
SUBMISSION ON COST RECOVERY FOR POLICE VETTING SERVICE

1. Purpose of report

To seek this Committee's approval for the draft submission (attached as Appendix 1) to the New Zealand Police in response to the *Cost Recovery For Certain Police Services* consultation document.

2. Executive summary

The New Zealand Police (the Police) are consulting on cost recovery for certain Police services. Cost recovery is seen as an opportunity to free up police resources and focus funding on areas that directly contribute to the prevention of crime.

Cost recovery could be implemented where private benefits accrue to identifiable users, implementation is practical and cost recovery would drive efficient procurement. The consultation document identifies a range of potential areas where this might apply.

The police vetting service is being proposed for cost recovery. Organisations use the police vetting service as part of a background check on employees or volunteers who will have contact with vulnerable people. Only organisations that work with vulnerable people are approved to submit vetting requests.¹

Any other services identified in the future will be consulted on separately. Officers recommend assessing each proposed service on its merits, and only supporting cost recovery where the benefits to ratepayers and the community clearly outweigh any risks.

However, as a general policy principle it is always going to be difficult to clearly separate public and private benefit. When it is unclear or where public benefit is in the mix, officers would not support charging for the service.

While the impact of charging for vetting would be minimal for the Council, officers disagree with the rationale put forward for charging for this service because:

- a) Vetting directly prevents crime and benefits the community at large.
- b) Charging could mean some organisations (for example community organisations reliant on large number of volunteers) would use vetting less, increasing the risk to vulnerable people.

¹ <http://www.police.govt.nz/vetting-guidelines>

- c) Procurement of police vetting must be based on public safety not cost. The Council's use of vetting would not change, so the costs would just be shifted from taxpayers to ratepayers and the community.

3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Strategy and Policy Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Approve the attached submission (Appendix 1) on Cost Recovery For Certain Police Services as the Wellington City Council Submission to be sent to New Zealand Police by 5 March 2013.*
3. *Agree to delegate to the Chief Executive and the Social Portfolio Leader, the authority to amend the proposed submission from the Wellington City Council to The New Zealand Police to include any amendments agreed by the Committee and any associated minor consequential edits.*

4. Background

The Government is considering introducing an amendment to the Policing Act 2008 that would enable the Police to recover the costs of providing certain services. The Police have released a consultation document and will report back to the Government with recommendations following analysis of submissions.

The Police are consulting on general principles and criteria for short-listing services for possible cost-recovery. Some services, such as dealing with lost and found property, maintaining order at commercial events and police vetting, have been categorised as 'additional' to general public policing.

Where practical, the Police seek to shift funding for services from general taxation to the specific users or beneficiaries of the service. This will enable the Police to free up resources and focus funding on areas that directly contribute to the prevention of crime. In line with this priority, the Police have adopted 'Prevention First' as their national strategy and "number one priority":

Prevention First puts prevention at the forefront of everything we do, ultimately to reduce crime and crashes, gain greater control of the criminal environment and make New Zealand a safer place to live, visit and to do business.²

There could be wider implications if the Council were to pay for some Police services, and both risks and benefits for the community. Where the benefits to identifiable users are primarily private, and the benefits outweigh the risks, there will be grounds for the Police to charge for services.

² <http://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/resources/strategic/prevention-first-strategy-2011-2015.pdf>

4.1 Cost recovery for the police vetting service

Only the police vetting service has being put forward as a candidate for cost recovery at this stage.

The following section outlines the arguments put forward in the consultation document for applying cost recovery to the police vetting service. These arguments are discussed in section 5 in the context of the Council's use of police vetting.

4.2 Cost recovery from users and beneficiaries

The consultation document suggests that in the case of police vetting, the mitigation of reputational risk provides a primarily private benefit to the user:

Approved organisations requesting a vetting check on an individual benefit because the information supplied allows them to make more informed decisions about the suitability of that individual for employment in the organisation, to act as a volunteer, to conduct business, or to gain citizenship. This in turn helps to mitigate the risks of any issues occurring with the service they provide.

4.3 Cost recovery for efficient procurement

The consultation document also states that cost recovery for the vetting service would encourage users to reassess the quantity of vetting checks they demand, freeing up resources to focus funding on areas that directly contribute to the prevention of crime:

Police does not want to simply stop providing any service, or to provide any service at sub-optimal levels. Recovering the costs of providing certain services is one way that the Police can continue to provide them without compromising the provision of front-line services.

5. Discussion

As a general policy principle it is always going to be difficult to clearly separate public and private benefit in the delivery of police services. When it is unclear or where public benefit is in the mix, officers would not support charging for the service.

5.1 How and why does the Council use Police Vetting?

The Council vets around 350 staff each year, including all Recreation Wellington staff and some Libraries staff. The Council only vets people who work with children and/or at risk adults (including the elderly and people with special needs).

5.2 Beneficiaries of police vetting

Police vetting is smart and effective policing. The Council's use of police vetting is wholly consistent with the Prevention First Strategy – the “number one priority” of the Police.

Preventing crime through police vetting helps protect the Council's reputation but this is just a side benefit. Reputational benefit does not drive the Council's use of police vetting.

The beneficiaries of police vetting are vulnerable people who may have otherwise become victims of crime. The wider community also benefits from less crime (including lower policing costs for investigating and prosecuting crime).

While the Police can easily identify the Council as a user of the vetting service, it would be difficult for the Council to identify direct beneficiaries and pass on the cost. This means that if the Council were to pay for police vetting, the cost would just shift from taxpayers to ratepayers.

5.3 Potential impacts of charging for police vetting

Charging community service agencies for police vetting could introduce a barrier to accessing this service, particularly for smaller community service agencies that rely on large numbers of volunteers and that work with vulnerable people.

One of the stated aims of charging for police services is to drive efficient procurement. The Council's use of police vetting is based on public safety not cost. The Council would not be in the position to reassess its use of police vetting if charging was implemented for this service.

The current practice of using guidelines to screen police vetting applications is a much more appropriate service procurement tool. For example, an application to vet an accounts administrator would not currently be accepted by the Police.

5.4 Consultation and Engagement

No consultation has been undertaken at this point.

5.5 Financial considerations

The direct financial impact if the Council were to be charged for its use of the police vetting service is likely to be minor.

5.6 Climate change impacts and considerations

Does not apply to this paper.

5.4 Long-term plan considerations

No impact.

6. Conclusion

The Council's use of police vetting helps to prevent crime and protect vulnerable people. The benefits accrue broadly throughout the community, rather than directly to the Council.

Charging could mean some organisations (for example community organisations reliant on large number of volunteers) would use vetting less, increasing the risk to vulnerable people.

Procurement of police vetting must be based on public safety not cost. The Council's use of vetting would not change, so the costs would just be shifted from taxpayers to ratepayers.

Officers disagree with the rational for charging for police vetting put forward in the consultation document. Officers recommend assessing each proposed service on its merits, and only supporting cost recovery where the benefits to ratepayers and the community clearly outweigh any risks.

Contact Officer: *Nigel Taptiklis, Policy Advisor*

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1) Strategic fit / Strategic outcome

N/a

2) LTP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

N/a

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

There are no Treaty of Waitangi considerations

4) Decision-making

This is not a significant decision.

5) Consultation

a) General consultation

This is an issue that could impact on community groups that the Council works closely with. The response recognises the potential impact charging could have on their services.

b) Consultation with Maori

6) Legal implications

There are no legal implications.

7) Consistency with existing policy

This is consistent with existing policy.

14 February 2013

Submissions on Cost Recovery for Certain Police Services
Policy Group
Police National Headquarters
PO Box 3017
WELLINGTON, 6140

Wellington City Council's submission on cost recovery for certain Police services

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on cost recovery for certain police services. The consultation document opens a valuable but difficult discussion on when it is possible and appropriate for public organisations to charge for goods and services.

We appreciate the focus of the document is on just one service, and the opportunity to comment on cost recovery for that service. The Council will assess any proposals for cost recovery on the risks and benefits for the proposed service. This submission focuses on cost recovery for the police vetting service. As identified by the consultation document, in a practical sense it would be easy to charge users a fee for this service.

However, the Council disagrees with the rationale for charging for police vetting put forward in the consultation document. The Council's assessment of its use of the police vetting service indicates that charging for police vetting will not shift the cost onto the direct beneficiaries of this service nor drive efficient procurement.

We consider that the Council's use of police vetting helps to prevent crime and protect vulnerable people. The benefits accrue broadly throughout the community, rather than directly to the Council.

Charging could mean some organisations (for example community organisations reliant on large number of volunteers) would use vetting less, increasing the risk to vulnerable people. Procurement of police vetting is based on public safety not cost. The Council's use of police vetting would not change, so the costs would just be shifted from taxpayers to ratepayers.

If cost recovery for police vetting is implemented, we would urge caution in its application, so that vulnerable people are not put at risk, and the costs are not just shifted from taxpayers to ratepayers.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Stephanie Cook
Social Portfolio Leader
Wellington City Council

Submission on cost recovery for certain Police services

General Principle

As a general principle it is always going to be difficult to clearly separate public and private benefit. When it is unclear or where public benefit is in the mix, Wellington City Council would not support charging for police services.

How and why does Wellington City Council use police vetting?

The Council vets around 350 staff each year, including all Recreation Wellington staff and some Libraries staff. The Council only vets people who work with children and/or at risk adults (including the elderly and people with special needs).

Who benefits?

Police vetting is smart, effective policing and the Council's use of police vetting is wholly consistent with the Prevention First Strategy – the *"number one priority"* of the Police.

Preventing crime through police vetting helps protect the Council's reputation but this is just a side benefit. Reputational benefit does not drive the Council's use of police vetting.

The beneficiaries of police vetting are vulnerable people who may have otherwise become victims of crime. The wider community also benefits from less crime (including lower policing costs for investigating and prosecuting crime).

While the Police can easily identify the Council as a user of the vetting service, it would be difficult for the Council to identify direct beneficiaries and pass on the cost. This means that if the Council were to pay for police vetting, the cost would just shift from taxpayers to ratepayers.

Potential impacts of charging for police vetting

Charging community service agencies for police vetting could introduce a barrier to accessing this service, particularly for smaller community service agencies that rely on large numbers of volunteers and that work with vulnerable people.

One of the stated aims of charging for police services is to drive efficient procurement. The Council's use of police vetting is based on public safety not cost. The Council would not be in the position to reassess its use of police vetting if charging was implemented for this service.

The current practice of using guidelines to screen police vetting applications is a much more appropriate service procurement tool. For example, an application to vet an accounts administrator would not currently be accepted by the Police.

Conclusion

The Council's use of police vetting helps to prevent crime and protect vulnerable people. The benefits accrue broadly throughout the community, rather than directly to the Council.

Charging could mean some organisations (for example community organisations reliant on large number of volunteers) would use vetting less, increasing the risk to vulnerable people.

Procurement of police vetting must be based on public safety not cost. The Council's use of vetting would not change, so the costs would just be shifted from taxpayers to ratepayers.

Considering the issues we have identified in this submission, the Council does not consider that it is appropriate for the Police to charge social sector organisations or the Council for use of the police vetting service.