

# COMMUNITY POLICING IN THE CONTEXT OF SINGAPORE

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Singapore has grown in many ways over the last 40 years to become a city-state that enjoys a high level of economic growth, political stability and most importantly, a sense of safety and security. It was not a smooth journey, as the country experienced its turbulent periods in the 1950s and the 1960s, characterised by problems of political instability, communist insurgency, secret societies, unemployment and communal riots.

Today, Singapore's crime rate is low by international standards and has declined successively for 9 years from 1989 till 1997. Crime rate has only edged up slightly by 5.2% in 1998 when the entire South East Asia region plunged into financial and economic crisis. The rise was mostly attributed to theft of handphones and cash cards, and immigration offences.

Amidst the rapid modernisation of society, much of the transformation from the old crime-ridden town to a safe city today can be attributed to the Singaporean government's tough stance towards criminals and criminality in the form of strict laws and heavy penalties.

Apart from the strict laws and rigorous enforcement, the improvement of the social and economic situation helped to control crime. Over the past 15 years, the Singapore Police Force (SPF) has made two significant innovations in the area of policing in light of social and economic changes. The first being the introduction

of a community-based policing strategy through the Neighbourhood Police Post (NPP) system in 1983 and the shift towards community-focused policing through the creation of Neighbourhood Police Centres (NPCs) in 1997.

Prior to 1983, policing strategies were reactive in nature. Police services were dispensed centrally, mainly through the 8 police stations existing at the time. Each police station served a very large area and these areas were patrolled by cars. Impacted by urbanisation, social and economic transformations, the police were faced with rising crime and a loss of public contact and support. The SPF then realised the importance of fostering closer police-community relations in an effort to prevent crime. By re-orienting a patrol strategy that was skewed towards the motorised mode to one that was community oriented and emphasised foot patrol, it is felt that the police could create a heightened sense of presence and visibility to deter crimes.

The Neighbourhood Police Post (NPP) system, adapted from the Japanese Koban System, was introduced in 1983. Eight NPPs were set up as a pilot in a constituency, with a view to assess the impact and success of the system in Singapore's environment. The trial was a success. By 1993, the entire set of 91 NPPs was set up throughout the island. This was accompanied by falling crime and increased sense of safety and security amongst the public.

However, in view of rising expectations of both the public and police officers, and the need to address new challenges arising

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from various developments, the police have now embarked on revamping the NPP system into the NPC system. The aim of this paper is to share the SPF's experience in its adoption of community policing as the principal policing strategy. In addition, the NPP and NPC systems, which are the operating structures to carry out this strategy, will be discussed.

## II. CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The basic premise of community policing is that the police and the members of the public should work together to eliminate, suppress and prevent crime in society. This is an extension of the realisation that crime is a community problem created by societal issues and failures, and not just a police issue or an indication of its effectiveness. Police effectiveness and public order cannot be greatly enhanced unless the community can be persuaded to do more for itself.

Community policing seeks to inform and educate the public about crime, its causes

and effects within the society. It actively seeks to mobilize the various sections of the community such as public organizations, private firms, governmental agencies and the general population in crime elimination, prevention and control. By educating the community in these areas, community policing hopes to reduce crime rates and at the same time, stimulate the society to self-police.

## III. COMMUNITY POLICING VERSUS TRADITIONAL POLICING

As opposed to the traditional reactive, legalistic crime fighting strategy, community policing advocates a community-oriented policing strategy. It is based on the assumption that the problem of crime cannot be adequately met with law enforcement. Instead, it emphasizes proactive policing tactics and the mobilization of the community in the areas of crime elimination, prevention and detection. The key differences between Community Policing and Traditional Policing are as listed below.

<b>Traditional Policing</b>	<b>Community Policing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reactive to incidents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-active in solving community related problems. Discuss possible solutions with the community.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles of police officers are limited to incident response.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles of police officers are broadened to include identification and solving of problems.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random patrols in cars to respond to crimes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visible patrols to interact with the community, i.e foot patrols, bicycle patrols, scooter patrols.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on internal resources.</li> <li>• Limited linkages with the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage on community resources. Police work with extensive co-operative links with the community.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information from the community is limited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information from the community comes from many sources.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision is control-oriented; authoritative style or command and control style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decentralisation of authority and autonomy given to front-line officers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewards based on solving of cases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance evaluation rewards based on service activities; crime prevention, satisfaction and sense of safety of the community.</li> </ul>

#### **IV. SPF'S ADOPTION OF THE COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGY**

The key strategic driver for the SPF's adoption of the community-oriented policing model was to establish and leverage community support for our own law enforcement policies and strategies in the face of a changing operating environment. The key changes in the operating environment were as follows.

##### **A. Increasing Crime Trend (1974 to 1983)**

Firstly, although the crime rate in Singapore was low by world standards, there was a disturbing trend of an overall increase in all types of crime (except violent property crimes) for the period 1974 to 1983. Analysis revealed that 70% of such crimes were house-breaking, theft of vehicles, and robbery which could have been prevented. The promotion of community-oriented policing would help the SPF to battle crime, as improved police-public relationships should result in a higher level of crime prevention awareness and greater public co-operation with the police.

##### **B. Change in Population Distribution**

Secondly, the population distribution was changing. In the 1960s, before the creation of the Housing Development Board (HDB), the bulk of Singapore's population was concentrated in the centre of the city. However, as a result of the HDB success in providing low cost public housing, about 84% of Singapore's population shifted from the city area to new towns and estates all over the island. These new public housing estates comprised mainly of high rise buildings and these lessened the opportunities for the public to interact with the police.

The SPF could no longer simply rely on the 8 divisional police stations for efficient and speedy service. There was a pressing need to develop a new, efficient response system that could cope with the changing operating environment and at the same time, offer opportunities for meaningful police-public interaction in a densely populated, urban environment. This spurred the SPF to develop the decentralised system of the NPP to serve the needs of the urban population better.

##### **C. Rising Public Expectations**

Thirdly, the general population was increasingly affluent and educated. This raised two challenges for the SPF. One was to meet rising public expectations of the police service. The other was stiff competition from the public and private sectors for quality recruits. The nature and prospects of police work was deemed by the younger generation as comparatively unappealing. Community-oriented policing addressed these two challenges by raising the quality of police services through attracting better quality officers seeking job challenge and satisfaction in the enhanced job scope.

##### **D. Learning From the Japanese Koban System**

At this stage, the SPF was in search of a successful community policing model. This was found in the form of the Japanese Koban (or police post) system. In Japan, the high crime clearance rate of 60% was due to the trust and co-operation that the public had with the police. Statistics also indicated that 80% of the Japanese public readily provided information to help the police arrest offenders. The desire to learn from the Japanese experience and to emulate the success of the Koban system led to the institutionalisation of community policing as the new policing strategy and philosophy of the SPF.

## **V. THE NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE POST (NPP) SYSTEM**

### **A. Study Team**

In November 1981, a team of Japanese experts was invited to help implement the Koban System in Singapore. The Koban system was to be adapted for use in the Singaporean environment, with varying social settings and attitudes of the populace.

With the recommendation of the Study Team to establish one NPP per constituency, 8 NPPs were first established on 1 June 1983 in the 8 constituencies in one police division. The second phase of implementation began with the setting up of several NPPs in two other police divisions. Positive public response to the NPP system led to the acceleration of the final implementation phase ending in December 1994. There are now 91 NPPs throughout the island. One division was merged with neighbouring divisions so that manpower saved could be deployed to the frontline, to meet the needs of the new system.

### **B. Purpose of the NPP system**

The NPP system was implemented in Singapore with the following objectives:

- To improve police-community relations in Singapore;
- To prevent and suppress crime through the co-operation of and support from the community; and
- To project a better police image and win the confidence of the public in the police with more community-oriented services.

### **C. Infrastructure / Location**

NPPs are the most familiar police contacts of the community within their neighbourhood. They are kept small to be personal, but big enough to make an impact

in the community. The area of coverage of each NPP is based largely on the political boundaries. The average population covered by each NPP is about 35,000.

Being the most familiar police contacts, the NPPs have been located where their services will be demanded most. Factors such as the number of households and population are taken into consideration in setting up and locating NPPs, to reach out to the widest possible section of the population.

### **D. Organisational Structure**

A NPP is manned by a team of about 12 to 16 police officers who provide round-the-clock service by working in 3 eight hour shifts. The Deputy Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the NPP, is tasked to lead and manage the NPPs with guidance and support provided by the operations staff units in the land division headquarters.

NPPs are also grouped in fives or sixes and placed under the charge of an OC NPP for better management and coordination between the different shifts. This allows for the transfer and movement of officers among NPPs in the same group. Officers in neighbouring NPPs supplement each other through joint night patrols and covering the duties of absent officers. Flexible working hours and shift have also been introduced in the NPP system.

### **E. NPP Function & Duties**

The establishment of NPPs enables the smooth execution and running of various functions and activities. The key functions of the NPPs, which ultimately must result in better police-community relationships, more arrests and effective crime prevention, are as follows:

- High profile police presence (or high visibility patrols)
- Provide efficient counter service

- Respond to incidents
- House visits
- Crime prevention
- Community liaison
- Security coverage/crowd control duties

#### **F. High Visibility Patrols**

NPP officers are required to patrol in the area under the jurisdiction of their NPP. The officers conduct foot patrols, bicycle patrols and scooter patrols so as to be able to interact with the community and enhance their rapport with the residents.

#### **G. Counter Services**

NPP officers provide a wide array of counter services in order to attract the community to visit the NPP and thus increase the opportunity of interaction with the public. The counter services provided by the NPP officers are:

- Lodging of Police Reports
- Traffic Accident Reports
- Lost & Found Reports
- Change of Address
- Reporting of Deaths
- Enquiry

#### **H. Incident Response**

NPP officers attend to non-urgent cases only. Urgent cases are attended to by the Fast Response Cars (FRC) from the Land Divisional Headquarters. However, NPP officers will still respond to urgent cases to assist the FRC officers.

#### **I. House Visits**

NPP officers are also required to conduct house visits to residents within the constituency. The rationale of such house visits is to enable the NPP officers to develop rapport with the residents. These House visits also help the residents to get to know the NPP officers personally as well as the services provided by them and the NPP. The close rapport and interaction

between the residents and the NPP officers not only improve police-community relations, but also lead to increased public co-operation and support for the SPF's efforts at preventing and suppressing crimes in Singapore.

#### **J. Crime Prevention**

The NPP also function as a crime prevention centre where crime prevention advice is given and where services such as the engraving of names on personal property is provided free for the residents. To enhance the community's awareness on crime prevention, the NPP officers conduct crime prevention exhibitions, school talks, crime risk surveys, as well as the distribution of crime prevention pamphlets and newsletters to the residents.

#### **K. Community Liaison**

Before the NPP system was implemented, there was no dedicated officer assigned to liaise with community and grassroots organisations. With the NPP system, NPP officers were assigned to attend meetings of organisations in their areas of jurisdiction and this improved markedly the co-ordination and co-operation between the police and the community organisations. The NPP system also accelerated the formation of Neighbourhood Watch Groups (NWG) for residential areas and Crime Prevention Committees for industrial estates and shopping complexes.

### **VI. RESULTS OF THE NPP SYSTEM**

The introduction of community policing through the NPP system has certainly brought revolutionary changes within the realm of policing. Firstly, it has changed the SPF's from a reactive or incident-driven policing approach to a proactive approach that attempts to prevent the possibility of crime before it can occur. The community is now mobilised to play an important role

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in crime prevention.

Another effect of the NPP system is the decentralisation of police functions from the divisional level to neighbourhood level. The police at the frontline are more empowered with greater autonomy and discretion to discharge their duties. This has expedited police response to crime incidents and improved quality service.

The decentralisation principle has also enabled the police to penetrate deeper into the society and thereby effectively pre-empt criminogenic conditions. It is possible for the police to tap valuable information about the people and the conditions that are causing criminality.

Community policing has shifted its emphasis from car patrols to foot and bicycle patrolling. Together with house visits, this has brought the police very much closer to the community. The increased visibility of the police in the neighbourhoods has helped to deter crimes and eliminate the general fear of crime in society. This is also noted in the decreasing crime rates each year.

With community policing, the public has also become more aware of its role and responsibility in crime prevention and detection. The number of public-assisted arrests had steadily increased from 33.6% in 1992 to 34.8% in 1993 and 36.1% in 1994. That is about 1/3 of the total arrests made! The close co-operation is not only reflective of the high level of public spiritedness but also the evolving partnership between the public and the police in crime busting. The SPF has strengthened the trust of the public in the police.

Two surveys conducted in 1987 and 1991 confirmed that:

- NPPs have created more and closer

contact with the public;

- NPP system has increased the confidence of the general public in the police;
- NPP system has had a positive impact on the image of the police.

Community policing and the NPP system has brought the police services to the community, helped Singapore achieve a low crime environment, and enabled SPF's to reach out to the public.

There is ample evidence that the community policing strategy and the NPP system in Singapore is a success. The 1996 Global Competitiveness Report ranks Singapore the safest city in the world in terms of its resident's confidence that their person and property are protected.

## **VII. BUILDING ON THE COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGY**

The NPP based system of community policing has served the SPF well for 14 years from 1983 to 1997. In 1996, the SPF initiated a review of its operational strategy. The review was driven by the realisation that the future would not be built through perfecting the past, no matter how successful it had been. More importantly, the SPF must ensure that the success of the NPP system itself does not become a limiting force that stifles growth and innovation in meeting new policing challenges and public needs.

As the SPF enters the new millennium, being the sole provider of policing services, the organisation owes its fellow citizens to further improve the already low-crime environment and strive to make Singapore even safer than it already is. Policing must be done smarter and more effectively than before. It is also clear in the SPF's vision to become a strong service organisation by

making continuous improvement to work processes to meet rising public expectations. At the same time, the SPF wants to offer every officer within the organisation a more enriching job scope and experience that stretches the officer's abilities and helps maximise their potential.

Since the implementation of the NPP system, the SPF has retained its traditional, reactive policing capabilities (namely, fast response patrols and investigation teams) in its 7 land divisions. Only the 91 NPPs that report to these police divisions have evolved along the direction of developing community-based policing capabilities.

Community-based policing has also been refined incrementally over the past 14 years. One recent innovation is the doctrine of 'problem-solving', under which NPPs initiate the resolution of certain community law and order problems that arise from simple systemic causes. The problem-solving approach makes community policing more effective because it is proactive and pools the whole community together in a concerted effort to ensure a safe, peaceful and cohesive society.

An example of a good problem-solving case is that by Hong Kah South NPP. The NPP used to receive many complaints about coffee-shop patrons consuming beer, after midnight, even when the coffee-shops in question were closed. Residents complained about the incessant noise pollution, littering, vandalism (often vulgar words written on walls), urinating in public places, and fighting. The coffee-shop patrons' unruly behaviour caused sleep deprivation to the residents, dirtied the neighbourhood and created a sense of public unease (especially to young ladies returning home late at night). Aware that

repeated one-off responses to such incidents is not an operationally effective solution to the problem, Hong Kah South NPP adopted the following solution.

#### **A. Co-operation with Coffee-shop Owners**

Mindful of the need to maintain good rapport and act in partnership with community resources to resolve local community problems, Hong Kah South NPP officers sought the co-operation of the owners of the problematic coffee-shops in the following areas:

- (1) Stop the sale of beer and start preparations to close half-an-hour before the end of the stipulated licensing time, so that ample time is given to the patrons to finish their drinks.
- (2) Stack up the chairs and chain them up, before closing the coffee-shop.
- (3) Remove all empty bottles from the tables to prevent their use as weapons.

#### **B. Dialogue Sessions with Coffee-shop Owners**

Based on the recommendation of Hong Kah South NPP, regular dialogue sessions with the coffee-shop owners are conducted at the Division Headquarters. Besides crime prevention advice and police recommendations, there is also sharing of good practices between the coffee-shop owners. This is effective in exerting peer group pressure on the owners of problematic coffee-shops to follow the good example set by their counterparts.

The above measures were successful in curbing the problem. Residents now enjoy restful nights, the neighbourhood is pristine in appearance, and a sense of peace and security prevails.

### **VIII. NEW OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

The SPF is expected to work in an increasingly complex environment, with forces that affect community safety and security arising from a multiplicity of causes. These complex social ills are characterised by seemingly intractable problems such as juvenile delinquency, spousal violence, the link between substance abuse and property crime, or the law and order problems posed by foreigners working in Singapore.

The SPF's traditional tool of effective enforcement can no longer, by itself, adequately address these challenges. The doctrine of problem-solving, which is targeted at simple systemic causes, and analysed and solved at the level of the NPP, is also impotent in the face of higher-order social dysfunction.

In addition, the SPF must continue to meet the rising public expectations of its service standards, as well as its ability to enhance safety and security. A recent survey, commissioned by the Service Improvement Unit (SIU), revealed that one area where the SPF failed to provide high levels of satisfaction, but which was highly important to the public, was the ability of the police to help solve the problems that have been brought to the attention of the NPPs.

In October 1997, the SPF made another significant and bold move to re-design the NPP system in a bid to strengthen its community policing approach, in light of the changing environment and factors. A system that can carry the strengths of the previous NPP system, like tapping on local knowledge to solve crimes, and at the same time can enable the SPF to grow and address key policing needs, ensures its continued relevance. The Neighbourhood

Policing Centres (NPCs) system has been created to enhance the community policing approach by:

- Strengthening the SPF's front-line operating system;
- Building a strong service organisation;
- Increasing community involvement and responsibility for its own safety and security; and
- Optimising the value contributed by each police officer to the policing process.

### **IX. NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE CENTRES**

#### **A. Changes to NPP System**

In order to deliver decentralised, flexible, integrated and community-focused capabilities, the existing structure of land divisions and NPPs will be modified. At the centre of the new operating system is the Neighbourhood Police Centre (NPC). The existing seven police land division will be reconfigured into six policing regions. Reporting to each of these regional commands will be the NPCs.

NPCs will be the sole vehicle for front line policing to ensure the community's safety and security. In the redesigned system, NPCs will be accountable for the total outcome of policing in the community. A short summary of the key differences between the NPP system and the NPC system is given in the below figure.



## RESOURCE MATERIAL SERIES No. 56

NPP System	NPC System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community policing post with limited services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-stop total policing centre providing the full range of policing services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disparity in workload due to electoral based boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More efficient pooling of manpower resources to serve the community</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General services to attract residents and establish points of contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on services that are critical to safety and security</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low value tasks and narrow job scope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High value, broad job challenge, better quality officers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compartmentalisation of services with many officers each performing a separate task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated service process with one NPC officer handling the entire service process</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower priority on proactive work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated resources for proactive work</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based policing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-focused policing</li> </ul>

### **B. One-Stop Total Policing Centre**

Today, the areas policed by NPPs vary significantly. Some NPPs have jurisdiction over areas with 2,000 households, while other NPPs serve up to 5,000 households. NPCs will however serve areas of similar residential population sizes.

On average, each NPC will serve about 100,000 residents. The size of each NPC is kept to between 100-120 officers, with administrative overheads, such as personnel and logistical support borne by the Regional Command Headquarters. It also ensures that the NPCs are not so large as to present a cold and impersonal image to the public.

A total of 32 NPCs will be created by the year 2001 to serve an indigenous population of 3.2 million in Singapore. NPCs, as centres of total policing, have a variety of policing options, ranging from reactive patrols and investigations, to proactive policing activities. These 32 NPCs islandwide will be supplemented by at least another 66 NPPs, with each NPC managing between 1 to 4 NPPs.

With the creation of NPCs, the current 91 NPPs would be re-distributed to achieve a balance of easy accessibility to police

counter services for the public and an optimal number of NPPs to be deployed in the NPC system. The emergence of the NPC as the sole vehicle for the provision of policing services means that NPPs cease to be sub-units of a larger police unit. The officers manning each NPP will come from the NPC itself. NPPs therefore represent service points only, with the deployment of patrol, investigative and pro-active policing resources based on the overall needs of the entire NPC area of operations.

Each of the six policing regions will have a dedicated Regional Command Headquarters to oversee police operations. Six Regional Commands will replace the existing seven police divisions. These Regional Commands will comprise the command and support elements for the region. They will also include specialist investigation units, focusing on investigations into serious crimes and other investigations likely to lead to prosecution in court. Each Regional Command will house a NPC to serve as the frontline service point for public interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> A DGP is a development plan that defines and builds a particular township. In the plan, each town's boundaries are clearly mapped out.

### **C. Relationship to Development Guide Plans (DGPs)**

Unlike the current NPP boundaries which are linked to political constituencies that may change after a General Election, NPC boundaries are based on Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) Development Guide Plan<sup>1</sup> (DGP) areas for the following reasons:

- (a) The DGP areas, being geographically-based, provide additional leverage by creating a sense of territorial ownership for the community. This will enhance the community's identity.
- (b) Each DGP area also has an expressed vision, which further reinforces a coherent identity for the communities living within that area.
- (c) DGP areas are permanent, unlike electoral boundaries. Over time, distinct identities can emerge for different communities, without being interrupted by changes in constituency boundaries.

Each NPC operates out of police facilities sited within its area of operation. Facilities for the NPCs could be co-located with other community agencies. A single edifice, representing all the community agencies for that area, will further reinforce the sense of community identity and permanence. As NPCs or NPPs are the means through which the SPF engages in community-focused policing, they can easily blend into a building that encompasses community clubs, community libraries, and service points for other community agencies. Most NPCs would be sited at the heart of the residential area in the DGP and remain easily accessible via public transport.

### **D. Strengthening SPF's Front-Line Operating System**

The front-line operating system refer to the way the SPF organises and discharges its policing duties that impact the public every day : fast response patrols, investigations, counter service and proactive functions such as house visits. A key feature of the NPP system is the compartmentalisation of its functions. A typical minor crime case is attended to by a fast response crew, then by NPP officers who guard the scene until a Divisional Headquarters investigator arrives. Frequently, the Scene of Crime officer may even arrive separately to take photographs of the scene and dust for finger-prints. The case and the victim are thus handed from one officer to another.

The present system has many drawbacks. Firstly, each officer handles only a small piece of the entire service process. This unnecessarily limits the contributions and job challenge open to officers. Secondly, it also dilutes the ownership over the case. The sense of ownership diminishes when one officer passes the case over to another to complete the service delivery process. Thirdly, the NPP officers' local knowledge is not tapped in the cases, as their participation at the crime scene is only transient. Lastly, the crime victim is inconvenienced and may even get confused with the service delivery due to the internal inefficiencies in police work processes.

The NPC system aims to integrate the entire service process : where fast response, general investigations and basic scene of crime work are launched from the NPCs. Officers are trained, supported and enabled to carry out all the previously compartmentalised functions in one single service delivery. They will also take over the ownership of cases, which are of a neighbourhood character, and pursue

follow-up investigations. Complex cases will still be handled by the Regional Headquarters and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

The NPC officers are also rotated among a wider and more challenging range of duties as compared to the NPP system: fast response and counter service during which s/he will take over the investigations of the cases that s/he attends to; follow-up investigations; and proactive policing such as community patrols, house visits, community liaison, school visits etc.

More attention and time is accorded to proactive functions as the NPC system seeks to reach out to the community even further. Officers on such duties will not be re-deployed to attend to other cases unless the case is urgent and involves life and death.

#### **E. Building a Strong Service Organisation**

Although the SPF's primary goal will remain to ensure safety and security, it must, in order to continue to win widespread community support and trust, respond to the community's needs in this area through high service standards. However, over the years, the NPPs have taken on more services. Some of these were justified on the grounds that police officers need to interact and reach out to the public.

The SPF realised that in order to succeed in strengthening the sense of safety and security of the communities the police serve, there is a need to refocus efforts on those services that directly affect this sense of safety and security. These core services include responding to and detecting crimes, maintaining the peace and preventing disorder.

Another change in the NPC system is the conscious matching of police resources

to the demand for police services. For example, the number of fast response cars varies with the demand throughout the whole day. One may see a higher number of patrol cars during the peak morning and evening hours, where incidents are usually high. In addition, some of the NPPs are closed partially at night from 11 pm to 8 am, where the demand for counter service is low and the police officers could be re-deployed to perform more effective mobile patrols.

A major quality service programme was also initiated to help officers internalise a strong service mindset.

#### **F. Enhancing Community Involvement and Responsibility**

The need to enhance community involvement and responsibility is consistent with the need for the SPF to expand beyond its traditional areas, so as to best tackle the impact of deep-seated social ills on law and order. By leveraging on the involvement and sense of ownership of individuals living within the community, the resources available to address such social dysfunction are also far greater than if the NPPs, grassroots organisations or other community agencies attempted to solve them on their own.

This marks a key shift from community-based policing to community-focused policing. Community-based policing is, at its heart, concerned with how the community can help the police do its job better. In the new model, the focus is entirely on the community, as the customers to which the police add value. The police, together with the community, will strive to provide total solutions to the community's safety and security needs. This is the next natural stage in the development of policing in Singapore. It builds on the trust and goodwill the police have secured through community policing.

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The shift to a community-focused model fundamentally alters the SPF's operating strategy. Successful policing will no longer be measured solely in terms of falling crime rates. As the focus shifts from the police to the community, what matters to the community, for example, its level of safety and security, will determine the success or otherwise of the police mission.

Arising from this, it will no longer be appropriate for formulaic approaches to be applied uniformly across the different communities. Police units operating in different communities must develop customised solutions tailored to meet the needs of, and which take into account the constraints on, each community. The need for specific, custom-made and workable solutions will redefine the required levels of operational competence. These demands will fuel the need to develop, at the organisational level, learning competencies so that each customised solution enhances the quality of the future solutions.

An operating strategy that is focused on the community also entails a skillful management of relationships between the police and the individuals, grassroots organisations and volunteer groups that form part of the community. Structurally, the SPF will be empowered and decentralised, so that at the front-line, police officers can 'broker' for total solutions in response to community law and order concerns.

Such an approach also has other benefits, in particular, by providing opportunities for individual participation in improving the quality of life in their community, so that emotional bonds to the community are strengthened. It therefore forms an important element in the overall Singapore 21 vision to build a civil society with strong community ties and active citizenry. It is also an integral part of the

Government's strategy to gradually lower the community's level of dependency on the authorities and to engender shared responsibility for social problems and their solutions.

This is done through a new initiative known as the Community Safety and Security Programme (CSSP). A CSSP is an action programme jointly drawn up by the grassroots leaders, residents and the police. It consists of the profile of the community and its needs, the key agencies involved and the action plans to tackle the community problems affecting the safety and security of the neighbourhood. Through CSSPs, the NPC system aims to shift the community's mindset from what the police are doing about safety and security to what we can do together.

One CSSP is crafted for each precinct / constituency and each differs from another, since different communities in different neighbourhoods might not share the same concerns. The CSSP aims to get the residents more involved and be responsible in taking actions to address the safety and security concerns affecting their neighbourhoods. The driving belief is that each citizen can make a difference to society.

### **G. Optimising the Contribution of Each Police Officer**

The SPF currently has a regular component of nearly 8,000 officers and 1,000 civilian staff. With falling birth rates, the size of new cohorts joining the workforce grows smaller each year. As an organisation competing within a limited pool of labour resources, the SPF must be attractive and challenging to bring in the best talents. Whilst the SPF may face the challenge of attracting the best talent to join the organisation, it has to contend with retaining officers over the medium to long term.

SPF Commissioner, Khoo Boon Hui, during one of his dialogue sessions with NPC officers said “...*That is why not only do we have to take care of those who are with us, but to get the best people to join us ...one of the main motivations of why we are going into the NPC system, ... is to bring our officers to match the expectations of the job, and to be proud of what we do.*”

Through the NPC system, the SPF is able to redesign its front-line jobs so that it can continue to recruit quality manpower from each graduating cohort. At the same time, in line with the national policy of continuous upgrading, the SPF also needs to upgrade the qualifications of its officers after they have entered the service. Re-designing jobs to create viable and attractive front-line careers in the NPC system will serve to enhance the credibility of the SPF as an institution, and instill trust in the ability of the police to carry out their tasks effectively.

The educational profile of police officers serving the community must be kept high to match the broad rise in educational qualification of the society. This will enable the SPF to meet new job demands, greater challenges and the expectations of the public.

#### **H. Organisational Structure**

In order to fulfil its role as being community-focused, and responsive and flexible to the needs of the community, police officers in the NPC operate in an empowered and self-directed fashion. They work as a team, rather than as individual officers.

The basic unit in the NPC is a group of three front-line officers, led by one group leader. This group of four officers is self-directed, and undertake the entire range of policing responsibilities of the NPC. Each group is also responsible for

nurturing and building a network of community relationships within a precinct of about 1,200 - 1,500 households. As this group is deployed as an operational entity, it will facilitate the process of team learning, a key lever of change and innovation in the redesigned system.

An average of 5-6 such groups form one team, which is led by a team leader and one assistant team leader. Each NPC have four teams, reporting to an NPC commander. Each NPC comprise, on average, 100 regular officers. With another 15 full-time national servicemen attached to the NPP, the total strength of the NPC will be about 115 officers.

### **X. NPC IMPLEMENTATION PHASES**

As the NPC system is a major change for the entire the SPF. It involves major re-organisation. Many of these changes will take some time to implement. A phased implementation approach has been adopted:

#### Pilot Phase

Oct 1997 1<sup>st</sup> pilot: Queenstown NPC created in Central West Region.

Apr 1998 Another 3 NPCs, namely Bukit Timah NPC, Bukit Merah West NPC and Jurong East NPC were created in same region.

#### Phase I

Jun 1999 6 NPCs in West Region to be created.

#### Phase II

Jun 2000 14 NPCs to be created in North, North-Eastern and East Regions.

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Phase III

Jun 2001      8 NPCs to be created in  
Central-Western Region.

In Commissioner Khoo's words, "*A pilot is not to test whether the system will succeed or not. It is a pilot in the sense that we allow officers more leeway to improve the system, to share experiences, resolve operational problems and tell us what is wrong.*"

SPF believes that its policing changes are set in the right direction. Our success will depend on our willingness to learn and change the way we operate. Our commitment and passion to learn collectively as a team, from the top police chief to the front-line officer, may turn out to be the most significant success factor in our journey into the new policing environment presented by the next millennium.

## **XI. PRELIMINARY NPC'S RESULTS**

A recent review of the pilot phase implementation has shown positive results and all the NPC objectives are largely met. A large majority of the officers felt that they had stronger working relationships with their team mates, between teams, supervisors and key officers. 74% of the officers were confident of their abilities in performing the various aspects of NPC duties (information technology systems, procedures and investigative duties). 81% of the officers rated the facilities in the NPC to be much better than their previous workplace (NPPs and Land Divisions).

Compared to one year before the NPC was set up, one-third of the residents in the precincts felt that the safety in the neighbourhood now was "much better". Two-thirds of the residents felt that the police had at least made some improvements to increase security in the neighbourhood with the creation of NPCs.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

The community policing framework in Singapore has been shifted to uplift the professionalism in front-line jobs and getting the community more involved in safety and security matters. The re-design of the NPP system builds on the achievements the SPF has made over the past few years - community policing, empowerment and quality service. The