

# SAFETY HUBS AND PARTNERSHIP POLICING: AN INNOVATIVE EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY SAFETY

Coordination, collaboration and partnership  
working in Auckland City Centre

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October 2025

SUGGESTED CITATION: Bradley, T. & Tompson, L. (2025). *Safety Hubs and Partnership Policing: An innovative experiment in Community Safety*. A report commissioned by Community Patrols New Zealand.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report presents key insights from an exploratory study of the Safety Hub initiative that first appeared in the run up to the 2023 Women's World Cup in Auckland. It highlights the potential and the pitfalls of partnership-based approaches to community safety in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study was based on a series of in-person focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with key partners and stakeholders including Community Patrols New Zealand (CPNZ) volunteers, NZ Police (Auckland city Beat officers and Liaison staff), Auckland council staff and Ngā Watene Māori (Māori Wardens). Data collection for this study took place over a four-month period from November 2024 through to February 2025, structured around the availability of participants. The study employed a thematic analysis methodology to systematically identify and organise key themes and issues within the qualitative data gathered from interviews and focus groups. From this analysis several key insights emerged:

- **Motivation and momentum:** The original Safety Hub at Queens Wharf was born of shared concern and practical urgency. It reflected an appetite among diverse safety actors to try something different, grounded in visibility, support, and collaborative presence. The motivation was less about formal mandates and more about community-led initiative and relational trust.
- **Adaptive, but ad hoc planning:** Planning was pragmatic, driven by availability and the desire to mobilise partners quickly. This allowed for speed and flexibility, but also meant roles and expectations were not always clear.
- **Aims evolved through doing:** The Hub's purpose matured as it took shape. While early goals around visibility and reassurance remained constant, the Hub's function diversified from volunteer coordination and collaboration to a place of belonging, learning, and cultural presence.
- **Diverse but complementary motivations:** Partners brought different aspirations to the table: civic duty, cultural care, public reassurance, crime deterrence, or pathway building. These motivations were not in conflict - the diversity was in fact a strength - but they point to the need for a unifying Kaupapa to harness contributions effectively.
- **Collaboration requires infrastructure:** While the vision of multi-agency working was widely supported, true partnership needs more than goodwill. Coordination, communication tools, shared briefings, and a consistent presence are essential to move from parallel work to integrated safety practice.
- **Operational delivery was uneven:** The Hub succeeded in creating visibility and a sense of place - but rostering, information-sharing, and feedback loops were inconsistent. Many volunteers felt uncertain about impact, and operational integration across groups (especially with police and council staff) remained limited.
- **Volunteers are central but under supported:** The initiative relied heavily on volunteer commitment, often without adequate supporting infrastructure or recognition. Supporting these individuals through coordination, feedback, and simple amenities will be crucial to maintaining momentum and morale.

- **Cultural grounding matters:** Māori and Pasifika Wardens brought a relational, community-centric model to safety work that resonated deeply with public users of the Hub. Embedding tikanga-informed practice and ensuring cultural leadership within planning structures will strengthen future iterations.
- **Clarity and communication are crucial:** Unclear or inconsistent communication and weakened operational cohesion limited the Hub's potential. Clear expectations, shared goals, and formalised systems for communication and tasking were repeatedly identified as areas for improvement.
- **Safety Hubs as a concept has strong potential:** Despite limitations, all partners expressed strong support for the Safety Hub model. Its adaptability, visibility, and potential for partnership make it a compelling approach to public safety in urban settings - particularly if lessons from the pilot phase inform its future rollout.

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# Acknowledgements

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This research was made possible through the generous contributions and support of many individuals and organisations. We are especially grateful to the research participants who shared their time, insights, and experiences with us.

Several organisations were instrumental to the success of this project, including Community Patrols New Zealand (CPNZ), New Zealand Police, Auckland Council, and Ngā Watene Māori (Māori Wardens).

We extend our sincere thanks to our research assistants, Amy Fitzgerald and Gabrielle Watson, for their expert work in data analysis and coding. We also thank CPNZ patrol leader Le'ah Beaumont for her invaluable help in recruiting patrollers for our focus group discussions, and Munirah Zuber (CPNZ) for her administrative and logistical support.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the individuals listed below for their various forms of assistance and support.

Chris Lawton (CPNZ)

Abtin Karimi (NZ Police Liaison officer)

Viv Beck (Heart of the City)

Adrian Wilson, Karen Smith, Duncan McLaggan, Judy Grieve & Michal Dziwulski (Auckland Council)

Grant Tetzlaff and David Christoffersen (NZP)

Matarora Smith (Ngā Watene Māori).

## Motivation for the pop-up and subsequent Safety Hubs

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The Safety Hub initiative emerged at the intersection of political urgency and opportunity. For several interviewees, heightened concern about crime and disorder in the central city and the impending arrival of the FIFA Women's World Cup, along with tens of thousands of visitors, were the catalysts for a pop-up Safety Hub, the first of its kind in Aotearoa NZ. Following initial discussions with New Zealand Police (NZP), Heart of the City (an inner-city business association), and CPNZ (a national association of volunteer community patrols) together sought to establish a local initiative that offered both visibility and reassurance.

As a CPNZ representative involved in its establishment, pointed out:

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*“Those were the days where it was still all doom and gloom and crime... it was the worst ... in terms of crime.”*

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A combination of cascading factors, set against the backdrop of a long-term decline in public perceptions of inner-city safety, thus helped galvanise local action. Interviewees described a strong sense of “wanting to do something” and the Safety Hub concept therefore began as a community-led presence at the Queens Wharf fan zone during FIFA events. The CPNZ Hub Coordinator, for example, explained:

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*“the pop up was a was a bespoke idea. [The] World Cup's coming up, [we thought it] would be great to have a presence in the fan zones, you know, where all the people are congregating”.*

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A member of the Auckland Council Safety team similarly explained the wider context in which the 'pop-up' hub was established:

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*“We hadn't invested in beat policing yet, we hadn't invested in expanding the city watch or the safety patrols at that point, so there was a big gap in physical beat policing and in the presence of our compliance officers...the hub was put in there to kind of resolve that gap”*

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The location was strategic: a visible public space near the ferry terminal and the fan zones, but also a spot known for loitering, anti-social behaviour and disorder. The initial Pop-Up Hub, a repurposed shipping container, served as a proof of concept for a new form of collaborative, community-driven safety work and a focal point for community patrols and public reassurance. For various stakeholders, the pop-up demonstrated that collaborative community-based safety work that offers a highly visible, reassuring presence has value.

The motivation behind the Safety Hub was, therefore, both reactive - a response to declining public perceptions of crime in the inner city and the absence of capable guardianship - and

proactive - demonstrating the potential capability of community-led partnership policing, and how that could operate in practice. As a short-term 'pop-up' it provided a base for coordinated safety work, served as a recruiting tool for younger volunteers and facilitated practical experiments with novel patrol methods including proactive public interaction via foot patrols and mobile patrolling via e-scooters. The concept also envisioned daily engagement with the public, with the Hub promoted as a 'safe space' from which the public could seek assistance and a base to gather informal community intelligence; functions not always covered by police patrols at that time.

Some participants recognised early on that the pop-up had potential to be more than a stopgap measure and could represent a platform for developing new forms of visible guardianship. The CPNZ hub coordinator explained the rationale for moving to a permanent presence:

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*[There was a] “general unease of people, but we’ve managed to do a lot...with patrolling of a variety of types, and I think that’s contributing to public safety overall ...it had got some legs, and I thought well let’s keep this going...”*

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What began as a short-term solution to a long-standing public perception problem, one brought into sharp relief by a high-profile international event, quickly grew into something more enduring. The perceived success of the pop-up led to interest in establishing a permanent presence and in replicating the Hub concept at other sites across the inner city. This eventual expansion was helped along by a mix of grassroots commitment and high-level political support. A CPNZ stakeholder recalled how the support provided by senior political figures ensured the transition from a fixed-term pop-up to something more permanent:

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*“At the same time... it was the Deputy Prime Minister at the time... she got involved, more of a political thing, but I’m OK with it.”*

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A member of the Auckland council safety team similarly noted the political context of the transition to a permanent Hub and that it was:

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*“a political reaction from the then Labour government coming into the last election around safety...because policing had been redirected elsewhere”*

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While stakeholders acknowledged the benefits of central government support, and the added momentum it generated, most emphasised that the driving force for a permanent Hub was local initiative and a desire to fill a gap left by overstretched police and under-resourced council services

In summary, the motivation for the pop-up and its transition to a permanent fixture was multifaceted. It was driven by recognition of the long-term decline in public perceptions of inner-city safety, and the determination to install proactive safety measures during a major international event. At the same time, it also reflected a deeper appetite for, and helped catalyse

locally led, multi-agency partnership working across the inner city. The initiative filled a vacuum, generated goodwill, and laid the groundwork for a more permanent collaborative approach to local crime prevention and community safety. It is for these reasons that the ‘story’ of the Safety Hub cannot be recounted in isolation. In addition to its own contribution to community safety, the Safety Hub also encouraged more ambitious plans for a functional multi-agency eco-system of community safety in Auckland city.

## Planning and consultation process

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The original pop-up Safety Hub was an exercise in local initiative, brought to life through fast-moving, opportunistic, and highly relational planning. Rather than a tightly governed or formally structured initiative, it emerged from overlapping conversations and a shared determination to respond quickly to public safety concerns.

Following informal dialogue about the possibility of establishing a city centre patrol, NZP gathered key community stakeholders to discuss local safety strategies. Heart of the City and CPNZ found common ground in the idea of establishing a ‘presence’ in and around the world cup fan zone, and from which sprang the idea for the Pop-up Hub. One of the key partners recalled:

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*“We were talking about...you know, the problems of various things and... about what can we do? Like you know, do something, not just talk about things, The HoC chair said look we're setting up for the FIFA World Cup, the fan zone on Queens Wharf, and saw the value of us doing something together, and so we discussed about having a presence at the entrance to the Wharf.”*

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These early efforts were marked by a readiness to act quickly despite limited infrastructure and prior planning. The process was described as pragmatic and highly adaptive. The planning involved few, if any, formal consultation documents and focused instead on the logistics of securing what was needed to get the Hub and the patrols operational. However, as a member of the Auckland council safety team suggested, if the initiative was to be repeated now *“it would be a much more thorough process”*.

The eventual site selected for the pop-up reflected this pragmatic, adaptive attitude and was chosen by virtue of a suitable ‘venue’, a refurbished shipping container, being readily available and serviceable, if not truly comfortable. The CPNZ Hub coordinator, one of the key partners involved in the initial conversations, described touring the proposed site, the ferry terminal, with other partners:

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*“we were standing next to a small container, going what's this? who owns it...would that be suitable...So before we knew it, we were in, we had that premises available to us for pretty well every night during the FIFA cup”*

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While various stakeholders were involved from the outset, including Eke Panuku, Heart of the City, and Māori Wardens, others were brought on board through word-of-mouth or informal networks. The FIFA event provided the impetus and a window of opportunity, and those already active in city safety were mobilised quickly. This agile approach allowed the project to move swiftly, but also created challenges around its precise aims, the distribution of responsibilities, and the formalisation of roles.

This style of planning, grounded in pre-existing relationships and local knowledge, enabled the pop-up Hub to launch in time for the World Cup. However, it also meant that some groups came into the initiative with different understandings of its precise aims and structure and the roles and the specific contributions expected from each partner.

Consultation was also often retrospective - designed to introduce partners to a growing initiative rather than collectively co-designing something from scratch. That said, the willingness to include diverse voices and share space was noted by several participants as a key strength. In some ways, the lack of rigid planning allowed a greater degree of responsiveness and learning-by-doing. At the same time, the desire to get things moving quickly also meant insufficient attention being paid to the Hub's longer-term existence, a problem that became more apparent once talk turned to adding yet more sites to the initiative.

There were other issues associated with insufficient planning. Participants described frustrations around the slow pace of formalising arrangements, particularly where contracts or additional funding were required to secure permanent premises. The process of getting a permanent base for Māori Wardens, for example, was marked by bureaucratic delays. During the focus group one warden recalled,

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*“They said, ‘We can find a room, thank you, but we gotta work through a contract’... and that just took another extremely long bit of time.”*

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Some partners also expressed concern that the informal beginnings, and an apparent absence of formal role descriptions and coordination/collaboration agreements, had created unnecessary ambiguity and confusion. Others acknowledged that coordination had improved, but was still limited by differing organisational cultures, time pressures, and mismatched expectations. For example, once the decision was made to render the Pop-up' permanent, Pasifika Wardens were approached to form part of an expanded collaborative team. While they initially took part in joint patrols, it soon became apparent the inner city had a relatively small population of Pacific Island people, and the Wardens therefore lacked a 'constituency'. Soon after the launch of the permanent Hub Pasifika wardens returned to South Auckland to resume their routine work among their own communities. Similarly, despite much local enthusiasm, initial expectations that CPNZ patrols, Māori wardens and others would jointly patrol with the newly introduced police beat teams, this expectation was not routinely met and this mode of coordination proved difficult to achieve in practice. As one Auckland city police beat team member put it:

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*“I suppose it makes it hard for us to coordinate with non-police...just because yeah, you know, if a job comes up, and say we're close to it, then you know we'll go to it...at a moment's notice we're like 'bye!'”*

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The planning story of the Safety Hub was thus one of improvisation over design, driven by relationships more than formal documentation and processes. While planning may not have followed a conventional model, it was grounded in shared goals, driven by local leadership, and enjoyed the flexibility to act quickly in a complex and challenging environment. Despite the challenges generated by the ‘organic’ nature of the establishment, participants remained overwhelmingly positive about the collaborative spirit and inclination for local action that enabled the Hub’s creation.

## Original aims and how they evolved

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From the outset, the Safety Hub concept was ambitious in spirit but loosely defined in practice. Stakeholders spoke of a range of intended outcomes - from public reassurance and crime prevention through capable guardianship to volunteer coordination and partnership working. These aims were sufficiently broad and non-prescriptive to attract multiple agencies and community groups but, as the initiative evolved, the aims and roles of some partners shifted as they identified clearer objectives while for others it shifted in emphasis regarding what was deemed feasible in the moment.

One of the clearest original goals of the pop-up was to create a “safe space” in the central city; somewhere people could go for help or advice. By providing a reassuring presence the idea was that by having uniformed volunteers stationed in a visible, central location, the Hub would deter antisocial behaviour while offering support to the public. As two CPNZ key patrollers described it:

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*“It was just really being that presence, being available to people if they wanted anything”*

*“...just being present as well in the community helps to deter crime”*

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This foundational idea - of visibility, presence, and public engagement – was woven through the comments of many interviewees. Moreover, from the outset and through the transition to a permanent base, volunteers did not see their role as only one of ‘enforcement’, but also to assist and, as confidence grew, to problem solve. Their uniforms, particularly those of CPNZ, Māori wardens and, before they withdrew, Pasifika Wardens, not only aided visibility but, arguably more important, were recognised and trusted by many in the community. The sight of different uniforms, particularly when patrolling together, helped create a sense of an extended network for community safety, the impact of which was both symbolic and instrumental. This ‘uniform effect’ was not lost on the participants, including a CPNZ patroller and members of the police beat team:

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*“...vests make such a big difference... when we are in the public... we are, you know, advertising a brand, a thing that we promote, we can make people feel safe.”*

*“those people walking around in hi-vis, and you know when it has like community patrol on the back... people can approach them, yeah and if you know it might be that people say ‘ohh look those people have hi-vis, they could help me’ sort of thing”*

*“...having all these groups together in partnership have more visibility...adds to the visibility all these people, a lot of people don't even realize it's not police, that it's CPNZ... also [council] compliance officers... so it just adds to that ‘ohh I feel safer so I am safe’.”*

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However, this clarity of vision was not uniformly shared. In particular, the lack of initial documentation and formal briefings meant that some volunteers and operational staff had to “figure it out as they went.” While this flexibility allowed for adaptation and some inventiveness, it also led to inconsistencies in expectations. Newcomers to the partnership, for example, were not always aware of the Hub. A member of the Auckland city police beat team was especially candid:

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*“honestly [it's] the first time I've heard, so yeah I'm sorry I was trying to figure out what it is.”*

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Similarly, a member of the Auckland Council Safety team highlighted uncertainty around the purpose of the Hub:

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*“So there wasn't much clarity around the objective...around the purpose...there was no data from the pop-up hub so we just weren't sure, so we left it [Hub] to CPNZ and police to kind of try and manage that”*

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As the initiative moved from pop-up to a more permanent installation, the original aims were subtly redefined. For example, the emphasis on information sharing and inter-agency coordination grew, particularly as Auckland council staff and compliance officers became more involved. But there were also unresolved questions around the scope of the Hub's function. There was insufficient understanding of the role to be played by Māori Wardens, for example, who assumed the Hub would provide a platform to deepen their unique approach to community care. Their vision extended well beyond deterrence or patrols, and into more holistic forms of well-being and community engagement. Ultimately, while there were still occasional interactions and collaborations, Māori wardens did not see themselves performing a conventional ‘policing’ role. Their focus instead turned to their own new base; a facility established in collaboration with Eke Panuku and described as a ‘safe space’ for the homeless and rough sleepers where they could

securely store their belongings while accessing food and hot showers. While Māori wardens ‘drifted’ from the Hub, their work with the street whanau was universally recognised by other community partners as making a significant contribution. During the focus group, one Warden explained their role in the wider ecosystem of city safety:

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*“so yeah there was a lot of noise but part of this Manaaki Tangata, about 7:00 every morning compliance wardens wake everybody up in the doorways. So where they used to hang out Queens wharf, and lay around on the tables or on the ground or whatever they now do it at Manaaki Tangata...they have access to water, they have access to leave their belongings so it's not cluttering the town, so the town has picked up its look... the streeties are in that one place where we are, so we contribute to lowering the crime, by having a place for them to be.”*

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Members of the Auckland police beat team agreed that there was tangible value in facilitating the work of Māori Wardens and particularly their role in engaging with the street whānau:

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*“...I think it's quite valuable that it's not police doing it in the first instance”*

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This process of redefinition was also reflected in a new approach to dealing with rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour adopted by the Auckland compliance wardens. An Auckland city council compliance officer explained the change in direction:

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*“we've taken a compassionate approach to safety, and to the people that we deal with in the street...the compliance wasn't working because when...you're getting a homeless person to get up and move...because of businesses complaining, where are they going? They're just moving to the next business or the next street and so we were...going round and round in circles”*

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At the same time, there was a reduction in ambitions regarding the Hub’s scope. Thus, while some stakeholders hoped for a full-time, multi-service space, others saw that as unrealistic given limited volunteer capacity and resource constraints. The CPNZ Hub coordinator confirmed the scaled back ambition:

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*“...so the talk was to get a full-time coordinator... but in the end it wasn't gonna work”*

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Once the hub became permanent, and as the wider community safety ecosystem began to fully emerge, police and council staff often became more focused on their own strategic goals and thus how, or whether, the Hub and CPNZ volunteers might best be integrated with broader city

safety plans. There was then a subtle divergence of purpose where police and Auckland council compliance staff prioritised their own work over and above the original aims of the Safety Hub despite the fact it was the Hub concept, and the media interest in it, that gave that work added momentum. This was not necessarily problematic, however, and both the council and NZP continued to emphasise the value of the CPNZ contribution, but it did mean that the aims and purpose of the Hub came to mean slightly different things depending on the perspective of the different partners.

In sum, the aims of the Safety Hub evolved through practice. The initial aspirations around safety, presence, and partnership held strong, but were shaped by the realities of delivery, resource availability, and organisational culture. Far from being static, the Hub's purpose was continuously negotiated, emerging from the shared experiences of those working within it.

## Stakeholder motivations and aspirations

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The Safety Hub brought together volunteers, council staff, police, and Māori and Pasifika Wardens, each with their own reasons for taking part. While the shared goal was safer public spaces, how that was understood and enacted varied across organisational contexts, cultural values, and individual aspirations. Among others, one of the strongest motivations, particularly among CPNZ volunteers, was the desire to make a practical difference in their communities. For some, this was grounded in a sense of civic duty; for others, it was part of a longer journey into public service or policing. Many of the younger volunteers and tertiary students viewed the Hub as a stepping stone: a chance to learn by doing, gain exposure to frontline safety work, and build confidence in managing real-world public interactions. The dynamic downtown setting, combined with the diversity of cultures and patrol roles, made the Hub a meaningful and formative training ground. A recent CPNZ recruit explained:

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*“...it's good for me, especially if it's for something that I want to get into - like policing... and I realized that CPNZ is actually a good place to start off, you know to get experience in patrolling, community safety.”*

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For more experienced patrollers, the motivation was framed around 'giving back' and providing reassurance. A senior CPNZ patroller recalled their particular motivation for volunteering with the Hub patrol:

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*“...so I thought 'OK I live in the city you know, safety is an issue. How can I support a safer city' and I thought 'yeah I will support this I will support this initiative’”*

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Māori and Pasifika Wardens brought a different but complementary set of motivations, rooted in Kaupapa Māori and collective values. Their aspiration was not only to reduce harm but to uphold manaakitanga (care and respect), act as role models, and build trust with communities

historically underserved or over-policed. For Māori Wardens in particular, the Hub was an extension of how they were seen by other partners:

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*“police officers were like ‘no we want wardens to be the front line’, we want them because they separate the police from the people and they like create that positive relationship.”*

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For these groups, the Safety Hub offered a platform for enacting culturally informed models of safety and support - ones that were more relational. Their involvement was not about enforcement *per se*, or even visible patrol and reassurance, but about supplying a non-threatening presence, and intervening early before issues escalated, with the latter goals shared in common with CPNZ volunteers.

Auckland Council compliance wardens, by contrast, were motivated by the opportunity to enhance city safety through partnership and problem solving. While enforcement and recourse to the police is always an option, they expressed instead a preference to address the underlying drivers of the city’s long-standing problem with homelessness and rough sleeping - key factors in declining public perceptions of safety. Their involvement was often tied to broader urban safety goals, including business confidence, tourism, and event management. During the focus group an Auckland City compliance team supervisor explained the overarching rationale:

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*“It is a perception problem... we're trying to achieve a city which is welcoming to everybody”*

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Police interviewees, especially those in beat prevention roles, saw the Hub as a force multiplier - a way to increase visibility, gather low-level intelligence, and strengthen ties with groups they might not otherwise interact with directly. However, their engagement was too often inconsistent. While those officers with some experience of the Hub saw value in building relationships with volunteers, others that had little involvement viewed the Hub as peripheral to their core duties and that the primary value of the Hub lay in connecting the public to police. As one Auckland city beat officer put it:

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*“they [Hub] would be a first stop for people, you know, if we're not necessarily on the street at that time...I suppose just being visible so that if they [the public] did need police... you know they see this safety hub, and they can call the police for them...”*

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Māori Wardens also observed that after an initial fanfare, partner activity dissipated over time as the realisation that others involved in the initiative lacked their rather unique skillset:

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*“it kind of fizzled out...you've got a lot of volunteers from the criminology [department at AUT]...but ... when we went down there and took them out they didn't know what to do...they didn't know how to interact with people”*

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For other stakeholders, however, an important motivation was the opportunity to strengthen inter-agency relationships. While most had worked alongside other groups before, the Hub provided a physical space, and symbolic purpose, for deeper collaboration. This aspiration was especially strong among senior volunteers and the patrol leader who saw this as a chance to move beyond siloed working:

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*“...having Māori/ Pacifica wardens, CPNZ and the council together, mix members, and obviously each bring different values, it just increased the visibility.”*

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Finally, several participants expressed the hope that the Hub would give their work greater recognition and legitimacy; something that was not always apparent, particularly among volunteers. Participants expressed the hope that being part of an official, recognised initiative would raise the profile of community safety work, especially for CPNZ patrollers, and make it easier to secure long-term support and recognition from other partners:

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*“...when I introduced myself as CPNZ community patroller, they [police] wouldn't recognize me! ...I thought how on earth don't they [police] recognize me as CPNZ.”*

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In this way, motivations ranged from the practical (visibility, engagement and deterrence) to the deeply personal and cultural (service, trust-building, manaakitanga). While different in emphasis, these motivations were not in conflict. Rather, they reflected the richness of the Safety Hub model and the diverse forms of contribution it enabled.

## Experiences of collaboration and partnership working

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The Safety Hub brought together multiple organisations that do not usually share space, time, or resources in such a concentrated way. Unsurprisingly, this created both opportunities and challenges. Participants across the board spoke positively about the intention behind collaboration, of being "in it together", but their experiences of actual day-to-day partnership varied widely depending on role, expectations, personalities and proximity to decision-making. At its best, collaboration within the Safety Hub felt organic and empowering. Some participants described a sense of camaraderie that came from sharing patrols, planning events, and cohabiting the same small space. As the CPNZ coordinator explained, joint barbecues and informal catch-ups also helped break down barriers:

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*“...we had a BBQ organized a few months back... on our safety hub where we got to know about the people who do security, there's security guards, Māori wardens... so they know us and we know them, so that was a good thing.”*

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However, collaboration was not universal and was difficult to sustain. CPNZ patrollers and beat police described only limited engagement with each other with one CPNZ patroller highlighting a passive approach adopted by some police:

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*“it's a little ad hoc...they haven't gone out of their way to tee up a meeting, or [say] right let's go and walk together”*

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There are also practical, logistical barriers to sustained coordination and collaboration. Partner organisations often operate on separate rosters and different start times, making regular coordinated patrols difficult. As a result, partners might only cross paths if their patrols happened to coincide. A CPNZ patroller explained that irregular joint patrols with council compliance officers sometimes occurred but that it would require patrollers to go out of their way to make it happen:

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*“we will call them [Auckland council compliance team) and we will let them know that we're on patrol, and ask if we can we meet up, can we walk together, so there's that OK, but we're the ones initiating it”*

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So, while all groups were contributing to safety in the same area, their activities could be described as ‘parallel action’. The absence of a unified operational plan meant that opportunities for deeper collaboration were frequently missed. Several participants pointed out that information sharing - an essential element of effective partnership working - was often inconsistent. CPNZ patrollers, for example, explained how on those occasions when they would call for police assistance they would often get a quicker and more enthusiastic response from calling 111 than the direct police line they had been given.

The lack of formal mechanisms for coordination, such as a shared logbook, formal joint briefings, or real-time tasking, meant that much of the partnership work relied on personal relationships or the efforts invested by individuals. Where strong interpersonal trust existed (often among coordinators), collaboration flourished. Where it didn't, silos re-emerged. The importance of having the ‘right’ personalities involved was not lost on a police liaison officer tasked with working alongside CPNZ volunteers (among others):

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*“I think it really depends on who you have...not only police or CPNZ... because if you don't have the right people...it can go very fast ...and there won't be much work together”*

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In some cases, cultural or organisational differences also shaped how collaboration was experienced. As mentioned, Māori Wardens described a more relationship-based and care-based approach to safety work; something that wasn't easily shared or applied by other partners:

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*"...people asked us to teach them, you know like, we were asked to train how to do manaakitanga, and aroha, but we were quite honest as we can't teach this."*

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Several participants suggested that a more deliberate and formalised coordination - such as shared comms or even a central coordinator - would help strengthen collaboration. For example, a senior volunteer patroller expressed a desire for a more formal integration of CPNZ patrols and police beat teams:

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*"I personally I would like for them [police] to include us in their beat, their foot patrols...and the most important part is they [police] would recognise us...we don't expect them to ask "who are you, we don't really know you"*

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At the same time, however, participants also acknowledged that meaningful, sustained coordination takes time, energy, and resourcing; key elements that have proven difficult to secure in volunteer led initiatives, despite repeated demonstrations of their value over a long period of time.

As experience with partnership working and collaboration grew, trust became an ever more important consideration. Across the wider safety ecosystem 'trust' manifested in different ways and each partner, both within and beyond the Safety Hub, described their different perspectives and experiences.

A CPNZ patroller emphasised the importance of first building familiarity and then trust with the public via positive interactions:

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*"yeah, you know, the most important thing is to interact with people, otherwise we can't get to know their situations, and...their concerns, and how we could help..."*

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Another patroller elaborated:

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*"it's always been told to us...that the first thing you have to do: go and talk to people, because, you know, it's not enough to be walking around ...this is the community, when we have that relationship with the community then the trust comes next"*

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It was in this context that the patrollers talked about how, unless really necessary, they would avoid calling for police assistance and deal with sometimes difficult situations and people themselves. Such positive interactions helped build trust with those on the street that had, historically, experienced being over-policed and sometimes subjected to heavy-handed coercion. One CPNZ patroller confirmed that the effort to resolve situations themselves, without recourse to police, was based on maintaining trust with those with whom the regularly interacted:

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*'yeah because what we're trying to do is build trust, so we can't really like get the police to come in there, they'll just kind of like, add to the problem... I do believe that we're facilitators of that relationship between the community and the police...we could be the middle party that sort of brings them all together, if need be, but also keep them apart'*

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At the same time, this self-reliance of patrollers was perceived to help free up an over-stretched police service:

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*"the police don't need so many in uniform, they can go out and do the stuff that they do everyday"*

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Beyond the hub, across the wider ecosystem it helped surface, a different though no less important manifestation was described by the Auckland council compliance wardens. Participants referred to the importance of building and then maintaining trust with all members of the 'street whānau'. In common with the CPNZ patrollers, one participant explained that becoming familiar with those on the street was the first step in building a relationship based on trust:

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*"a lot of them [rough sleepers] are known to us now...you know everybody's got a story and we should know these stories and so that's the first thing"*

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However, several council compliance wardens also referred to the ways in which collaboration failures, which led to poor outcomes, could easily undermine that hard won trust. As one compliance warden explained:

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*"...one of our staff refers someone to an agency [service provider], and they don't do anything, which is unfortunately common, and so it's [compliance warden] that gets it on the street, because then that person says 'well what happened you said you were gonna refer me...[warden] says 'I've referred you' and the response is "I don't want to work with you again', so now we're back to square one, Ground Zero of her building their trust, because now they don't trust her because nothing's been done"*

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Ultimately, experiences of collaboration within and beyond the Safety Hub were uneven. Some groups found deep connection and mutual support, while others operated at the edges. Much depended on local leadership and how much value was placed on cross-agency interaction while personalities often dictated the quality and duration of collaboration.

Despite these challenges the underlying enthusiasm for partnership was strong across all groups. Comments from a compliance warden and CPNZ patroller illustrate the point:

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*“...there definitely is an appetite for this kind of work to be continued”*

*“I'd like to see more engagement with the police, I'd like to see more engagement with the other patrol teams, I'd like to see shared patrols... and then just, I guess more comms with the police, more inclusion”*

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This section reveals that while the vision of multi-agency collaboration is compelling, its realisation requires deliberate attention to infrastructure, trust and effective communication, and relationship-building. When it works, the Safety Hub becomes more than just a shared space - it becomes a living example of pluralised safety in action. But without coordination and reciprocity, collaboration risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

## Operational realities vs expectations

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The operational reality of the Safety Hub initiative was, for many participants, a mix of promise and pragmatism. Stakeholders entered the project with varying expectations; some modest, others more ambitious and aspirational - but a recurring theme was the extent to which the day-to-day experience both affirmed and challenged those expectations. The Hub proved itself to be valuable and worthwhile, but it also exposed gaps in communication, resourcing, and coordination that, if left unaddressed, could limit its long-term effectiveness.

For many volunteers and frontline partners, the visible presence of the Hub was its most immediate success. It created a recognisable anchor point in the city centre and offered a base for patrolling and public engagement. Beyond visibility, however, operational expectations differed. Some partners expected a highly coordinated effort with regular briefings and cross-agency patrols, while others assumed a more low-key, voluntary presence. In practice, the Hub often functioned somewhere in between; a symbolic centre with useful elements of coordination but lacking in shared structure.

One commonly cited issue was the inconsistency in staffing and presence. Patrollers described days when the Hub was busy and active, followed by periods when no one was rostered. The lack of a consistent presence made it difficult for the public, and sometimes even partner organisations, to know when the Hub was open or who was available. However, council partners, in particular were aware of the limited availability of volunteers and of heaping unrealistic expectations on them. In fact, recognition of these limitations led to plans to deepen collaboration at the Hub by providing council compliance wardens to extend the operating hours. A compliance warden supervisor outlined these intentions:

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*“[safety hub opens] only for a few short hours maybe once or twice a week, but there are plans that we will be manning that [Hub] probably from 8:00 in the morning till 5:00 and then the plan is if it's not ‘manned’, then it will be like a button you can press that will go through the call centre, and then somebody can say ‘I've got a problem’ and then the call centre can pick that up”*

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Another gap between expectation and reality involved information sharing. Several stakeholders had hoped the Hub would become a site for collecting and disseminating community intelligence - reporting low-level issues, observing patterns of concern, or passing on useful updates to police or council. In practice, however, this function was rarely formalised. There were no shared digital tools, briefings were inconsistent, and knowledge tended to stay within individual groups.

Beyond the Hub, other partners in the city-safety ecosystem experienced gaps, often significant, between expectations and operational realities. The Auckland compliance wardens, for example, had adopted an empathetic, problem-solving approach to dealing with rough sleeping. This initially ran against public expectations that rough sleepers would, if necessary, be forcibly moved on. However, a supervisor of the compliance warden team noted the change in public attitudes following the adoption of this new approach:

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*“now the public are...you know...on board, they support the work that we do, they support the team out there, they feel safer out there”*

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Having won the public’s confidence, primarily by achieving successful outcomes through facilitating access to social and mental health services, the warden’s assumed that collaborating social service agencies would share the same goals. However, the practical reality was rather different. As a member of the council compliance warden team explained:

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*“...so we’ve found different agencies really have different agendas, of the ones that [name of warden] has most success with is...more of an NGO, so they're purely based on getting results out on the streets, that's all they are focused on. Whereas another agency is more focused on their reputation and basically fundraising...the sole purpose of that organization is to help those in need, but the people in need are missing out. So, when [name of warden] comes across them, she doesn't have time to be playing games or getting involved in the politics behind it all...she's learned to go with the agency that she can get results from”*

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Despite these frustrations, most participants remained optimistic, specifically in relation to the Hub which they saw as a “work in progress,” and its imperfections as growing pains rather than fundamental flaws. Importantly, the experience of being out in the community, engaging with the public, and seeing small positive interactions still made the effort worthwhile. A CPNZ patroller

recalled the positive feedback they received from the public while patrolling and the added encouragement this provided :

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*“people say, “you guys are fantastic, we see you guys everywhere in the high-viz everywhere, funnily enough, we don't see the police”, that's great feedback for us.”*

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## Summary and lessons for the future

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As the Safety Hub initiative looked to expand across Auckland, and as other local authorities have latched onto the concept (including Rotorua and Wellington), stakeholders were clear that improvements are needed to make any future Hubs more effective, sustainable, and equitable. While they remained very supportive of the concept, their reflections surfaced several recurring lessons and constructive ideas for future planning, each of which were informed by the different phases of the Hub's life cycle.

The installation of the pop-up Safety Hub, and its transition to a permanent fixture, resulted from a range of overlapping factors. These included problems with anti-social behaviour and disorder, deteriorating public perceptions of safety and the imminent arrival of tens of thousands of FIFA world cup supporters. Local groups, did however, rise to the challenge and thus the first lesson offered by the pop-up hub is that a local determination to 'do something' is a crucial precondition, regardless of the availability of detailed planning. Moreover, ahead of the re-introduction of 'beat policing' in the CBD, the initiative filled a long-identified vacuum in capable guardianship and supplied the outlines of a model for other more permanent, collaborative approaches to community-led crime prevention. The Safety Hub should not, therefore, be evaluated in isolation and some credit is due for the role it played in helping identify the need for a wider and more cohesive ecosystem of community safety in Auckland. Although its origin owes more to improvisation than design, the Hub was nonetheless grounded by a shared vision, and its informal origins allowed a flexibility to move at pace unencumbered by bureaucratic processes. Its 'organic' nature generated various challenges but on reflection its creation says much about the collaborative spirit and inclination for local action.

The initial goals of improved safety through visible presence and partnership policing informed operations from the initial pop-up through to the permanent hub. Other objectives, however, were shaped by the logistics of delivery and resource availability while the Hub's purpose evolved from the shared experiences of those working within it. Thus, key lessons for similar local initiatives in the future is the need to avoid rigidity and the value of adaptability in the face of logistical challenges. The operational realities of the Hub also reveal that while the ideal of multi-agency collaboration is compelling, its realisation is as challenging today as it has always been. For multi-agency collaboration to be effective and consistent, and substantive rather than symbolic, it requires not only an integrated infrastructure, a feature the Hub lacked, but also trust borne through relationship-building. It is worth noting the extent to which both CPNZ volunteers and council compliance wardens invested in the latter. However, when genuine collaboration occurred the Safety Hub became more than just a base of operations and on those occasions offered a model for pluralised safety in action.

In summary, the operational reality of the Safety Hub was rather less structured and more 'organic' than some participants had hoped, but it still delivered meaningful outcomes. The Safety Hub made its own valuable contribution to community safety while the difficulties it faced helped identify the need for a wider, linked-up ecosystem of community safety in Auckland city. The Hub has proved itself to be a viable concept, that diverse partners can work together in a shared space, and that the presence of volunteers does offer reassurance and can make people feel safer. However, those involved in the Hub also identified a range of challenges that need to be overcome if the Hub is to be more than just a base for increasing the visibility and presence of capable guardians.

For the Hub to realise its greater potential as a shared space for meaningful and effective multi-agency partnership working, it will require consistent rostering, on-going infrastructure support and sustained resourcing, and clearer communication channels. Among the various partners and stakeholders there is also widespread recognition of the need for more formal mechanisms for coordination and collaboration along with regular and timely reflection on actual practice. If these challenges can be overcome, then the Hub can represent a sound model for community-led, joined-up safety work that is sufficiently flexible to be replicated across other local authority sites experiencing similar problems.