

2. INNER CITY SAFETY PROPOSAL

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The purpose of this report is to allow the Council to consider a proposal developed by He Oranga Pounamu in conjunction with Otautahi Maori Wardens to support safety and security measures in the inner city (attached).

BACKGROUND

Concerns have been expressed regarding the large numbers of young people that congregate after 10pm on most Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights in and around Cathedral Square and in the areas of Colombo and High Streets. He Oranga Pounamu were asked by the Chair of the Community Services Committee to investigate the possibility of involving the Otautahi Maori Wardens to assist in augmenting and supporting existing safety strategies already in place.

The following background comments are summarised from the proposal document.

The current situation is that Police make regular patrols, as resource constraints allow, particularly from 10pm to 3am on each Thursday, Friday and Saturday night and various Youth Workers are also active in the area during these times. Despite this, significant concern for the general safety of young people still exists at these times. Police have expressed the view that when Maori Wardens voluntarily accompany Police foot patrols the response and respect from young Maori (and from other youth generally) noticeably improved.

Businesses in the area (particularly the fast food outlets) have expressed concern about the difficulty of managing their businesses given the high numbers of young people and the behavioural problems associated with significant levels of alcohol and drug consumption.

The issues that the Committee members were aware of are as follows.

Large numbers of young people (10-11 up to late teens, early 20s) in the High Street/Colombo Street/Bus Transfer Station area though to the Square, present from 10pm to 3am. Groups also include a significant proportion of young Maori people who can often react negatively to Police intervention. There are also some anecdotal reports of younger ages being negatively influenced by older peers. Soiling of the streets in the area is reported by youth workers, apparently related to young people being scared to use the toilets in the Square. There are concerns expressed by the Police, local business and community about observed significant levels of drug and alcohol use by young people in the area. There appears to be a lack of contact and communication between Police/Wardens on patrol and Council funded and other Youth Workers. There is the problem of dangerous driving and racing of cars in Colombo Street. There also are significant numbers of youths reportedly under the influence of alcohol and drugs using buses on these nights (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) who have been reported as creating dangerous and near uncontrollable situations for bus drivers and other passengers (particularly on the last "Red" bus back to Hornby).

Otautahi Maori Wardens have been operating in the inner city area for a few months, and have been maintaining a presence in the Christchurch Casino on Friday and Saturday nights, at the request of Casino management, for which they receive a small honorarium. At the completion of this duty they have voluntarily patrolled the Square, High Street and the Bus Exchange areas as resources allowed.

As a result of this activity by the Wardens the Christchurch Police have requested the presence of wardens to accompany foot patrols on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights and it has been reported that there has been an improved behavioural response from young people when Maori Wardens are present. This applies to all youth not only young Maori.

THE PROPOSAL

While Otautahi Maori Wardens have continued to support Police and other services on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, with positive results, the continuation of increased long-term commitment to this activity is now seen as needing additional resourcing.

The proposal is in two parts, but these are seen as connected on a long-term basis.

The first part is that Otautahi Maori Wardens be contracted for an initial period of three months (12 weeks) to support the current level of Police and Youth Workers and to augment their current voluntary effort. They would provide six Wardens on each of Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights to patrol the area in pairs and to accompany Police foot patrols on a rotational basis. They would also provide transport of youth to their homes in acute need situations if appropriate and maintain a presence at critical and particular locations (such as the vicinity of the Square toilets) as required.

The second part relates to an on-going commitment beyond the initial three-month contract. During the three month period He Oranga Pounamu would take responsibility for brokering and co-ordinating a longer term proposal involving obtaining commitment and funding from a wider stakeholder base, to include the affected business community, in addition to the Council, Otautahi Maori Wardens, and the Police. It is considered that this longer-term commitment is important to maintain the presence of the wardens in the area for at least a 12-month period. This will enable the reinforcement and extension of the gains that have been made through the voluntary contributions to date and those expected to arise from the three-month trial.

DISCUSSION

The Council has budgeted a sum to deal with some security issues in the central city area and this is sufficient to cover the proposed costs of the three-month trial for employment of Maori Wardens and for the brokerage fee for the longer-term contract funding approach. As there is a longer term commitment proposed by He Oranga Pounamu, and the funding from other sources than the Council is not yet clear, some further funding would be needed in the New Year.

At present the cost of the trial three months is estimated to be \$18,438 with an additional \$3,000 to cover the long term service brokerage fee. With the current available funding the period that could be funded would be about 18 weeks. If the service commenced in December this would enable it to continue until the end of March 2002.

At that stage funding from the City Council would not be available unless further provision was made in the 2001/02 financial year. It is intended to include a similar sum for inner city safety in the 2002/03 budget but that alone would not cover a year's operation.

There is support for the concept from the Youth Advocate and the Police Youth Section, although the latter would like to see the Wardens receive some more training and perhaps have more contact with the independent youth workers. However these matters could be addressed should a contract be entered into with the Otautahi Maori Wardens.

CONCLUSION

From the information obtained it appears that the proposal to contract Otautahi Maori Wardens to undertake the support and security activities in the inner city area could have a number of advantages. There is funding available to cover the costs of the three-month trial and to provide the cost of brokering further external funding for the continuation of the project over a full year.

However, it should be noted that if a commitment were made to continue the project for longer than the three-month trial period additional funds from City Council sources would be required. The amount would not be clear until the brokerage process has been undertaken but at the costs quoted in the proposal a full year could cost in the order of \$80,000 if the service is provided for three nights a week. This sum may be reduced if, during the winter months the number of nights serviced was reduced. Once the initial trial period is completed a review could be undertaken as to its effectiveness.

Recommendation: That the Council agree to undertake the proposed three-month trial and request that He Oranga Pounamu determine other sources of stakeholder funding and support for the continuation of the service over a longer period.