

ICW RESPONSE TO WCC CLAIMS IN SCOOP 27 April 2021

Inner City Wellington (ICW) has always tried to work cooperatively and in good faith with Wellington City Council (WCC). An example of one successful co-operative outcome was the development of Camera Base Wellington in 2013. Yet, in contradiction of their stated aims of working with communities, WCC arbitrarily shut this operation down overnight in March 2020 with no consultation or notification to ICW.

The WCC CCTV cameras were originally put in place for the Rugby World Cup in 2011 and in 2013 the police approached ICW to provide volunteers to utilise this network. ICW agreed, and David Webb co-ordinated a group of 48- 50 volunteers working at the Central Police Station.

On 27 April 2021, a Wellington Scoop article by Jem Traylen reported that, at a council Strategy and Policy Committee meeting on Thursday 22 April, David and Sarah Webb from ICW accused the WCC of underhand tactics and undermining city safety after sacking a volunteer group which had been monitoring the inner-city's CCTV safety cameras. 50 volunteers were replaced by 2 employees on sole shifts and moved to the WCC CCTV hub.

Sarah also highlighted a range of benefits the city had lost which, not limited to, but included:

- 50 dedicated, highly trained, knowledgeable volunteers
- 2 operators per core shift
- Double shift/24-hour coverage for events such as Cuba Dupa and Homegrown
- Direct interactive 'in-house' support for police
- Enough fully trained camera operators for immediate 24/7 back up support in emergency situations (i.e.: Kaikoura Earthquake)
- Inner city resident community taking a Guardian Angel approach

In relation to the closure, Sarah Webb said "It was extremely underhand the way it was done." The official reason given was due to technology issues, but she said these were fixed in September 2019.

Sarah Webb said unofficially they were told "The council were becoming very nervous about what the information was showing about Wellington and essentially they weren't able to control the narrative if that information was out there. So, by keeping it in-house you can control what gets out."

Council spokesperson Ms Barton-Chapple said the decision to move the camera monitoring function in-house with highly trained permanent staff was not taken lightly and included the need to put in place better technology.

However, Ms Barton-Chapple failed to acknowledge that the 2 "highly trained" employed permanent staff were in fact former volunteers from Camera Base Wellington who had gone through the rigorous training sessions set up, developed, and provided by Camera Base Wellington.

ICW also disputes the WCC claim that “the decision was not taken lightly”, when David and Sarah Webb as key partners from ICW were not consulted, or even made aware that closure was being considered.

Ms Barton-Chapple claimed that “We are able to leverage off the networked approach of our council IT, use of smart technologies and in how cameras are viewed – interactive and compact rather than a large bank of screens.” ICW refuted that claim as camera base had been set up in line with international standards and followed the format of other camera bases in New Zealand.

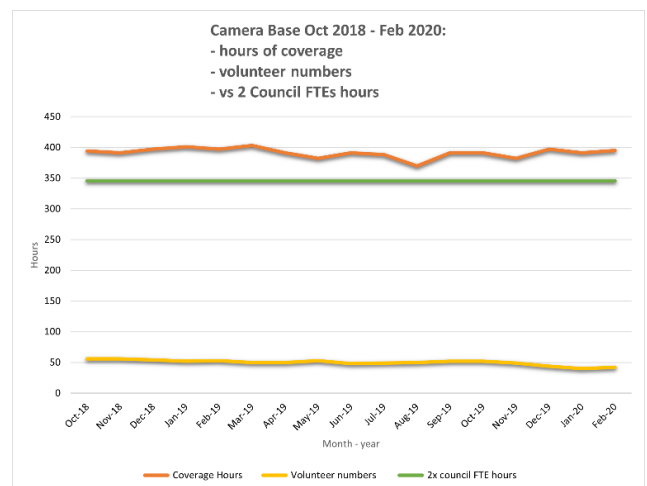
According to Ms Barton-Chapple the council also had concerns about privacy and a decrease in volunteer hours declaring “We wanted to ensure privacy of data was strengthened and we could address the inconsistency in the availability of the volunteers to fill rostered times. We saw a drop in volunteer hours over 2019 through to January 2020 with 40 volunteers registered and just over 100 hours were worked.”

ICW believes WCC is misleading the people of Wellington as, at no stage did volunteer numbers drop to 40, and the volunteers worked 403 hours a month/4836 hours per year (not 100).

And, at no time were privacy issues ever raised with the Camera Base coordinators, and all volunteers were vetted to police employee status by the police.

The graph (right) from October 2018 to February 2020 shows volunteers completed more hours each month than the current two council officers do each month. The data for the graphs comes from the Better Impact rostering software and monthly reports which were sent to WCC Community Services staff.

And, while Ms Barton-Chapple advised the council was not in breach of the Privacy Act, saying it followed guidelines issued by the Privacy Commissioner, Sarah and David Webb had advised that all other councils have limited their role to providing CCTV equipment, while the monitoring staff are Police employees or Police volunteers, not council officers.



At the end of the meeting Mayor Andy Foster offered to set up a meeting with Inner-City Wellington, the council, and police to discuss their concerns. ICW welcomed the offer and requested a meeting with the Mayor in this regard on the 23rd of April.

To date ICW has not even receive any acknowledgement of the letter or of a follow up email. ICW wants to engage with the council on this issue and expected a prompt response, given the offer made by the Mayor to meet with them.

ICW believe WCC’s treatment of the dedicated and conscientious team of volunteers was indefensible and the myriad of emails received by ICW with comments like “I am gutted this has been decided”, “What a kick in the shins” and “What a great shock. I suspect they are not telling us the truth about why it’s being closed” all echo the sentiments expressed.

The closure has resulted in disbelief, anger, and grief, leaving the volunteers feeling council's inaccurate claims have discredited the work they performed over the seven years Camera Base Wellington operated.

And so, once again, we find ourselves having to confront WCC who, through the responses from Ms Barton-Chapple, simply reiterate their prior position which we still maintain is not based in fact. If we are wrong, why does WCC not provide the information we have sought?

Therefore, we ask WCC to

- Stop providing public statements that simply defend your position and instead give us the facts, documents, and risk assessment report presented to council last year regarding the decision, and which we have requested.
- Apologise for the appalling manner in which the volunteers were treated with no notice they were being made redundant or any public acknowledgement of their work over the previous 7 years. After the closure WCC belatedly offered the shocked and upset volunteers a farewell which by then was far too late and ended up cancelled.
- Begin to work with us and other community groups in the manner espoused in your policy documents (i.e.: transparently and co-operatively).
- And, with urgency, act on our willingness (despite your past behaviour) to work with you on your Safety Committee, as invited to at the Strategy and Policy meeting.

ICW believe that if WCC is at all serious about forming social contracts and trust with city residents regarding city safety, then it needs to seriously and cooperatively address all the issues raised here.



Stephen King
CHAIR



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