



NEW ZEALAND
POLICE
Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa

Response to “*Towards a stronger safety net to prevent abuse of children*”

New Zealand Police response to the Independent Children’s Monitor’s report, *Towards a stronger safety net to prevent abuse of children*

Submitted as required by section 30 of the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022

July 2024

Tēnā koe

Purpose

1. This response outlines Police's feedback and next steps to the Independent Children's Monitor's (ICM's) report, *Towards a stronger safety net to prevent abuse of children*. It is provided to the ICM pursuant to section 30 of the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022 (the Act).

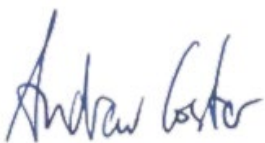
Background

2. Following the murder of Malachi Subecz in 2021, six agencies (including Police) commissioned Dame Karen Poutasi to review the Children's System as a whole, to identify ways to improve the system to better protect any child in Malachi's circumstances in the future. Dame Karen's report was published in November 2022 with 14 recommendations. Oranga Tamariki has led the work to address the recommendations via several cross-agency working groups. Police representatives have been involved in most of these working groups.
3. Recommendation 14 of Dame Karen's report stated that: *in order that change can be monitored, the recommendations made in this report should be reviewed in one year's time by the Independent Children's Monitor in its new system-wide role.*
4. Police and other agencies received the ICM's progress report on 10 June 2024. Pursuant to section 30 of the Act, this response outlines:
 - a) what Police intends to do in response to the ICM's findings;
 - b) the timeframe in which Police intends to make any necessary changes; and
 - c) how Police intends to monitor the impact of those changes.
5. Oranga Tamariki led a joint cross-agency response to the ICM's findings, with each agency also providing responses specific to their agency. This response is to be read alongside the cross-agency response led by Oranga Tamariki.

Next steps

6. Police welcomes the ICM's report and the impetus it provides to ensure children's sector agencies collaborate at a greater pace to address Dame Karen's recommendations. We accept the report's findings and will continue to actively participate in cross-agency work to implement Dame Karen's recommendations.
7. The table on the following pages outlines our point-by-point response to findings in the ICM's report, and the specific actions and intentions Police has underway to address these findings.
8. This response has been published on Police's external facing website as part of our commitment to openness and transparency.

Nāku noa, nā



Andrew Coster
Commissioner of Police

Subject Area	ICM Finding	Police Intentions in Response	Timeframes	Monitoring Change
Family Harm	<p>The ICM reports on hearing through monitoring that “NZ Police pulling back from family harm” has a flow on effect to the ability of partner agencies to keep children safe.</p>	<p>There is a vast spectrum of incidents that fall within our definition of family harm (which is a much wider term than family violence). At the low end, Police presently responds to minor family disagreements and disputes, right through to those involving violence, criminality, and immediate danger. Our focus is on ensuring we can attend those events, in a timely and appropriate fashion, which most need police attention.</p> <p>Given extremely high demand across the spectrum of family harm, and the need for us to respond to other incidents that are squarely within Police’s statutory responsibilities, we are exploring how to triage differently for family harm events that present a low-risk; and are more indicative of family dysfunction, as opposed to presenting any real risk of violence. Police is simply not resourced to provide a response to all situations where families require assistance, and we need other social supports to step up in this area.</p>	<p>This work is ongoing and subject to the availability of partner agencies.</p> <p>Police acknowledges there is still a lot of work for us to do and we cannot do it in isolation.</p> <p>We continue to work alongside Te Puna Aonui towards aspirations set out in Te Aorerekura, including exploring how we facilitate the design of alternative pathways for people experiencing family harm who do not require an emergency Police response.</p> <p>We also continue to partner and engage with communities to ensure our responses work for those we serve.</p>	<p>As other social supports step up to support alternative pathways for those experiencing family harm, we expect to see an increased ability for Police to be able to respond to those requiring an emergency Police response.</p>
Child Protection Policies	<p>The ICM has encouraged agencies to ensure their Child Protection Policies are kept up to date.</p>	<p>Reviews of the Police’s Child Protection policies have been delayed due to staff turnover and the potential for changes with the review of the Child Protection Protocol in response to Dame Karen’s report. Once the outcome of the Child Protection Protocol work is determined, Police will make any necessary changes to Police policies.</p> <p>Current Police policy requires Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF) assessments to be undertaken by Districts every four months and national reviews annually. The QAIF is outlined in more detail in Police’s Child Protection Investigation Policy and Procedures.</p>	<p>Work on the Child Protection Protocol is ongoing but expected to be resolved this year. The reviews and publishing of the policies is expected by the end of 2024.</p> <p>Police District QAIFs will continue to occur every four months, with annual national QAIFs completed.</p>	<p>There have been minimal changes to Police practice since the last review of these policies, hence minimal impact is expected. Any impacts from further changes will be identified through the QAIF.</p>

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Identifying and Supporting Dependent Children	The ICM encourages agencies to ensure better visibility of identifying and meeting the needs of detainees’ dependents. Page 17 notes that agencies, including Police “had either updated or were in the process of updating forms to include a field to asking about the existence of dependent children.”	Ensuring Police understand the needs of detainee dependants is reflected in current policy, however improvements with more detailed guidance are to be made to ensure greater visibility. Current Police practice involves addressing the short-term care needs for dependents and if there are care and protection concerns the information is provided to Oranga Tamariki.	We are aiming for the improvements to Police policy to be completed in late August 2024. Police continue to prioritise other custody policy and improvement work on the areas that will have the most impact on detainee safety. Police will continue to address the short-term care needs for dependents, and report care and protection concerns to Oranga Tamariki.	It is expected that provision of detailed guidance for custody staff will result in greater efficiencies and handling of detainees with dependents.
		Police is reviewing what information is collected through the arrest and custody process that could be provided to the Court to provide a safety net to ensure dependents are visible. The Duty Lawyer Instruction Sheet was amended earlier in 2024 to specifically include a question about dependent children. However, information gathered by duty lawyers is generally confidential and may not always be disclosed to Police or the Court. Ensuring the Police prosecutor is aware of what is known by Police staff involved with the arrest would provide an opportunity for further enquiries.	This work is ongoing. Police is still fully socialising this internally to assess the utility of providing this information considering the process in place within the court environment, what information will be relevant to the court, and how to minimise the amount of private information about dependents being shared.	It is expected obtaining additional information through court processes would result in greater efficiencies and handling of detainees with dependents. However, current changes will not be able to be centrally monitored for frequency of application and attributable impact as it would be stored in free text on individual reports.
Multi-agency teams	The ICM noted that while there are examples of multi-agency teams as per the recommendation in Dame Karen’s report, they are not operating in every community.	The multi-agency teams Police participates in to address family harm are one of the most relevant partnerships for addressing the circumstances like Malachi’s. As outlined in the joint response to the ICM’s report, a current state analysis of these multi-agency responses is being undertaken by Te Puna Aonui to better understand how local responses are operating to inform a longer-term work programme to strengthen existing processes and structures across New Zealand.	This work is ongoing, and we await completion of the work being undertaken by Te Puna Aonui.	Following completion of the current state analysis, and implementation of any next steps, we will be able to assess if multi-agency teams are operating in every community.

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Information Sharing	The ICM encourage enhanced information sharing between agencies to ensure that those children at risk of harm are supported.	<p>Police has been involved with the cross-agency working groups addressing recommendations 1, 2 and 6. The response to findings with respect to these recommendations is outlined in the joint agency response.</p> <p>Police continue to proactively support the wider information sharing regimes within the Oranga Tamariki Act that relate to the wellbeing of children and young people.</p>	This work is ongoing.	With the exception of reporting the number of referrals made through the Police AWHI application, it is difficult to monitor information sharing that occurs at community level as it is not recorded centrally for national oversight.
Reports of Concern	The ICM noted there has been a reduction in Reports of Concern (ROC), however this has not been attributed to a lack of need and no factors have been identified as to the cause. However, the ICM cites a lack of feedback when reports are made by Police to Oranga Tamariki.	<p>Currently, family harm incidents attended by Police are reported using an application on Police-issued smart phones. However, where there are concerns for the safety and wellbeing of children at the incident, a ROC needs to be completed on return to the Police station.</p> <p>While statistics indicate Police submit a large volume of ROCs to Oranga Tamariki, Police has identified inefficiencies in the need to return to a Police station to complete ROCs. An internal review is being undertaken by Police to determine how we could enable ROCs to be sent directly from officers at a scene.</p> <p>It is anticipated this will be enabled by a web-based ROC form being explored by Oranga Tamariki to enable agencies (including Police) to make reports online.</p>	<p>This work is ongoing. Police and Oranga Tamariki have met to discuss issues associated with ROC.</p> <p>Planning is at the early stages, therefore there are no indicative dates to complete this work. The Police Information Communication and Technology (ICT) team are connecting with Oranga Tamariki ICT to further explore options.</p>	<p>If completed it is anticipated this will enable improved efficiencies in ROCs submitted to Oranga Tamariki.</p> <p>This will go some way to responding to what the ICM will be looking for in 12 months’ time with respect to how information is shared between agencies.</p>