

Council Briefing Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, 4 August, 2021
Time: 9:00 a.m.
Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

In Attendance

Cr Gavin Benney (Chairperson)
Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai
Cr Vince Cocurullo
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Greg Innes
Cr Greg Martin
Cr Anna Murphy
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid

Not in Attendance

Cr Nicholas Connop
Cr Shelley Deeming
Cr Jayne Golightly

Scribe Sue Reid (Democracy Adviser)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Crs Connop, Deeming and Golightly.

Cr Benney convened the briefing at 09:00 and handed over to Mr Jonny Gritt (Manager – Community Development (MCD)) and Mr David Palmer (Community Safety Officer).

2. Reports

2.1 CitySafe Briefing

MCD said they would be giving an annual update on CitySafe and updating Elected Members on the current operational environment for council's CitySafe programme. The current model has been going for ten years and they would cover what CitySafe was originally set up for and also the experiences Community Safety and CitySafe are encountering now.

The current contract expires on 25 February 2022 and this briefing is in preparation for a workshop to be held on 24 August 2021 for Elected Members to position CitySafe in whatever form they wished for the next six to eight years.

Mr Gritt said the Area Commander from the Police and two CitySafe staff will attend the first ten minutes of the workshop to cover their experiences in their roles and to set context for the workshop discussion.

Elected members feedback and discussion included:

- The subject of community policing is broad and one where, as a council, we are having to fill the gap that is not being covered by police. The question was to what extent could discussion with police be elevated to a political level as there are wide implications for Whangarei's social and economic development. Safety is a key thing for our local residents and for developing tourism and needs to be recognised with central government resourcing support as well.

Mr Gritt responded that Community Safety meet about every two months with the police Area Commander and he feels they have a sense of what council can do to assist them and what is concerning to them in terms of activity. However, other than occasional meetings with Her Worship and the Chief Executive, there are no higher central government conversations taking place though this would be desirable.

- The issue being faced is that the more CitySafe is offered, the more police will take and require as the police no longer walk the beat with this being done in effect by CitySafe.
- CitySafe was originally designed to only cover the CBD but there is a positive perspective in the community about CitySafe; who Elected Members observed are not warranted to the same degree as the Police and have only limited powers; and so there is a distinct difference from police.

Mr Gritt said CitySafe Officers possess an emphatic robustness in their dealings with the younger community and have a different type of conversation from the police when they connect with them, which is considered a strength.

Mr Palmer said the police have had a policy for a number of years that they are not allowed to inundate courts with minor antisocial behaviour, so nobody gets arrested for minor offending. They are taken to the police station, given a warning and released as central government has made a policy that these cases should not go to court. He said there needs to be a discussion with police about their approach to antisocial behaviour and what they will do about it.

- It had been noticed that, with a positive response to CitySafe, other groups within the community had been formed.

Mr Gritt said their position was that if they became aware of these groups they inform police and maintain a monitoring presence around who they are and what they are doing. There are groups which are part of our community safety, roving patrols of volunteers who add value, there are others that are not helpful and not safe.

- Issue of homelessness raised; there is great uncertainty around where homeless people can sleep and stay. They often sleep in places that perhaps they will be moved on from and Mr Gritt was asked if there was a policy in action so as to remove this uncertainty.

Mr Gritt responded that although there does not appear to be a national policy, locally, practice has developed that seeks to support the homeless, which has evolved over the last three years. They are hands-off and not moving people in the middle of the night, although they are encouraged not to obstruct a pathways or cause issues. Instead they are encouraged to connect with Open Arms and agencies such as MSD for help.

He said, from the last meeting with the police Area Commander, the top concern they have is for mental health and how the health system handles this, particularly after hours. The position of the police is that they are having conversations with the Ministry of Health but are concerned about people who are unpredictable.

Youth crime was discussed and lack of discipline being the biggest safety issue.

Mr Palmer said there was a big spike in youth crime and two additional CitySafe officers were recruited.

- There needs to be an entire picture if Elected Members are to make a decision on CitySafe. Mr Gritt said the workshop in August needs to cover CitySafe and its role, including homelessness, antisocial behaviour and what realistically can be achieved.
- Staff safety and retention needed to be addressed in the workshop as it is expensive to train new staff.

An Elected Member suggested expanding CitySafe services to Kamo and Tikipunga and looking at seeking funds for CCTV from the proceeds of crime.

Mr Palmer said they were making an application with the police to replace the current CCTV system and using funds from the proceeds of crime to transfer to the new system.

- An Elected Member requested that there should be an emphasis on CCTV cameras at the workshop, whether this might minimise the need for

as many people on patrol and what other types of support council needs to provide. It was agreed this would be included in the workshop to some degree.

- A partnership approach was suggested and accessing the funds from the proceeds of crime in a bigger way for the area might provide an opportunity. Dr Emily Henderson, the local MP could be approached in looking at the broader picture.

Mr Gritt said the focus of the workshop needs to be kept on CitySafe but the number of times they have reacted from something on the CCTVs has been instrumental to preventing crime and harm. In terms of funds from crime they are having conversations with the police about what that might comprise, but that was in the police hands as only they can access this source of investment.

- Mr Palmer was asked how many CitySafe incidents would be within the under 17 age bracket. He responded that he collects statistics manually and there is a high rate of youth incidents and the majority of health and safety incidents are with youth during the day.

He said CitySafe staff have an important role as they have formed relationships with the youth and have a different type of conversation with them than the police. They are usually able to provide guidance but can escalate to police when required.

- Some Elected Members expressed a belief that the scope of CitySafe could be reduced (hours wise) and that they should not patrol at night as it exposes them to too high risk; and that such a role belongs to the police who should hold the parents socially responsible.

Mr Gritt explained that not all parents respond to the police and sadly we face a societal condition that isn't easy to solve or manage. He said that if additional budget for CitySafe could not be found then Elected Members should consider changing the package of service and scope for CitySafe. It is important that Elected Members are very clear what they want to achieve.

- Mr Forlong said, although CitySafe was being discussed, the issues are broader and there is not a lot of reciprocity from the government. One of the options would be to look at this across the board, to call a meeting with local Labour MPs and put the whole package on the table. This would include waters, roading, housing and policing.
- There was discussion around the role of the police who should advise council what help they need. CitySafe are supporting the police to do their job and if they were not there, Elected Members felt there was a risk of them being replaced by vigilante groups.

CCTVs are monitored by volunteers and there needs to be a discussion with police around that if the number of CitySafe Officers on the streets are reduced. It is key that someone is monitoring the CCTVs.

Mr Gritt said the police will attend for five minutes at the August workshop along with CitySafe Officers and that it would be an opportunity to discuss this with them and what was on the table for discussion, which Elected Members felt could include the option of withdrawal of the CitySafe service completely.

Cr Benney (Chairperson) said it would be good for Elected Members to focus on some of the things that can be delivered for the workshop and Mr Gritt was asked if he could provide some examples of material obtained from the CCTV cameras.

3. Closure of Meeting

The briefing concluded at 10:05.