) children being bullied at school due to their parent's job.

189. We got the impression that access to wellbeing support and advice from Police was more difficult for officers in small communities. We think Police should be more proactive in this area, and require regular welfare checks to ensure the officers' and their families' needs are met. These checks would not necessarily have to be in person. Our interviews took place before the Covid pandemic, when ways of working remotely were less common. But use of video conferencing technology has become a lot more widespread, and could help Police access officers in more isolated communities more easily (provided the internet connection is strong enough – see paragraph 208).

Summary of Issue 4 – Is there sufficient support for small community officers' safety and wellbeing?

190. Safety was a concern for many of the small community officers we spoke to, because they are routinely required to attend incidents alone and in remote locations. Most had strategies for accessing support from other rural officers nearby, or from within the community when necessary.

191. Safety concerns are exacerbated by the presence of black spots which prevent officers from contacting their Communications Centre in the event of an emergency and exposes them to undue risk.

192. Many officers preferred not to wear firearms, but some were more inclined to do so because they knew backup was far away. A small number of officers had problems with living in Police houses, because they feared for the safety of their families after repeated incidents.

193. This issue highlights the need for small community officers to have the right personality, have strong communication and risk assessment skills, and be properly inducted into the community so they know the people they are dealing with. However, we also think Police should provide more proactive welfare support to officers and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Police should find a technological solution as soon as possible to enable officers (and particularly sole officers) to contact their Communications Centre from a black spot in the event of an emergency.

10. Police should provide regular welfare support to small community officers and their families.

Police response to this issue

194. The Police Public Safety Network Programme is part of a government initiative, Next Generation Critical Communications (NGCC, Poutama Whai Tikanga Pāpāho). Several trials are under underway in rural locations, and the Rural Policing Enhancement Project has identified supporting functions for Communications Centres and District Command Centres, including addressing communication black spots.

195. Police are also working to identify opportunities to enhance welfare support for officers in rural/remote areas.

5. ARE SMALL COMMUNITY STATIONS ADEQUATELY RESOURCED?

Are there enough officers in each small community?

196. The small communities we visited were a mix of one-person and two-person stations, as well as one with one full-time officer and one part-time officer (a '1.6' person station).

197. Two-person stations arranged their roster so they alternated the weeks they were on call (that is, available to be dispatched at any time). The officers called the week they were on call their 'heavy week', where they worked every day, followed by their 'light week', where they were not on call and only worked Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Because the officers quite often took the opportunity to have a whole week off (by taking leave on the three days they were supposed to work on their 'light' week), it was often the case that only one officer was working each week and there was no overlap between them.

198. Some officers said that, while their supervisors were generally happy with this arrangement, they also sometimes accused the officers of abusing the roster and running a two-person station as a one-person station. One of the officers told us the community sometimes joked with them when they saw both officers together (*"they're like, 'Ooh we've got two policemen', you know like joking, you know just having a little bit of banter with us"*), but they were generally happier to have two officers rather than just one.

199. One area we visited had recently increased from a one-person to a two-person station. The officer who had been in the sole position told us:

> *"I was doing 80, 90 hour weeks. I was getting, I don't know how many, like I'd be getting 30 odd callouts in a week, some real serious arrests. I think at that stage they had four constables and a sergeant and a non-sworn in [a nearby town] and for that first year I had more arrests, more callouts and more offences recorded [here] than they did up there."*

200. He said he did not think he could have stayed in the role if Police had not added the second officer. The crime rate had since dropped significantly, the job was a lot more manageable and they now had a lot more time available for more community and preventive work. However, he

was still frustrated that he did not receive more support from the nearest town for time-consuming jobs like transporting detainees.

201. The provision of support and back-up is a particular problem in a remote one-person station. For example, in two of the isolated areas we visited face-to-face supervision was sporadic (see paragraph 330), and, if the officer was off-duty or on leave and there was no reliever, attendance in an emergency or following an urgent call for service was an hour and a half drive away.

202. It is, of course, inevitable that the 24/7 nature of the job and the constant scrutiny to which officers are subjected may give rise to the potential for feelings of over-work and burn-out, especially in one-person stations. Indeed, one officer thought that all small community stations should be at least two-person, because it resulted in better support for the officers and better decision making when they could *"bounce ideas off each other".* It also meant that if community members had an issue or a conflict with one of the officers, they could go to the other one for help.

203. However, we do not think that this is a realistic solution. Some rural communities simply do not have the population to warrant two-person stations, but cannot be expected to rely upon policing support from the nearest town because of geographical distance; Haast is a case in point.

204. Nor are we in a position to determine whether overall resourcing levels are appropriate. Clearly some stations were much busier than others in terms of reported offences and recorded occurrences, but these are not the only considerations in determining the required level of resource.

205. In the Authority's view, the real issue is the absence of a consistent resource allocation model. Currently, each Police district decides how best to allocate their resources, and how many officers each station should have, roughly on the basis of a combination of population, recorded offences and occurrences, and geographical distances. However, the process by which this is done, and the way in which various criteria are weighted and applied, are poorly articulated and sometimes unclear and inconsistent.

206. We do not underestimate the challenges in developing a model that would cater for all circumstances. The needs of communities vary widely, and there is no *"one size fits all"*. For example, some isolated island communities may need a policing presence despite low demands for service. Whatever the model, some individual judgment needs to be applied to the decision-making. However, a nationally consistent resource allocation model, even simply as a starting point or guide, would be better than nothing.

Are the Police stations properly resourced and in good condition?

207. Several areas raised issues about having inadequate resources to maintain their buildings. A number of Police stations and Police houses were clearly substandard. In one station, for example, there was no counter area or interviewing space, and officers had to meet with people in the room where they worked. Given that they had no cabinets or other storage facilities for

files, members of the public could readily see personal information relating to others. There were also cracks in the roof, peeling wallpaper, very worn carpet and overgrown grounds. One of the officers also reported that when there was a leak in the toilet, it was not properly repaired for cost reasons and two years later the floor caved in, requiring a vastly more expensive repair. The two officers also reported that they were required to share one computer.

208. In the more remote communities, the quality of the internet connection and technology available at the Police station was a major issue. One officer rated it as 2/10, and said they wasted a lot of time trying to log on to their system, trying to save documents and dealing with system crashes. Police were providing technology support and trying to fix the problems, but they had not made much progress over the 10 months the officer had been there. This caused a huge amount of frustration.

209. As a consequence of these sorts of technology limitations, officers were sometimes required to work without access to the tools that they would otherwise have been required to apply. For example, some officers did not have access to, and did not know how to use, the Electronic Custody Module, the mandatory online tool for receiving and assessing the risk of detainees in Police custody. This is likely to be an increasing problem as more and more front line policing is reliant upon *"real time"* information through officers' mobile devices.

210. We appreciate that capital expenditure is limited and subject to prioritisation, and we are not in a position to assess whether any of the substandard stations or houses we observed should have received higher priority than other capital projects that had received funding.

211. However, we think it is vital to ensure that these facilities are included in all district plans for maintenance and upgrading, and are appropriately prioritised. Our impression is that this does not always occur. The result, of course, is likely to be that the poor state of the facilities may exacerbate difficulties in recruitment and retention.

Are the officers adequately equipped?

212. In many of the small communities we visited, officers sometimes needed to travel through rough terrain to make inquiries or respond to incidents, for example the theft of farming and forestry equipment. While some had four-wheel-drive vehicles (4WDs), others had to make do with two-wheel drives, which greatly hindered their ability to provide assistance. It was evident that Police were not sufficiently taking into account the terrain and working needs of individual officers in some of their resourcing decisions, although we understand that they are now actively considering this.

213. In one very remote community, they were not equipped with any speed detection equipment when we visited. However, Police were due to provide it soon.

Are sufficient relievers available?

214. All areas had processes for providing relievers to small stations to cater for leave or illness, and to cover increased demand for services in holiday areas. In some cases, the increase in staffing over holiday periods was substantial.

215. Because of the relative frequency with which relievers were used, some officers used the Police database (National Intelligence Application or 'NIA') to record comprehensive accounts of events and interactions. This was so:

> *"… if relievers go over there and someone asks them a question about something, they can see what's been done, who's involved, and everything like that…. I don't want the guys getting caught out when the relievers come over, they don't know the background and you can get seriously caught out in a little place like this where if you don't know what the connections are."*

216. Some officers emphasised the importance of giving relievers a good briefing to ensure continuity and that they acted in line with the local policing priorities. However, this did not always happen and many community members reported that relievers *"come in, shake things up, and then walk away"*. Some also reported that relievers get too complacent at times, and are unable to deal with incidents effectively. One officer said it could be good to have a *"fresh face"* as a reliever in a community, because they feel more comfortable enforcing traffic laws without fear of repercussions from the community. He noted that some people may also be more prepared to disclose sensitive information about offending or harm done to them to an officer they did not personally know.

217. Notwithstanding the general expectation that relievers were used as cover, officers in two-person stations frequently complained that, unless leave was for a protracted period, one was left to cope on their own when the other was away. No relief was available or provided.

218. Supervisors told us that it was costly to house and pay relievers, and they often simply did not have enough staff to provide them. They did not provide a reliever unless the officer was going to be away for at least two weeks. In the more remote areas, officers had to book leave at least six months in advance due to the difficulties of providing cover for them.

219. One officer in a two-person station reported that the other officer had been gone for the last six months, but Police had not yet replaced him or put in a reliever to cover for his absence. Highway staff were providing cover during the week that the remaining officer was not on call, but they only responded to high-priority events. Lower-level matters had to wait until the local officer was on duty, and he was now having to deal with all of it.

220. One two-person station close to a city also reported that relievers had become less available, even though they were needed to cover a substantial increase in the resident population and day visitors in a particular holiday area over summer. It was also difficult when the two officers in a station were a couple, because they would probably want to take leave at the same time (see paragraphs 241-245 below for more on this).

221. These difficulties deterred some officers from taking leave when they needed it, either because they did not want to burden their fellow officer or because they wanted to avoid the backlog taking leave creates. One officer noted that when no relievers were provided, policing went from being prevention-based to being *"purely reactive"*:

> *"If my leave builds up and I take four weeks off, I come back with four weeks' worth of work that I've got to make up. So I've got to sit there and complete all that work, whereas if there was a reliever there and they could be ticking over things like firearms licences, ticking over enquiry files, taking care of exhibits and visiting, and this is where Police fall over….*
>
> *You've got the repercussion of that for the next two or three weeks. That might include working a few extra hours just to show the community that you're out there, which means a lot to them, it builds up that sense of trust, I guess, you know, yeah cool he's out there, he's looking after us, but ultimately it's just to show the community that you are back there and Police are here and stem that flow of crime, whereas if you were away and they did have a good relieving plan in place, you wouldn't have to do that."*

222. To the extent that relievers were unavailable, this also contributed to the difficulties officers confronted in accessing training courses, or in obtaining short-term secondments to other acting positions (such as acting sergeant positions) for career development purposes. Most advised us that when in small community roles, formal career development went *"on hold"*.

223. When Police did provide relievers, officers and supervisors generally preferred using people who had been to the community before or had received a proper on-site induction. This was due to the complexities of the job, and the time it takes for new officers to familiarise themselves with the role. One officer explained:

> *"On one occasion they actually sent some poor guy out here, and we have a half-hour turnover because he arrives on one flight we leave on the next, so there's a half hour at the airport. You're trying to tell the guy: 'Oh, man this is how the generator works, and this is where the radios change over, and this is who you go to if you're having problems.' There's just too much stuff there, so we've tried to have a base of relievers that come out on a regular basis, (a) we have to like them, (b) they have like it here, (c) the island has to like them because otherwise they're just not effective. And we try and get them and then we try and train them in all the bits and pieces that go with the job."*

Summary of Issue 5 – Are small community stations adequately resourced?

224. Some of the officers we spoke to were concerned about workload and burnout, and the lack of adequate support, especially in one-person stations. However, we are not in a position to determine whether overall resourcing levels are appropriate. Clearly some stations were much busier than others in terms of reported offences and recorded occurrences, but these are not the only considerations in determining the required level of resource.

225. In the Authority's view, there is a need for national resourcing model, even simply as a starting point or guide, to ensure each small community has a sufficient number of officers and relievers. Consideration should also be given to the development of an annual relief plan for each station.

226. It is also vital that Police stations and houses are included in all long-term district plans for maintenance and upgrading, and are appropriately prioritised, and that officers are supplied with the equipment and technological support required for the job. This is not always occurring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. There should be a national resourcing model to support decision-making about whether a station is required for a particular catchment and to determine adequate levels of resource for a station when it is established.
12. The district deployment model should also provide for additional relievers to cover leave and periods of increased demand such as holiday periods, and possibly an annual relief plan for each station.
13. Police should explore the possibility of building more permanent relieving capacity for small community roles.
14. The physical state of all small Police stations and houses should be included in all long-term district plans for maintenance and upgrading, so that a properly prioritised upgrading schedule can be developed.
15. Districts should review all station equipment to ensure that officers are supplied with the equipment and technological support required for the job (see also Recommendation 9).

Police response to this issue

227. Police say the Rural Policing Enhancement Project will make recommendations on resource allocation and deployment specific to rural policing. The project is also working on a rural relief policy.

6. ARE THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESSES FOR SMALL COMMUNITY OFFICERS SUITABLE?

What skills and qualities do small community officers need?

228. Small community officers are constable level positions, supervised by a sergeant in a larger nearby town or city.

229. We asked the communities we visited about what qualities they expect to see in their local officer. Some of the responses included:

a) *"It takes a special person to be a good country cop."*

b) They need to be professional but approachable, *"firm but fair"*, and *"pretty tactful"*.

c) A good constable needs to understand the local issues, but apply the national law.

d) They should have a passion for de-escalating and resolving conflicts.

e) Good communication is key, even if it is something the person does not want to hear.

f) They should be non-judgmental and empathetic, and give people a chance to comply with the law.

g) They should treat everyone fairly, and not pick on certain people.

h) It helps them to fit in if they are interested in the same activities as the community, like rugby, fishing and hunting.

i) They need to earn the trust and respect of the community, and make them feel safe. To do that, they need to be able to build relationships with a wide variety of people.

j) They should be sensitive and responsive to the concerns of all cultures, and be willing to learn.

k) A good cop is *"part of the solution"*, willing to work with the community and be proactive rather than reactive.

l) They need to *"see beyond the blue machine"*.

230. Experience was also often seen as a key factor. One officer told us a small community officer should have at least five years' policing experience or more before starting the role. Some community members also valued *"real world"* experience in an officer, and believed it helped if they had done rural jobs like shearing.

231. A few community members thought that officers viewed the small community officer role as a stepping stone to further their careers. They were wary of this, and preferred to have an officer who cared about them and were personally invested in the community, rather than *"city cops who are just building their CVs"*.

232. Many believed that officers should have experience living and/or relieving in a small community before applying for a permanent or long term position. One officer told us:

> *"Some cops just wouldn't suit this side of policing. You get cops come through here and they whack everyone with a big stick basically and it doesn't go down too well and then they'll take off to town and leave the community quite upset. There's a real balance you've got to find really."*

233. This does not necessarily mean that the officer needs to have significant experience either in the Police or elsewhere. We were told of junior and relatively inexperienced officers who had performed superbly in a small community. But it does mean that those appointed to small community roles need to have the right personality for the job, as well as the necessary technical skills and experience. This includes an understanding of small community dynamics; self-reliance and a tolerance of isolation; good problem-solving and negotiating skills; skills in setting priorities and managing time; and qualities of empathy and 'EQ' (emotional intelligence).

234. Most supervisors were fully aware of at least some of these requirements, and tried to identify candidates who were going to be the right fit for the job. However, that was not done systematically – for example, by way of psychometric testing. Instead, it tended to rely on the impressionistic assessment of the supervisor and the appointment panel. Moreover, because of recruitment difficulties for some positions, those responsible for appointments did not always have the luxury of looking for *"fit"*: they considered themselves fortunate to have any choice of candidate at all.

235. In the Authority's view, more needs to be done to explore the psychological profile of candidates, because personality flaws can be readily, rapidly and disastrously exposed in the 'fish-bowl' environment of small communities. We also agree that it is extremely valuable for candidates to have had experience relieving in small communities, and think Police should engage in better succession planning by identifying the officers who may be suitable for and interested in these roles and consistently offering them that experience. District Development Boards[7] should play a key role here. This would help Police to avoid the situation they often find themselves in, where a long-serving officer leaves and nobody qualified and willing to replace them is immediately available. It would also help ease the handover and induction process if the officer is already familiar with the community, and vice versa (see paragraphs 261-271 below).

236. It is equally important that officers understand the characteristics and demands of the community when considering whether they are suitable for a position in that community. We understand that the Police Media Team have begun to produce promotional videos as part of the process of advertising positions in provincial and rural areas. We applaud this development and emphasise the importance of ensuring that the videos provide not only an account of the attractions of the job and the accompanying lifestyle, but also its demands and pressures.

Should officers with family connections to the community/two officers who are in a relationship be appointed?

237. We found there were mixed views about whether a person who had grown up in a small community should be allowed to become the Police officer in that same community. Some saw it as a real advantage: officers are more likely to fit in; they are likely to have a sense of commitment to the community and be accepted; and their longstanding relationships tend to produce empathy with and respect from the community. Extended whānau connections may also facilitate the formation of a more effective partnership with local iwi. One officer who was in this position said he believed it made his job easier, as it helped *"break down barriers"* when people already knew him or his family. Some also noted that they were able to go to jobs on their own that others would find too risky, because they had a relationship with, and the respect of, the person they were dealing with.

238. However, as we discussed earlier, this can cause difficulties in respect of real or perceived conflicts of interest due to friendship and family ties (see paragraphs 130-134 above). The officer's familiarity with the community and the people in it can also lead to a *laissez-faire*

[7] District Development Boards have been established to co-ordinate decision-making at the district level about the career development of individual officers, and the training opportunities that should be available to them.

attitude, complacency or even implicit collusion with the community. For example, in one two-person station we were told that, while one officer strictly enforced driving with excess blood/breath alcohol, the other (who had been the officer in the area for some time and had been raised there) simply gave people a warning and told them he would be keeping an eye on them.

239. The tension between these competing concerns was summarised by one officer in the following terms:

> *"I don't think it's fair to judge everybody in the same basket… there are special individuals that can deal with this better than others perhaps…. I definitely think it is something that can benefit a community because you know everybody and you can ring the right people and defuse situations really, really fast, but in the same breath you can also be seen to be complacent or selective with previous relationships that you've built. So I guess there's a balance."*

240. Some who thought they had been on the wrong side of favouritism and bias argued that officers should never be appointed to rural posts in an area where they were brought up. It is fair to say, however, that most community members thought the issues can be managed as long as the officer is properly supervised and receives regular professional development, and that the benefits of local knowledge outweigh the potential for conflicts of interest.

241. Similar issues arise in respect of appointing two officers who are in a relationship to a two-person station. When the local officers are a couple, a community member who has a problem with one of them is likely to have a problem with both of them. Conflicts of interest (whether perceived, potential or real) naturally extend to both people in a relationship. That community member is then left with no local officer to go to.

242. A few people we spoke to noted that some couples in the past had arrived with marital problems, which were only exaggerated due to the demands of the job and having to spend so much time together. It could also be more difficult to get full relief cover for the community if the two officers want to take leave at the same time.

243. However, members of one community told us it was good for their officers to be a couple, because that meant they could support each other. The officers themselves also said it was good from a welfare perspective to be able to freely discuss their work with each other, as there was no real support network otherwise.

244. These roles are sometimes quite remote and difficult to fill. They may be more attractive to a couple, or to someone who has family in the area.

245. We think it would therefore be counter-productive to have a blanket policy preventing officers from being appointed to an area in which they have family connections, or preventing officers in a couple from being appointed to a two-person station. However, if they are, particular care needs to be taken to ensure there is appropriate and detailed training, and the adoption of detailed and agreed processes for ensuring that potential conflicts of interest and other problems are avoided.

246. In respect of officers with family connections to the community, that is more easily managed in a two-person station than a one-person station. Appointments of officers to one-person stations where they have family connections are much more problematic. We accept that officers sometimes want to return to their roots and *"give back"* to their own community, and that it would be counter-productive to have a blanket prohibition on their ability to do so. However, if such an appointment is being contemplated, careful consideration of all potential difficulties and whether they can be appropriately managed is required. If such an appointment is made, the written plan as to how potential conflicts of interest will be handled needs to be supplemented by appropriate and detailed training, and by the development of much more detailed and agreed written processes for ensuring that potential conflicts of interest and other problems are avoided.

What is the interview process for small community roles?

247. The composition of appointment panels varied. In many areas, Police had placed a community representative on the interview panel. Both community members and officers were generally supportive of this and thought it worked well, while acknowledging the need to be careful about choosing the right person to be the representative (especially when there were different factions within the community). One officer told us they appreciated having a community representative on the panel because it helped to combat any predetermination by Police:

> *"I think it is a good thing personally and also it takes away just a little bit perhaps of the bias that goes on in Police interviews, because we all know that they usually have a first and second preference so it's nice knowing that there's a person at the table that doesn't have any of those preconceived ideas that can put their two cents in."*

248. We were also told that having community representation on the panel helps to ensure the interviews are more tailored to considering the demands of that particular community and whether the candidate would be a good fit. One community representative we interviewed said that, in his experience, the Police managers on the panel were more focused on a *"tick box"* process; they had a very structured approach but he asked questions outside of that format.[8]

249. We also heard from iwi that they saw it as a corollary of effective partnership that they be involved in, or at least consulted on, appointments (see paragraph 82). We agree, and think that community representation should include iwi whenever practicable and relevant.

250. When questioned about whether the other officer in the role in a two-person station should be on the interview panel for incoming officers, some said this would be inappropriate. This was because the current officer would likely prefer people who operated in the same way as them, whereas the community may need or want a fresh approach. We agree that this may sometimes be the case.

[8] We note that this perspective on Police interviews may now be outdated because of changes being made to the appointments process under the Talent Pathways Project.

251. However, one officer in a two-person station explained that it is good to at least have some input into the selection, because *"It would be very difficult if you worked in a place that you didn't get on with the other member."* He said his input had been that he recommended the community representative on the interview panel, and trusted them to ensure the new person was right for the role.

252. We agree that input from the incumbent officer is desirable and that, where appropriate, they should be on the panel, particularly if they are going to be continuing in the role and thus be the appointee's colleague. There may occasionally be personal information about a future peer and colleague (such as their disciplinary record) to which they should not have access, but this will be the exception and is not good reason for generally excluding them from membership of the panel.

Should the selected candidates visit, and otherwise receive a detailed briefing about, the community before accepting the role?

253. There was considerable variability in practice about the extent to which officers and their families were introduced to the community before they took up the role.

254. In one community we visited, where an officer had recently been appointed to the sole officer position, this had apparently been done very well: before the officer accepted the appointment, his spouse had been brought to the area at Police expense, met the supervisor and members of the community, and been shown the environment and Police house.

255. In contrast, in another community where a husband and wife were selected to be the officers at a station with 1.6 positions, Police only paid for the husband (who was taking up the full-time role) to visit the community beforehand, and the wife was left out of that process.

256. In the Authority's view, Police should give all applicants selected for the role, and their immediate family, the opportunity to visit the community before accepting the position. Police should also develop information packages that inform officers and their spouse/partner of the nature of policing and living in that rural community and the associated risks. It is crucial that the applicants understand exactly what they are signing up for, especially in the more remote areas, because if they and/or their family are not happy they are unlikely to stay in the role for long.

Summary of Issue 6 – Are the recruitment and selection processes for small community officers suitable?

257. Community members had high expectations of their local officers. We found that, as well as a good amount of policing and life experience, it was most important for candidates for small community policing roles to have the right personality for the job.

258. We therefore think Police should look at reviewing the selection criteria for these roles. They also need to give officers who are interested in these roles regular opportunities to relieve in small communities, so they can find out if they are suited to it and will thrive in that

environment. Overall, Police need to engage in better succession planning so they can fill rural positions with suitable officers more quickly.

259. We support the inclusion of community representatives in selection panels, and believe this should be standard practice across the country. Police also need to involve the preferred candidate's partner and family in the process, organise for them to visit the community, and provide them with detailed information about what the role and the community are like. Then they will know what to expect and can decide whether the job will work for the family as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Police should plan for future appointments in small community roles (including but not limited to selecting relievers who might be interested in that sort of role).

17. Wherever practicable and relevant, the interview panel should include appropriate community representation (including iwi representation), although the ultimate decision should still rest with Police.

18. The incumbent of the other position in a two-person station should be involved in the process and able to give prior input into the selection.

19. Criteria for selection should be developed in each case, including an assessment of *"fit"* with the community and any potential issues in dealing with conflicts of interest.

20. Officers with family connections to the community should not be precluded from being appointed to one-person stations. However, an appointment is unlikely to be appropriate if the family have a significant presence and influence in the community. If they are appointed, particular care needs to be taken to ensure there is appropriate and detailed training, and the adoption of detailed and agreed processes for ensuring that potential conflicts of interest and other problems are avoided. In the case of a one-person station, these written processes should generally be much more detailed.

21. There should be no prohibition on two officers in a marriage or partnership being appointed to a two-person station. However, if this occurs, there should be a plan for managing conflicts when they arise and an alternative avenue for community members to make a complaint about one of the officers.

22. As part of the assessment process, Police should where practicable enable the preferred candidate and their spouse/partner and family to visit the community before final selection. Detailed information about the role, the community and the associated risks of the job should also be provided.

Police response to this issue

260. The Rural Policing Enhancement Project is identifying opportunities to enhance the recruitment and appointment process, including the use of relievers who may be possible future applicants.

7. ARE PROPER INDUCTION PROCESSES IN PLACE?

What kind of induction do incoming officers receive?

261. In areas with two-person stations, induction was not usually a major issue. The new officer generally received a high-level induction by their supervisor, and a much more detailed induction and introduction to the community by the second officer still in the post.

262. There was a much greater problem with one-person stations.

263. Occasionally the outgoing officer was available to provide a handover to the newly appointed one. For example, in one community there was a fortnight's overlap between the two, and a fairly comprehensive introduction both to the community and to the administrative details of the station. In others, officers were able to spend at least a few days with the outgoing officers, but said they still had to introduce themselves to people, try to figure out all the family and relationship links in the community, and find their own support network.

264. In several communities, however, the outgoing officer had already left and the incoming officer did not have anyone to properly introduce them to the community or the station. One officer told us:

> *"Now I think about it, it was quite bad…. Everything that I learnt, I learnt for myself when I came here. I got no introduction, nothing. Here's the keys, here's the truck, you're away. And I used to freak [out] because I didn't really… know who I could trust and then two (and they're quite prominent members of the community)… said if you're really getting in trouble you come and pick me up and I'll be coming down with a bat. I was like, 'Whoa, that's helpful'."*

265. Another officer, who had started in the role three weeks before we visited, had still not figured out how to use the station's phone system.

266. It was easier when the incoming officer had previously been inducted as a reliever in the community. But we found that reliever inductions also primarily addressed the practicalities of the job rather than its scope and focus.

267. Supervisors rarely briefed the incoming officer on the strategic plan for the community (if one existed). Nor did inductions generally cover common small community issues, like dealing with conflicts of interest.

268. When desk files or contact lists existed, the incoming officers sometimes found them inadequate or out-of-date. They did not usually include a profile of the risks and particular issues associated with the community.

269. We also had feedback from community members who were sympathetic to the problems incoming officers faced in learning about a new community, and wanted greater involvement in the induction process.

How could Police improve inductions?

270. Almost all officers we interviewed agreed that Police need to improve the induction process. Suggestions for improvement included:

a) Ensuring, whenever possible, that the incoming officer in a one-person station spends at least one week (ideally two) working with the outgoing officer to conduct a proper handover before starting the role. One officer told us:

> *"What would've added value would've been to sit in the truck with the person that I'm taking over from, go with him for two weeks, maybe a little bit longer…. You can get a huge advantage from sitting with the guy who's just been there for X amount of time and take a large portion of that knowledge. [If] he leaves with that knowledge, nobody extracts it. He's got all that upstairs and we've just wasted it…."*

If the outgoing officer has already left, the supervisor should be the next best option (although, as we discuss below, we found that many supervisors were fairly hands-off and had only limited knowledge of the community). The new officer needs to learn about what to expect in the community from someone who knows the area well. In two-person stations, the officer who is already there should work together with the new officer for the first couple of weeks to help them settle into the job.

b) Introducing the new officer to the community, and helping them to start establishing connections to the people with whom they will need to work closely. Some communities requested pōwhiri to welcome the new officer.

c) Developing equivalent induction materials for spouses/partners (for example about local schools, Police house, and job opportunities in the community).

d) Developing comprehensive and up-to-date desk files in each station. This should include a community profile with demographic information, detailed risks, and a contact list, as well as practical information about where to find equipment and local protocols.

e) Providing a special training package for small community officers (see further discussion of this in paragraphs 306-324).

Summary of Issue 7 – Are proper induction processes in place?

271. We found that inductions for small community officers were often poor, especially for those in one-person stations. There is widespread support for more comprehensive inductions, including providing better information about the community and its particular safety issues and risks. Inductions need to address common small community issues, such as conflicts of interest, as well as the more practical matters of how to run the station. It should also include inductions and/or information for spouses/partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. Police need to develop better, more systematic induction processes.

24. This should include overlap with the outgoing officer whenever possible (ideally two weeks, although a much shorter period may be sufficient if the incoming officer has already been a reliever or it is a two-person station).

25. Police should prepare a desk file for each station (including telephone system, file management, custody procedures, general demographics, community contacts, at-risk families, and safety issues). There should be procedures to require regular updating of the file, or at least updating before an incumbent leaves the position.

26. Relievers should also receive an induction and have access to a full desk file.

Police response to this issue

272. The Rural Policing Enhancement Project is identifying opportunities to enhance the induction process for staff, relievers, and their families. Officers new to the small community policing role should have access to additional coaching, mentoring and support.

8. ARE THE TERMS OF DEPLOYMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITY OFFICERS APPROPRIATE?

What is the nature of a small community officer's employment contract?

273. Small community officers have the same employment contracts as other Police officers, as they are all covered by a collective agreement.

274. Applications for small community roles are therefore typically advertised in the same way as for other Police positions: a brief description of the position (for example: O/C one-person station, [area]), accompanied by reference to the generic Position Description attached to the position. As we have already discussed above (see paragraphs 60-61), while that is appropriate, it should ideally be supplemented during the selection process by clearly articulated selection criteria. After appointment, it should be followed by a detailed statement of what the job entails and, in particular, the scope of the job in terms of prevention and civic duties. That should include the officer's priorities in the particular community as part of the Police's Strategic Performance Framework. This was generally done in rudimentary form or not at all.

What are the demands of the role?

275. Most officers said they tailored the hours they worked in a week to the demands of their community. For example, if they had to work extra hours because there was a big event on, they took more time off during the next couple of days to compensate and recorded that in their timesheets.

276. Some officers in two-person stations told us they were only supposed to have 22 weeks on call per year, but they often each ended up covering 26 weeks. This was because they tended to only take leave on their 'light week', for two reasons: a) they could get a whole week off by

taking three days of leave (see paragraph 197); and b) they did not want to inconvenience their partner officer and make them cover their 'heavy week' when they are supposed to be on call (as Police were generally reluctant to provide relief cover for an officer in a two-person station unless they were on leave for a substantial amount of time – see paragraph 217). As a result, these small community officers were inclined to only take leave for one week at a time.

277. Even if one of the two officers in a small community was on leave, if they were still in the area they were generally still expected to help the on-duty officer and provide backup in an emergency situation. This contributed to officers feeling like they were on call 24/7 and unable to escape the demands of the job unless they left their area completely.

278. One officer in a one-person station said he had to be on call for 34 hours per week on top of his working hours, but it was actually a lot more because he could not turn people away if they wanted to talk to him. When he was not on call, his area was supposed to be covered by the nearest town. However, the locals preferred dealing with him.

279. One officer also complained that the system for identifying when he was not on call did not work well. When he was coming on or going off duty, he logged on or off on the Police computer system. But if there was a call to him, Comms looked at the roster rather than whether he was logged on or off. But the problem was that he did not always work to the roster. For example, if he had been called out during the night, he did not start work until later in the day, even though the roster showed him as starting duty at 8am. He was therefore frequently disturbed while asleep, and unnecessarily contacted while off-duty.

What benefits do officers receive to compensate for the demands of the role?

280. All officers in small stations receive a rural allowance under the collective agreement, on a three-point scale depending on the size of the area and the scope of the job. Officers based in especially remote places receive an extra allowance, and several paid flights per year.

281. In addition, a housing allowance is tied to a Police house in each community. In one community we visited there were two Police houses for the officers, but in the other two-person stations the sole Police house was occupied by one of the officers (the senior of the two unless they preferred to live elsewhere), while the other had to find their own accommodation and pay market rental. The housing allowance is a substantial discount off the market rental; at the time of our fieldwork the rental of a Police house was a flat rate of $24 per week, regardless of location.

282. In one of these stations where there were two officers, the longest serving officer (who had been raised in the area) owned his own house, and the newer officer who had only recently come to the area was about to vacate the Police house and find his own accommodation because the house was not big enough for his family. Neither were then to receive the benefit of the Police house, which was to lie vacant.

283. The rationale for the housing allowance appears to be that the officer living in the Police house is less likely to be able to separate work from private life and may be regularly disturbed by calls

for assistance, whether formally rostered on duty or not. One occupant of a Police house even said that people came knocking on the door *"any time of the day or night"*, whether or not he was on duty. He also reported that if he was not there, his wife answered the door and took a message. Others tried to mitigate this by letting the community know when they were working and discouraging them from coming to the house, but not always successfully. Another tried to limit the number of callers by erecting a gate and fence.

284. It is clear, therefore, that officers did not see the allowance as compensation for an additional service they were providing to the community; it was compensation for the inconvenience of being disturbed when they were not providing a service.

285. Some officers who were not living in the tied Police house complained about the differential treatment in comparison with their colleague. One officer said:

> *"With me there was no fixed housing because obviously there was only the one, the police house which is sort of a sour point with me. I've been fighting it for a while but I've sort of given up really."*

286. In the Authority's view, Police should not generally be in the business of owning property for accommodation purposes. It is an anachronism that causes actual or perceived unfairness. Moreover, it is evident that Police have not been good landlords: they have failed to maintain an adequate maintenance schedule; and when a house is unoccupied, communities told us that the house and grounds are not properly attended to. If accommodation support is required for officers to attract them to small stations, that ought to be done by way of a uniform allowance rather than Police-provided accommodation. However, we recognise the possibility that an exception to that general rule may be required in a community where no suitable rental accommodation is available.

287. Most small stations usually have a 4WD vehicle, which in a two-person station has to be shared between the two officers (see paragraph 212). Officers told us they were allowed to use the Police vehicle while on duty or on call, and they sometimes used it while on personal business because they needed to be contactable by Police radio (built into the vehicle). In one of the more remote communities, the Police vehicle was the officers' only vehicle, so they used it all the time. One officer said that his use of the Police vehicle was written into his contract, but others said it was just an unwritten agreement or expectation.

288. Such vague expectations are potentially problematic. We received more than one expression of concern from members of the community about the use of 4-wheel drive (4WD) Police vehicles for private purposes – for example, to launch the officer's boat. The difficulty here is that, whether or not the use was permitted, members of the community did not know and some drew the conclusion that it was improper even if it was not.

289. For this reason, one officer had decided that it was not a good look to use the Police vehicle to launch his boat, although he still used it to collect firewood. He told us: *"I think there needs to be some sort of rule around how far is too far."* We agree, and think supervisors should be required to specify the circumstances in which private use is permitted.

Should officers have fixed terms?

290. At an early stage in this project, some complainants raised with us the desirability of making small station positions fixed-term contracts or subject to rotation. They argued that permanent positions carried significant risks for the Police and for the communities being served. In particular:

a) Some officers get too settled and form personal relationships that affect their ability to remain impartial (or be seen to be impartial). As one community member expressed it, *"it is too difficult in a little community to lay down the law with people [the officer] knows well"*.

b) By the same token, because they are constantly dealing with the same relatively small group of people, the officer may form negative preconceptions that become worse over time, and affect their ability to deal with those people fairly and impartially. That can become particularly problematic when they are dealing with civil disputes and may be perceived as *"taking sides"*.

c) *"The job can be a cushy number, and officers can stay too long for that reason."*

d) Some become too complacent, lose motivation, and are *"just counting the days until retirement"*.

e) Some officers are not a good fit for the role and, when that happens, they should not be allowed to stay indefinitely.

291. We therefore canvassed that issue with all officers and community interviewees. We encountered very mixed views. Generally, interviewees favoured having officers who remained in the community for a significant period, because this enabled the formation of strong community relationships which created ongoing stability in policing. They believed that the benefits of having a long-term officer outweighed the potential problems (as long as they liked the officer), and said problems could be avoided if officers get regular professional development and are properly supervised (see further at paragraphs 329-343 below). Many said that, if officers do well and want to stay longer, they should be able to do so.

292. One community member expressed the view that they did not need fixed terms for officers because, if the community thought the officer was performing badly, they would make their feelings known. The officer would then find themselves without any support and would not want to stay in the community for long.

293. Officers themselves noted that the job requires a specialist skill set, and that the effectiveness of officers in the job often depends upon a detailed knowledge of the dynamics of the community, and the relationships within it, that takes time to develop and cultivate. Some community members even argued that it takes about five years before officers are fully trusted, accepted by the community and competent in the job. They therefore argued that it is counter-productive to move officers on against their will.

294. One officer said it was unfair to make all small community officers subject to limited terms just because some were not performing, and questioned why those issues could not be addressed *"from an employment point of view"*. He also said that having limited terms could make the small community policing role less attractive, and lead to officers investing less effort:

> *"If I knew that I'm only here for four years I'm going to be reserved, pull back, my wife's not going to inject her time into it. We have questions about how much we put the kids through – a lot of the staff that go to rural communities bring families."*

295. Others, however, took a different view. One supervisor of officers in a two-person station noted that one of the officers, who had been there a long time, could not be given some jobs because of his past connections and the likely perception of bias as a result. He commented that the other officer was likely to be in the same position after he had been in the position for five years or so, because it was simply impossible to do the job well without forming relationships that give rise to a perceived conflict.

296. Some officers, and their supervisors, also saw permanent contracts as problematic. In particular, they commented on the isolation, the limitations on the extent to which friendships can be formed, and the relentless 24/7 nature of the job. For example:

> *"It'll be a culture shock and I don't think, I don't think it will be healthy for someone to take them from [a city] or somewhere else in the country and put them [in that isolated area] and basically say 'That's your job until you apply for something else'. Giving someone an end date gives them, especially if they're a little bit 'I don't know whether I'm 100% sure on this', 'Oh well, I've only got a couple of years to go.' In saying that, if someone said, 'Look, I really don't like this, I want to leave', well, that's fine. These things happen. But I think a three year contract with the ability to extend for a further two, five years – and five years in any one location is, it's a long time, it's a long time to be doing one job."*

297. One community we visited had a limited term for their constables, of two years with the possibility of a six-month extension. One officer told us he thought the term should be increased, because:

> *"I'm just starting to see opportunities and what I want to do out here, how I want to make difference and it's taken nearly a year to get to that point. Then if it's a two-year term that only leaves you one year to achieve those…. Can you change a community's culture in one year? I don't think you can… it's not really enough. You kind of need probably that third year to make a real difference, to achieve those goals and that's just one goal. I mean I've already identified three or four different opportunities out here… but do I have enough time for that?"*

298. One community member suggested a term of five years, with an extension of another five years if the officer was fitting in to the community and managing relationships appropriately. That would give the community and the officer a bit more stability, and would also be less disruptive for the officer's family. For example, it could allow the officer's children to go through schooling with less interruption.

299. Overall, this was an issue about which there was little agreement. Most believed that officers needed to be embedded in the community in order to do the job effectively, but many recognised that the dangers of undue closeness to the community, complacency and inconsistency in policing increased with the passage of time. There is, it seems, a delicate balance to be struck.

300. These tensions can be more readily managed in a two-person station, because matters can be passed from one officer to the other if a conflict arises. Indeed, one interviewee suggested that the optimal arrangement in a two-person station is to have one longer term officer and one shorter term officer, so that they can complement each other.

301. We agree, and observed a number of two-person stations where the balance between long term and short term tenure seemed to have benefits. However, while this mitigated conflict of interest and complacency issues, it did not address them altogether, and it was not a solution that was available in a one-person station.

302. Our own view is that, although many of the potential problems that arise from long term tenure can be adequately managed through clearer articulation of performance expectations and robust supervision, that does not do enough to address the real difficulties that can arise when the relationship between the officer and sections of the local community begin to fracture over time.

Summary of Issue 8 – Are the terms of deployment for small community officers appropriate?

303. While small community officers could usually be flexible with their rostered hours, they often felt they were on call for more hours than were set down in their contracts. We also found there were some tensions between officers arising from differences in allowances, particularly in respect of housing. We think that, as a general rule, Police should cease to provide Police houses, although an exception may be required in a particular community if no suitable rental accommodation is available.

304. There were very mixed views from community members and Police about whether small community officers should be on fixed terms and subject to rotation. While some prefer their officer to stay as long as they want, others believe terms should be limited due to the stress of the role, and the danger of long-serving officers becoming complacent and *"too settled"* in the community. On balance, the Authority favours fixed terms with the option of an extension if the community and Police believe that is appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

27. Small community officers should generally be subject to rotation. Police should renegotiate the Collective Employment Agreement with a view to instituting five year fixed term positions, with the possibility of an extension.

28. Police should cease to provide houses for accommodation purposes unless no suitable rental accommodation is available in a particular community.

29. Supervisors should be required to specify the extent to which, if at all, Police vehicles are available for private use.

30. Police need to develop a deployment model that properly reflects the demands of small community stations (and complies with the Collective Employment Agreement).

Police response to this issue

305. Police are looking at the housing issue and are considering options for capturing information for small communities to influence deployment decisions.

9. DO OFFICERS HAVE SUFFICIENT ACCESS TO TRAINING AND SUPPORT?

What ongoing training do small community officers receive?

306. Apart from an initial induction which, (as discussed above in paragraphs 261-271) was usually very brief and limited, officers generally received very little training in the particular job. The training they do receive falls into three categories.

307. First, they are able to do training online via the Police's *Te Puna* system. However, this depends on self-motivation, and our impression is that this is done haphazardly and not well monitored by supervisors, and that knowledge of some important recent policy changes is sometimes lacking. One officer told us:

> *"I bloody hate online stuff and it grates me because I'm not the sharpest at learning like that and I'm the first person to admit that but I make the most of it and try my best… like getting sent a link and saying, 'Hey look at this link and by the way you're using it for the next five years, this is great', and you go through the online training thing and there's videos and they're monotonous and you're trying your best and I don't learn very well like that…. It's convenient and it's quick and it's cost-effective, but I'd say there'd be a few people in the same boat as me."*

308. Another said: *"Some of it's all right but I think some of it just goes in one ear and out the other fairly easily."*

309. Secondly, officers are regularly updated on policy changes and 'lessons learnt' via message boards and emails. However, some said these messages are not usually relevant to small community policing, and it is not clear what they are supposed to get from them.

310. Thirdly, officers may occasionally be required to attend staff training days at Area Headquarters (for example, to bring them up to speed with changes in Police policy) and to undertake any other mandated training such as refresher firearms or driver training. Sometimes a reliever will be made available to facilitate that. But such attendance is not always feasible if it requires a long return drive, and in any event may usually be impracticable in island communities that are accessible only by boat or air.

311. In any event, while supervisors thought that small community officers enjoyed general training days and benefited from them, the officers themselves saw them as oriented towards policing in cities and towns, and largely unsuited to their needs. As one put it:

> *"[The staff training days] are just a waste of time, not really appropriate for us out here. We want training that is tailor made for a rural community. And that has always been my gripe. Give us the training that would be appropriate for our base, that would be great…. It's all about the different types of issues you deal with. It's the Fencing Act, it's Property Acts, it's Wild Animal Control Act, it's all those things that you deal with in the country that you don't deal with in town."*

312. Many small community officers were therefore dissatisfied with the form and extent of the training they received. They complained that, since they are the person the community relies on to provide 24/7 cover, any training opportunities are very limited. For those who have career aspirations and do not see themselves as remaining a small community officer until retirement, this affects the opportunities available to them.

313. Some officers also complained of being *"left behind"* in respect of training on how best to use the technology now available to them, particularly their mobile devices:

> *"There's that much stuff now with these iPhones and applications and stuff happening and I know they're getting the training in town. It's rostered, like we should be having a training day once every four or six weeks. It's just not happening."*

314. Because they usually work alone, they do not have the same opportunities as other officers to casually pick up tips from their colleagues. Sometimes their training was second-hand:

> *"Quite often they'll just train, they'll just send one of our crew to a training day and it's usually a pretty broad sort of training and they're expected to come back and train all of us and it's kind of like they don't really know what they're – you know they just get a whole lot of pamphlets, a whole lot of handouts to read and muddle your way through it."*

315. Some officers in these areas told us that the costs of providing and housing a reliever made them reluctant to even ask for additional training, because they did not want to be a bother and/or expected the request would be refused anyway. Others said they had to line up their training to occur at the beginning or end of a period of leave, to minimise the number of times a reliever had to be called in.

316. Many officers we spoke to were reluctant to go away on training courses for short terms because no relievers replaced them and the work just piled up. As one said: *"You leave the station and you still get the same files coming over your desk… just because you're away it doesn't mean crime stops."*

Should there be specific training and support networks for policing in small communities?

317. Officers therefore consistently identified the need for better training that is specific to small communities in rural areas. Generally, they noted that there was virtually no opportunity for them to interact with others doing the same job, even in their own district.

318. There was the occasional exception. One area we visited had recently held a *"rural policing day"* for the small community constables, with presentations and discussions on issues like conflict of interest. An officer told us:

> *"You had some reasonable speakers and there was presentations and then just a bit of a chat about what's working well in one area and that and I think that's probably what is lacking in a way, like a bit of a get-together with everyone because every place has their own challenges and they're all different and each cop deals with it in a different way."*

319. Other officers reported getting 4x4 training or Search and Rescue training, needs that were directly relevant to their particular job. In another area, the small station officers and their supervisor met every month to sit down and discuss common problems, and potential ways to address them collectively.

320. We asked officers whether they would benefit from a rural policing network and regular conferences, and they all thought that would be extremely helpful. There was no repository of advice for small community officers, and they often felt isolated. One officer said:

> *"I have actually wondered whether I should just touch base with [other remote communities] and say 'How do you find X-Y-Z? What do you do? How would you approach that?' because there's – no one else is going to have that same perspective that we do."*

321. Some individual officers had created email groups with other officers in small communities to discuss particular issues. One spoke of consulting his email group to get ideas on community engagement from other officers, which he had then successfully used in his own community.

322. However, there was no nation-wide practice in this respect, and as far as we could discern no effort by supervisors or the Executive to encourage or foster it. It was left to individual officers to take the initiative and develop relationships of that sort themselves.

323. Since we conducted our fieldwork, this sort of practice has begun to expand, with a few Police districts arranging conferences to provide small community officers with relevant training as a group and the opportunity to discuss common experiences and problems together. However, in our view this should not be regarded as an optional extra. It is key to ensuring consistency of approach and the provision of a minimum level of support.

324. Officers and community members identified the following areas where further training would be valuable:

- managing conflicts of interest;

- safety issues;
- community engagement;
- mediation;
- tikanga Māori; and
- dealing with mental health crises.

Summary of Issue 9 – Do officers have sufficient access to training and support?

325. Many officers believed they lacked training specific to their role, and thought they were being left behind in respect of the training received by officers in cities. Some found online training ineffective, and faced obstacles to attending regular training days in person due to distance and lack of relief. There is therefore a general problem with lack of access to training. It is even more important that this be properly addressed if our recommendation that there be fixed term contracts is accepted.

326. As well as addressing these obstacles, we think Police should develop training that is specific to small community roles with greater focus on communication, engagement, mediation and managing conflicts of interest, among other things. This should be reflected in Personal Development Plans for all small station staff.

327. Police should also encourage, develop and properly resource a rural support network for small community officers under the leadership and guidance of a designated manager, who would have responsibility for elevating any common district small community issue to district management and any national issue to Police National Headquarters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. Police need to enhance opportunities for small community officers to access general training both to maintain general skills and to further career development.
32. Police need also to develop a specific training programme for small community roles.
33. This should include the development of a properly resourced and supported online rural policing network, under the leadership of a designated manager, to foster a community of practice and mutual support. The designated manager would have responsibility for elevating any common district small community issue to district management and any national issue to Police National Headquarters.
34. All small community officers should have Personal Development Plans.

Police response to this issue

328. Police say the Rural Policing Enhancement Project has identified the need for a rural specific component in Police training to support rural officers in their work and to increase the understanding of policing in rural environments for all officers across the organisation. The project is also looking at rural networking as a way to support officers.

10. ARE OFFICERS RECEIVING ADEQUATE SUPERVISION?

What kind of supervision do officers get?

329. Officers generally described their supervision as *"on-the-job training"*. Good supervisors did not leave officers to their own devices; they were regularly in touch, kept their officers up to date on operational issues, and were accessible to answer queries and provide guidance on individual files. Officers also appreciated it when their supervisors had experience in policing small communities themselves.

330. Supervision arrangements varied. Some officers spoke to their supervisors every day, but others only talked to them every fortnight or so. Contact was usually informal and ad hoc, and done by phone or email. Face-to-face meetings were much less frequent, especially in the more remote communities where the time and cost involved in visiting is high. Officers in island communities said they only saw their supervisor in person two or three times a year.

331. The appropriateness of the degree of supervision depends in part on the experience and capability of the officer being supervised. One officer said of his supervisor:

> *"Generally he's pretty hands off because he knows that we've been doing it for a long time, and he trusts I guess that we will if we've got a question have the nous to ring him and ask him before we go making a decision. But most of the lower level of stuff or the normal stuff, we just deal with and then it goes to him and he gets it as part of the file."*

332. But the level of supervision should also depend upon the extent to which there are issues between the Police and the community to be resolved, and the need to obtain general community feedback on levels of satisfaction with policing service. For this reason, we expected that the supervisor's role would be to establish relationships with the local community and to identify and address general issues with the way in which the community is being policed as they arise. However, most supervisors did not seem to regard this as a core part of their role, and those we interviewed within the community (who were often influential members) rarely had any idea who the supervisor was.

333. In fact, supervisor visits to the community itself were relatively uncommon, and when they did occur were for the purpose of dealing with a particular job or talking to the officer (or officers) rather than interacting with the community. In this respect, one officer described their supervisor's visits to the area as:

> *"Generally he just comes out to support us usually, he doesn't generally need to come out for any particular reason. He might do station checks occasionally when he's out here but generally it's just to come out and chew the fat and see how things are going and he's usually only here for half a day, if there's no issues…."*

334. Supervisors told us that most of their work involved reviewing and signing off their officers' files through the Police database, and conducting regular audits of files, equipment and so on. Officers confirmed that much of the contact with their supervisors was incident- or file-specific, rather than involving discussions about community engagement or how they were getting on in

general. One commented that the number of incidents entered in the database did not accurately reflect his total workload:

> *"My workload – unfortunately the bosses have no idea of just how much work goes into a day because a lot of it is not recorded and I'd be a slave to my device or the computer recording everything and all the bits and pieces that come my way. A lot of it is shooting from the hip. That's low level."*

335. The quality of communication from supervisors was mixed. One officer told us:

> *"I actually feel I have quite good communication with my supervisors. I'm quite comfortable with that. They allow me to do my thing and they don't micro-manage me but are always available for advice or support."*

336. However, others complained that there had been communication breakdowns with their supervisors, which left them feeling isolated and lacking support. One example was a supervisor who did not respond to messages and failed to advise them when he was on leave. Occasionally, officers in the most remote communities also faced delays in the provision of support; one officer who dealt with a fatal car crash said it was a week or two before they were given welfare support, whereas officers in more populated areas usually received it immediately.

337. Some officers reported that their supervisor was constantly changing. One said he had had seven different supervisors over the last 18 months, and was constantly struggling to adjust to new expectations and management styles. Another said he did not even know who his current supervisor was, because they kept on changing.

338. These situations made it difficult for the officers to ask for advice, because they had not had the chance to get to know and trust their supervisors. As one officer put it: *"We are human and we depend and work with relationships. We are not just a person on the other end of the phone or a computer email."* Consequently, they sometimes went to other senior officers they trusted for advice rather than their official supervisor.

339. In several cases, the officers' supervisors were responsible for overseeing a large number of people. They were consequently stretched thin and unable to spend as much time on each officer as they wanted. Some who picked up acting supervisory roles still had to carry on in their usual role as well, so they were in effect trying to do two jobs at once.

How could the supervision of officers be improved?

340. One supervisor we spoke to acknowledged that communicating with their officers primarily by phone call or email *"isn't the best"*. He suggested that using video conferencing technology or applications like Facetime would be more effective, and allow both parties to share what is on their screens. As noted above, use of this technology has become more widespread since we conducted out visits in 2018.

341. Another suggestion for improving the quality and consistency of supervision was to have dedicated 'roving' supervisory positions, where the supervisor would regularly visit the small stations in their area. This would enable them to become more actively involved and familiar

with the particular needs and problems of each community. We encountered two areas where this had already been put into practice. In one, the sergeant had responsibility for all nine rural stations in the area, and spent three days per week visiting and interacting with the officers and the community, thus enabling him to give better guidance and direction and have much greater influence. In the other, the sergeant was responsible for four rural stations with seven officers in total, as well as three other direct reports, and aimed to visit each in their station once a week, although in practice it was a little less frequent.

342. Additionally, we had feedback from community members that they wanted Police to consult them regarding their officers' performance reviews. They also wanted the reviews to be tailored to the specific skills required in policing a small community, such as managing conflicts of interest well.

343. Police agreed they could be more proactive in obtaining feedback from the community (for example, by consulting representatives on community boards), but were concerned that the process should be fair to the officer. They were therefore considering more regularly consulting the community about how they felt about the Police's service in general, rather than seeking input into individual officers' reviews. One officer told us:

> *"The thing I think the police could do I suppose is ask people what they think the problems are in the community… a lot of the time the police assume they know what's going on and it might not necessarily line up with what the community thinks the problems are… something that I might think is quite serious might not be such a big deal to them…."*

Summary of Issue 10 – Are officers receiving adequate supervision?

344. We found some supervisors were good at providing oversight and support, with regular calls and visits to their officers. But others only contacted their officers about job-specific queries, and neglected to discuss wider concerns regarding the particular issues in their community.

345. We believe that supervisors should be more focused on and directly engaged with the community, and should regularly seek the community's feedback regarding the policing service they receive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

35. Supervision should be general (that is, not confined to review of or questions about individual cases) and should involve regular interaction with the community as well as between supervisor and officer. It should include discussion of any potential conflicts of interest.

36. For this purpose, the supervisor should have a presence in the community.

37. Performance reviews ought to include community feedback about the effectiveness of the officer's involvement in community development and crime prevention functions, and mechanisms should be in place to facilitate this.

Police response to this issue

346. The Rural Policing Enhancement Project is looking at supervision and performance management. Police acknowledge that they must ensure consistent standards and that supervisors may need a more in-depth understanding and appreciation of the rural environment.

11: ARE SMALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS EASILY ABLE TO CONTACT THEIR LOCAL OFFICERS?

347. In areas with two-person stations, the officers said that many in the community preferred to deal with one of the officers over the other, so called them directly or waited until they were on duty to talk to them. One officer said:

> *"We've had to educate them around, we might be out of coverage and might not be working so you need to make sure if it's important, it's serious you need to be ringing 111 because you might not get that response in a timely manner, but to the majority of the community we're pretty contactable."*

348. Almost all the small community Police stations we visited were set up to divert calls that were not picked up to the nearest town or city station, or to the crime reporting line at the Police Communications Centre (now known as 105). They also had a phone at the front of the station that people could use if nobody was there, which was similarly put through to the nearest bigger station or Communications Centre. The caller could then usually leave a message for their local officer. However, many complained of experiencing very long waiting times when their call was transferred to the Communications Centre, which put them off calling again. Some said this resulted in fewer people reporting crime.

349. We found that the biggest single source of discontent with policing services was the difficulty in communicating with local Police. When people have an issue that they think needs to be addressed by the Police, they invariably want their local officer to deal with it and to be able to contact the officer directly. During the day, they often go to the station in the hope that the officer will be there. But it was a source of great frustration that, more often than not, the station was shut, with no indication of when the officer would be back. This sometimes gave rise to a negative perception that officers were not doing their job and were just *"goofing off"* rather than making themselves available. One person told us that it was a *"real mission"* to get hold of the local officer because there was never a response, and eventually people just give up. Many drew a negative comparison between the current approach and the former practice where each station had its own number to which the community could make non-urgent calls.

350. Of course, small community officers have to cover a large area and may end up spending quite a lot of time out doing inquiries rather than working in the station. As one officer explained:

> *"We try and explain to them like we don't sit at the station all day waiting for you to come and visit us… 90% of our job is out in the community. [But] if there's no one here, it's like 'Oh you guys are never in the station'."*

351. But the alternative of ringing an anonymous person in a Communications Centre or on the 105 telephone line, who often does not even know where their town is, was unpalatable to everyone we spoke to unless the call was an emergency. In three very isolated communities, even a 111 call in an emergency was seen as a waste of time, since the local officer would necessarily have to deal with the situation. As one officer put it, the community *"wants to be dealt with by their own"*. One officer told us:

> *"I'd be frustrated as well with the current setup. Being within police I understand why we tried to do it, to try and create efficiencies but in a way it's isolated, alienated people."*

352. Indeed, it was commonly reported that, when an officer was away, people often waited for them to return before reporting non-urgent issues, even when a reliever had been brought into the area. Occasionally this even applied to urgent matters. Extraordinarily, we were told of a man who rang 111 after being shot in order to be put through to the local officer but, when told that the officer was off duty, did not say why he was ringing and waited until the next day to report the matter to the local officer.

353. Dissatisfaction was often compounded by the fact that messages were not returned. Some officers admitted that they returned calls selectively depending on their knowledge of the caller, and that even when they did ring back there was often a significant delay (in one example, up to three weeks).

354. Many community members argued that, at least for non-urgent matters, there needed to be a local number where they could ring and leave a message. This had actually been done in one station on the officers' own initiative, since they were acutely aware of the community's frustration: the officers had installed a phone line at their own expense and put a notice with the telephone number at the front of the station and in the local newspaper. However, this also produced discontent, because those who rang it often got an answerphone message, and their message might not be returned for days.

355. For this reason, a minority of officers encouraged people to ring them directly rather than ringing 111 or 105. Some handed out their mobile number to everyone. They felt obliged to answer calls, even when they were not on duty, in case it was an emergency. One officer said: *"If something happens, bottom line is I want to prevent it, I want to stop it, I want a positive outcome, I want people to get hold of me, so yeah."* However, this contributed to some officers feeling like they were constantly working. As a result, most officers only gave their mobile numbers to a small and select group of people who they regularly communicated with or were otherwise regarded as *"intelligence contacts"* in the community. This sometimes led to accusations of bias and favouritism from others who were not part of this select group.

356. The difficulties in this respect are to some degree compounded by unrealistic expectations. As we have already noted, communities do not always respect officers' off-duty time and want them to be accessible when they are needed. In an area with a one-person station, a community member even told us that the officer should always be available and that *"in the old days"* the officer was on call all the time and had no days off. In two-person stations, this even extends to contacting the off-duty officer they prefer rather than the one who is on-duty.

How could Police make it easier for the communities to contact their local officers?

357. There were several suggestions for making it easier to contact and leave a message for officers. These included:

a) Better promotion and funding of the 105 line, so wait times are reduced and community members are happier using it.

b) Engaging volunteers to help with community inquiries and provide advice during normal working hours – either at the Police station or perhaps the local information centre. However, these volunteers would need to be properly vetted and trained (as already required by Police policy), and some in the community may not be comfortable talking to them. One officer suggested merging the Police, Fire, Ambulance, and Search and Rescue services into one hub, in which volunteers could assist.

c) Clearer messaging to the community that officers will only answer calls while they are on duty.

d) Setting expectations that officers must respond to messages within a reasonable period of time once they are back on duty.

358. In the Authority's view, a mix of these strategies is required. Given the investment in it, it would be unrealistic and counter-productive for Police to abandon the 105 line for small stations. Rather, better promotion and funding of the line is required so that wait times are reduced and community expectations are properly managed. We accept that, given the wide variety of calls, it is not realistic to establish fixed performance expectations about the time within which calls will be responded to. However, we believe that supervisors should generally exercise closer oversight of the way in which officers are handling calls for service.

359. This should be supplemented by a system of volunteers to staff the station during working hours and answer inquiries, take messages or provide information in the officer's absence, at least in stations where this can be shown to have demonstrable benefit. This would be an effective way of increasing community satisfaction with their ability to contact their local officer. Police told us that health and safety concerns currently prevent the use of such volunteers. This is because, when the officers are away from the stations and the volunteers are left alone, their safety cannot be guaranteed. We are not convinced that this is a realistic concern. In most cases the station can be designed to provide necessary security at relatively little cost.

Summary of Issue 11 – Are small community members easily able to contact their local officers?

360. Difficulty contacting their local officers was an enormous source of frustration for community members and was their most common complaint. Many said Police took too long to answer calls or respond to messages, which discouraged them from trying. Some believed this resulted in crime being under-reported.

361. We think Police need to review their processes for handling calls when small community officers are unavailable or off duty. Greater use of volunteers in small stations could help, and we believe

Police should look at how they can address the safety concerns. Police also need to better educate small communities about the best ways to contact their officer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

38. Police should better promote and fund the 105 reporting line so that wait times are reduced and community expectations are properly managed.

39. Supervisors should exercise closer oversight of the way in which calls for service are responded to.

40. Police should establish a volunteer system during ordinary office hours for assisting with inquiries at stations and staffing the station when the officer is absent. This should include appropriate safety measures.

Police response to this issue

362. Police say one of their priorities is *"Delivering the services New Zealanders expect and deserve"*. This forms part of performance management for officers and supervisors.

363. The Rural Policing Enhancement Project is looking at ways to improve the 105 service, including staff training; technical enhancements; awareness campaigns; and marketing within rural communities. The project has also identified an absence of volunteers in rural stations. Police acknowledge that their policy also needs to be updated to provide more guidance about when Police should and should not use volunteers.

12. DO OFFICERS EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE AND HAVE SUFFICIENT VISIBILITY IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

How do the officers communicate and engage with their communities?

364. We found that officers communicated with their communities in a variety of ways, including:

a) contributing to local newsletters;

b) having set days for community members to visit the station;

c) email groups (for example, Police alerting local farmers to crime issues in their area and vice versa);

d) attending community events and festivals;

e) visiting schools; and

f) attending community 'stakeholder' and council meetings.

365. Although Police's 'Social media policy' limits Facebook pages to one per Police district, officers in one community we visited had obtained special permission to have their own Facebook page, focused on their particular community. They found that smaller communities were more likely

to engage with a page devoted to them, rather than their district's Facebook page in which their area was likely to be overlooked. An officer described the benefits of using social media as:

> *"it's just phenomenal how much the attitude towards us has actually changed, so the inception of our Facebook page and us getting our information out there and the face of the Police but from a real community focus has actually been really good…. It opens you up to all sorts of things as a way of communicating with the general public and it would be anything and everything from, you know, there's been a spate in car thefts or, you know, break-ins to cars and things like that… remind you of what you need to do, lock your car, all that sort of stuff, the prevention advice as well as 'Hey we've had something handed in, if it's yours let us know'. Just that general keeping in touch with the community and having it as a way for them to communicate back."*

366. While acknowledging that it requires some work to moderate the page, the officers recommended it as a good way to open up a dialogue with their community.

367. Notwithstanding this view in some areas, we understand that Police continue to discourage this practice, on the basis that all official content on a social media page should be co-ordinated by the Police Media Team on a district-wide basis.

368. We are inclined to the view that, at least in more isolated communities, the discerning and selective use of social media is an effective means of communication, and that the current policy is too restrictive. However, we agree that officers should use social media only within strictly defined parameters and only when they have the skills to do so.

369. In some areas, people felt like their officers were never at the station or did not have enough of a presence within the community. Most recognised this risk and tried to mitigate it by walking around the community on a regular basis and being seen. That was often the way in which issues were raised with them; people less often came to the station.

370. Some people acknowledged that their officers need time away from the community, and thought others were being too harsh *and "judgmental"* about their availability. Community members were not generally aware of all the different kinds of work their officer was doing, and one said of his officer: *"A lot of people don't realise the hours that fella does"*.

How could officers' accessibility and their communication with their communities be improved?

371. Suggestions for improving the accessibility of officers and their communication with the community included:

a) conducting regular patrols to 'fly the flag' and have a presence in the community;

b) Police regularly reporting to the community on their crime statistics so they know the facts, rather than just gossip;

c) empowering communities to provide Police with good information via email groups and initiatives like installing security camera networks.

Summary of Issue 12 – Do officers effectively communicate and have sufficient visibility in their communities?

372. Small community officers used a wide variety of ways to reach out and stay in contact with people in their communities. However, some communities thought their officers did not have enough of a presence. We think Police should provide more guidance to officers about how best to communicate with their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

41. Police should set more specific expectations about the extent to which officers should communicate with their local communities, and the means by which it is appropriate for them to do so (for example, via Facebook page, newsletters, visibility in the community). There should not be a blanket prohibition on the use of social media on a local basis, but this should be permitted only within strictly defined parameters and when the officer has the required skills to do so.

Police response to this issue

373. Police recognise the value (and the risks) of social media for rural officers. The Rural Policing Enhancement Project has recommended that rural officers be provided with guidance on the Police's social media model and policy.

Conclusions

374. During our visits and interviews for this project we found widespread community support for the local officers, and the services they provide. We also met many excellent officers, and were impressed by the work they do in their communities and how they handle the huge demands of their job.

375. However, we found there were some key areas where Police need to provide the officers with more support. These include:

a) policy and training to improve understanding of how conflicts of interest can arise (or be perceived as arising) in small communities, and how to address them;

b) more consistent terms of deployment;

c) more comprehensive inductions for small community roles;

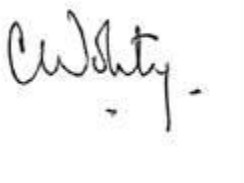
d) better provision of relief and supervision; and

e) improved accessibility within their communities, and guidance on how best to communicate with people.

376. Police recognise these problems and have begun working to address them with their Rural Policing Enhancement Project (RPEP), as noted throughout this report. We have agreed with the Commissioner of Police that we will monitor the progress of that project. We will also monitor Police's implementation of:

a) any recommendations that come out of the RPEP; and

b) the recommendations we make in this report.



Judge Colin Doherty

Chair

Independent Police Conduct Authority

4 November 2021

Appendix – Data tables

Stations		Occurrences		Persons Arrested		Offences Resulting In Prosecution
		2016	2017	2016	2017	2016-2017
1-person	Kohukohu	1010	1047	42	35	70
	Kotemaori	1141	921	54	29	68
	Piopio	1280	989	41	36	40
	Stewart Island	159	337	8	12	12
1.6-person	Chatham Islands	30	29	13	8	24
2-person	Coromandel	2064	3499	74	81	175
	Great Barrier Island	225	240	31	23	30
	Hikurangi	3950	3630	154	129	302
	Murchison	3077	5446	36	93	99
	Rawene	2522	2045	118	58	150
	Tolaga Bay	1420	1208	36	34	67
	Tuatapere	1227	1159	66	41	70

OCCURRENCE TYPES – 2017												
	Chatham Island	**Coromandel**	**Great Barrier Island**	**Hikurangi**	**Kohukohu**	**Kotemaori**	**Murchison**	**Piopio**	**Rawene**	**Stewart Island**	**Tolaga Bay**	**Tuatapere**
Crime	14	332	63	504	157	68	434	124	252	20	103	135
Non-crime demand (crash/offender management/social/ service/other)	12	457	60	980	240	175	1323	219	320	55	177	126
Activity (court/custody/ investigation and forensics/prevention /social service/misc.)	3	2710	117	2146	650	678	3689	646	1473	262	928	898
TOTAL	**29**	**3499**	**240**	**3630**	**1047**	**921**	**5446**	**989**	**2045**	**337**	**1208**	**1159**

OFFENCES RESULTING IN PROSECUTION – 2016 and 2017												
	Chatham Island	**Coromandel**	**Great Barrier Island**	**Hikurangi**	**Kohukohu**	**Kotemaori**	**Murchison**	**Piopio**	**Rawene**	**Stewart Island**	**Tolaga Bay**	**Tuatapere**
Homicide and Related Offences				4	2	1		1	1			
Acts Intended to Cause Injury	2	37	5	43	23	17	7	7	33	2	8	12
Sexual Assault and Related Offences		5		2	1				1		2	2
Abduction, Harassment and Other Related Offences	1	2	2	7	1	3	2	2	13		1	1
Robbery, Extortion and Related Offences		2		7					2			
Unlawful Entry with Intent/Burglary etc		12	2	10	2		1	3	5		5	5
Theft and Related Offences	1	14	1	11	3	5	10	2	8	2	5	3
Dangerous or Negligent Acts Endangering Persons	3	25	4	41	7	9	22	6	11	5	8	7
Fraud, Deception and Related Offences	2	3		5			2		3		1	2
Illicit Drug Offences		11	5	15	5	7	6	4	20	1	1	12
Miscellaneous Offences			1			8	2					
Offences against Justice Procedures etc		16	3	40	12	5	6	3	13		6	4
Prohibited and Regulated Weapons and Explosives Offences		2		4	1	3	3		3		1	8
Property Damage and Environmental Pollution		5	2	5	2		1	2	5		1	3
Public Order Offences	2	12		2		1	1		1			5
Traffic and Vehicle Regulatory Offences	13	29	5	106	11	9	36	10	31	2	28	6
TOTAL	**24**	**175**	**30**	**302**	**70**	**68**	**99**	**40**	**150**	**12**	**67**	**70**

About the Authority

WHO IS THE INDEPENDENT POLICE CONDUCT AUTHORITY?

The Independent Police Conduct Authority is an independent body set up by Parliament to provide civilian oversight of Police conduct.

We are not part of the Police – the law requires us to be fully independent. The Authority is overseen by a Board, which is chaired by Judge Colin Doherty.

Being independent means that the Authority makes its own findings based on the facts and the law. We do not answer to the Police, the Government or anyone else over those findings. In this way, our independence is similar to that of a Court.

The Authority employs highly experienced staff who have worked in a range of law enforcement and related roles in New Zealand and overseas.

WHAT ARE THE AUTHORITY'S FUNCTIONS?

Under the Independent Police Conduct Authority Act 1988, the Authority receives and may choose to investigate:

- complaints alleging misconduct or neglect of duty by Police;
- complaints about Police practices, policies and procedures affecting the complainant in a personal capacity;
- notifications of incidents in which Police actions have caused or appear to have caused death or serious bodily harm; and
- referrals by Police under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Authority and Police, which covers instances of potential reputational risk to Police (including serious offending by a Police officer or Police actions that may have an element of corruption).

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