

COMMUNITY POLICE: VISIBLE, ACCESSIBLE, RESPONSIVE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

LABOUR'S COMMITMENT

250 extra community police on the streets over the next two years.

POLICY OBJECTIVE

The Government has invested heavily in police numbers and resources since 1999. This has contributed to outstanding police results in reducing crime. Crime statistics indicate that both serious and high volume crimes like burglaries have reduced. The crime rate is now the lowest it has been in more than twenty years. The public also need visible engagement with an accessible police presence on their streets, to provide confidence and reassurance that their local community is a safe place for their family to live in.

Labour will therefore target a dedicated personnel resource to the kind of high visibility, high engagement community policing work that demonstrates presence and engagement with local communities and their concerns.

This will be a new layer of policing, built on the existing foundations of community policing, working to complement the outstanding job being done by police already.: a second front against crime.

Community police work with their communities to reduce crime and contribute to a diminished fear of crime, which can in some cases be as crippling to communities as crime itself. They are visible, accessible and responsive.

Activities for community cops include:

- Regular walk-throughs of shopping precincts.
- Dropping into shops and businesses to talk to business people about any concerns they may have.
- Encouraging and helping community groups or main-street business associations to hold meetings to discuss a community approach to local problems such as graffiti.
- Providing crime prevention advice.
- Building relationships and knowledge of local communities and identifying at-risk individuals and families and referring them to support agencies as appropriate.
- Designing and coordinating response to local crime problems.
- School education visits.
- Liaising with local government and community boards.
- Working with community volunteers such as community patrols and neighbourhood support groups. Contributing a brief column to local community newspapers.

Community police work in and with local communities to prevent crime, and build strong and confident communities.

In the past, community policing has at times relied too much on the individual skills, experience and motivation of the local community constable. To strengthen community policing, and build an effective new layer of policing, Labour will ensure that community police are well led and supported by a nationwide coordination structure. elevate the strategic importance of this policing role and ensure it is supported through the development of nationwide leadership. Community police will operate in teams, rather than just individually, where this is geographically feasible and appropriate. The new nationwide coordination structure will encourage sharing of best-practice and skills development, and ensure that community police are supported appropriately by other police district resources.

Financial implications

The commitment means doubling community policing numbers within 2 years. This will require an addition to Police baseline funding of \$12.5 million in year 1, rising to \$25 million in year 2 and out-years.

There may be additional costs associated with leasing shop spaces to establish new community policing bases in areas where none currently exist. Decisions on local 'shop-front' presence will be made in partnership with communities – the main objective is not to have community police sitting in offices, but rather to have them engaging out in the community. In some cases the local community may choose to help support a shop-front presence where this is particularly important to them, for example through business association donations, fundraising, and local authority support.

LABOUR'S LAW AND ORDER RECORD IN GOVERNMENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Record police resources delivering record results

- The commitment to recruit 250 community police over the next two years means that Labour will have added over 1670 police positions since becoming government in 1999.
- There were 7,577 sworn police officers in New Zealand as at 31 May 2005, and 9926 police in all. That compares to 7,027 sworn officers and a total of 8767 police at the end of 1999. The further 265 staff announced in Budget 2005 will take total police numbers above 10,000 for the first time ever.
- The Police operational budget is currently \$1.03 billion (excl. GST: 2005/06) – this is a record high and approximately \$280 million more per year than in 1999.
- Funding has been specifically directed since 1999 at setting up specialist police teams to target burglary, methamphetamine, gangs and youth offending, and make better use of DNA laws.
- The record resourcing of police and focus on strategic priorities means we now have the lowest crime rate since 1982, and a greater percentage of crime is being solved now than at any time since 1987. Significant reductions have been achieved in the high volume crimes that affect ordinary New Zealanders, like burglary.
- Official Police crime statistics show that both total recorded crime and the crime rate have come down substantially since their peak in 1996. The crime rate for the 2004 calendar year is now 21.8 per cent lower than it was in 1996.
- There were 406,363 offences recorded in 2004. This is 14.9 per cent less in absolute volume than the peak of 477,596 offences recorded in 1996.
- The resolution rate for all recorded crime is now 44.6 per cent – the best resolution rate since 1987. The resolution rate in 1996 was just 36.8 per cent.

Better legislation helping to drive the crime rate down

- In line with the wishes of 92 per cent of New Zealanders in the 1999 law and order referendum, the Government's Sentencing Act 2002 is delivering longer sentences across the board, as well as the longest sentences ever for the most serious crimes, and the Parole Act 2002 is seeing inmates serve a greater proportion of those sentences in prison. Safety of the community is now the overriding consideration in every parole decision.
- The Bail Act 2000 is seeing fewer people granted bail, with an estimated 1000 more serious and repeat offenders denied bail in 2003 than in 2000.

- Better legislation on DNA and more investigative powers for police, combined with record police resources are contributing to better crime resolution rates.

Sentence lengths

- Average prison sentences under the Sentencing Act 2002 are longer across the board.
- 23 per cent of convicted violent offenders were sent to jail in 2003, to serve an average sentence of 29.7 months. Both those figures are the highest recorded in 10 years.
- 43 per cent of burglars were imprisoned in 2003 – the highest recorded in 10 years. The average length of their sentence was also five months longer than it was in 1994.
- The average non-parole period imposed with life sentences is now three years longer than the average prior to the Sentencing Act 2002.
- The longest non-parole periods within a life sentence for murder have also been handed down: periods up to 30 years have been set. By comparison, in 1987 the longest non-parole period for murder was just 7 years.
- Preventive detention – which is a life sentence – is now available for a wider range of sexual and violent offending. Under the new laws use of preventive detention has doubled.

Reparation

- The Sentencing Act's greater emphasis on criminals being made to pay reparation to their victims saw reparation of \$18.8 million imposed in 2003 – the highest figure ever.

Tackling the causes of crime

- Government is tackling the causes of crime through early intervention (for example, Project Early and Reducing Youth Offending), more support for families, and economic policies that have delivered the lowest unemployment rates since 1987.
- Lower unemployment is contributing to a falling crime rate – New Zealand now has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the OECD.