**Background**

As at January 10, there has been an indication from the NZ Police that the community would be able to provide input into the proposal to shift the resident police officer away from Russell sometime in the early stages of 2022.[[1]](#footnote-2) As the community is concerned that the 90-day vacation notice is looming, without communication from NZ Police, we have chosen to take a pro-active approach to providing input into the proposal. This document is a summary of a public meeting held in Russell on January 5, 2022. The meeting was attended by hāpu, whānau, local business representatives, emergency response representatives and concerned members of the community. Submissions during the meeting were unanimously in favour of the retention of a resident community police officer.

**Concerns expressed by the community**

1. Impact on partner emergency response agencies

The community meeting was addressed by a St John’s ambulance driver who raised the potential for the proposal to increase the risks faced by emergency response services, including St John’s and the Volunteer Fire Brigade. Examples were presented of times where partner emergency services have relied on the support of the resident police officer to ensure their safety when responding to an incident. Often these examples occurred during the evening. On this basis, the community is concerned that:

* The proposal to withdraw a resident police officer from the Russell and surrounds community is a clear example of siloed decision making without due consideration of the impact on partner emergency response agencies, especially medical services.
* There has been insufficient consultation and collaboration with partner agencies to understand the role of the resident police officer for ensuring the safety of all parties.
* There is a lack of understanding of the time required to commute between Paihia and Russell to provide support for partner emergency response agencies.[[2]](#footnote-3)

1. Movement away from a “prevention first” approach to policing

NZ Police have acknowledged the value of a “prevention first” approach to policing.[[3]](#footnote-4) As clearly outlined in the National Operating Policy, the prevention first approach involves investing in “meaningful partnerships with others in the community”. The value of a resident police officer, based in Russell, is that they can establish effective working relationships with a wide range of stakeholders across the broad geographical area that is made up of Russell and the surrounding communities. Stakeholders at the community meeting noted:

* It is difficult to measure the prevention of crime – we are unable to quantify the amount of crime that has not occurred simply because of the presence of a responsive, resident, community police officer who is aware of events that are taking place and can work alongside those involved.
* There has been a significant up-tick in the level of crime in Paihia because of a withdrawal of the resident community police officer in that location. This experience does not necessitate the withdrawal of the Russell community police officer to cover the Paihia community, but the reinstatement of the Paihia residential community police officer from alternate resources.
* Russell has 12 licenced premises. The local population swells from 2000 to 5000 in the summer months. A speaker for the local Nauti Penguin Pub expressed strong concerns about the potential loss of a quick response time by police to deal with unruly customers, which often happens after 5 pm. As noted by police operational policy, alcohol related incidents, including driving under the influence, require immediate attention to prevent escalation.
* The voice of whānau and hāpu suggested that a lack of effective consultation about the withdrawal of the resident police officer may be once again reflective of the inability of Crown agencies to uphold their Te Tiriti responsibilities. “Meaningful partnerships” requires an investment of time and trust.

1. The impact on rural policing

The community meeting noted the recent publication of an Independent Police Conduct Authority report into policing in small communities.[[4]](#footnote-5) The community meeting further noted the positive engagement with the residential community police officer to date and supported the recommendations contained within the IPCA report. In particular, the following recommendations were considered pertinent to the current situation:

* providing regular welfare support to small community officers and their families;
* building more permanent relieving capacity for these roles;
* developing better, more systematic induction processes;
* enhanced training and a support network for small community officers;
* better supervision of officers and more community feedback on how well Police are serving these small communities.

The meeting noted that there had been no recommendations to withdraw resources from small communities, but to ensure that those police officers entrusted with serving these communities are more effectively supported. It was questioned why the NZ Police in this instance are apparently ignoring the results of this review and are not offering the support that would enable the current resident police officer to continue to reside in the area they are serving. It was felt that being a part of their local community was very important in having local knowledge and influence in order to deter crime in the first place (see above point on “prevention first”). The ability to provide a quick response is also critical to good community policing.

1. A responsible landlord

Finally, with the welfare of the current community police officer in mind, the community meeting expressed concern about whether NZ Police had behaved as a responsible landlord and upheld their obligations under the Tenancy Act.[[5]](#footnote-6) In particular:

* The NZ Police has allowed the historic Custom House to deteriorate through a lack of maintenance, creating dampness and mould and resulting in substandard rental accommodation. The NZ Police has been aware of this for a considerable length of time but has taken no steps to remedy this or to find alternative accommodation in Russell.
* The Custom House is subject to Treaty of Waitangi claim upon its disposal. It is incumbent upon the current lessee, the NZ Police, to maintain this heritage resource in a proper condition.

1. From https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/crime/russell-up-in-arms-over-plan-to-relocate-towns-sole-police-constable/7VT7AJAEQ6ILF3RNQPRL6WBQTA/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. While the distance between Russell and Paihia is 18km by road, on average it takes around an hour due to the need to use a car ferry. The car ferry runs between 7am and 10pm, after which time the distance and time required to commute between Paihia and Russell increases to around 2 hours due to the need to use unsealed “back roads”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. From https://www.police.govt.nz/about-us/programmes-initiatives/prevention-first [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. From https://www.ipca.govt.nz/Site/publications-and-media/2021-media-releases/2021-nov-04-policing-small-communities-review.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. From https://www.tenancy.govt.nz/starting-a-tenancy/new-to-tenancy/key-rights-and-responsibilities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)