Fire Research Report

The Value of Fire Stations and the Management of Relocations From a Community Perspective

Kaitiaki Research and Evaluation
November 2014

The New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) commissioned Kaitiaki Research and Evaluation to carry out community engagement research to understand community concerns arising from past station relocations and how these concerns could be better addressed in the future. The study employed a participatory qualitative approach and comprised a combination of a thematic and content analysis, semistructured focus groups and in-depth qualitative interviews with key community stakeholders in three locations in which a brigade had relocated recently: Katikati, Te Atatu and Takapuna.

Fire stations were unanimously valued as providing a sense of safety in emergency situations, albeit fires, road accidents or as a first responder to health-related emergencies. Fire stations / brigades were primarily valued as a central component of the community or alternatively valued as an important emergency responder. There were both negative and positive impacts of the loss or gain of a fire station on a community. The initial reaction to a new relocated station was largely positive due to an identified need to relocate and modernise the service the community receives. Short-term community concerns concentrated on the impact of relocation on response times and concerns that the new location would negatively impact volunteer fire fighters. Post-relocation concerns centred on the future of the previous site and station.

The research identified key stakeholders, from a community perspective, that need to be consulted and informed throughout the process from the initial announcement to post-relocation and these included: decision makers and local regulatory bodies, local fire brigades, affected residents and the wider community. From the findings a number of strategies, corresponding with key points in station relocation, were developed to guide future NZFS station relocation communication with the community.

The Value of Fire Stations and the Management of Relocations From a Community Perspective

prepared for the

New Zealand Fire Service

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Executive Summary

The relocation of fire stations is necessary to ensure that that the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) is optimally located to respond quickly to fire and non-fire emergencies (NZFS, 2013). The decision to relocate a fire station from one community to another is often the result of the findings of complex and scientific location-based mapping programmes. Currently, national goals require a response to fire and non-fire emergencies within eight minutes for career fire stations and eleven minutes for volunteer fire stations 90% of the time. As such, it is vital that stations are appropriately located (NZFS, 2012). The impacts of fire station relocation on the communities they are leaving and entering is significant and the loss or gain of a station can generate community distress. As highlighted by the NZFS, explaining the scientific factors motivating the relocation does not always counter the concerns felt by locals. The NZFS have identified the need to know how communities value their fire brigade and fire station, in order to develop strategies to better manage station relocation.

The overall aim of the project was to better understand community concerns so that the NZFS can communicate successfully with the community in regards to station location changes (NZFS, 2013). The specific aims of the research were to:

- understand the non-economic values that communities have for their fire brigade/stations;

- explore how the lose or gain of a fire station effects local communities;

- examine, from a community perspective, how the NZFS have communicated and managed fire station relocation in the past;

- identify, from a community perspective, what factors support the successful relocation of fire brigade/stations;

- identify, from a community perspective, what factors help generate an unsuccessful relocation of fire brigade/stations; and,

- explore strategies to ensure that the NZFS better communicate and manage station relocations in the future.

Approach

The study employed a participatory qualitative approach and employed a combination of semi-structured focus group and in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders in three locations: Katikati, Te Atatu and Takapuna. Within each community a station has relocated in the last two-to-three years.

In total 33 people participated in the study. Six interviews were conducted with individuals, and of these, three were carried out face-to-face and three were telephone interviews. The remaining participants shared their experiences in four small group interviews comprising between two and five participants. More males (n=20, 61%) then females participated (n=13, 39%) in the research. Seven of the participants were affected residents (21%), 13 participants were or had been in the past a volunteer fire fighter (39%), ten were community representatives (30%) and three participants were local government representatives (9%).

Participants were recruited through a combination of direct invitation via contact with individuals who had made submissions relating to the proposed relocation of fire stations, contact with a variety of local community groups and community boards and snowballing methodology.

The value of local fire stations

Fire stations were unanimously valued as providing a sense of safety in emergency situations, albeit fires, road accidents or as a first responder to health-related emergencies. Participants differed, however, according to the degree to which fire stations were regarded as a central or embedded feature of the community. Appreciating this difference is, to some degree, complex as a number of tensions were identified in participants' narratives. First, a number of passionate descriptions of community were provided by participants critical of the relocations. Essentially, the relocations had occurred outside of what participants viewed as their geographic community, despite the relocation having occurred within a relatively short distance. This was most evident in Te Atatu where discussions of 'community' elicited a longstanding divide between Te Atatu North (the Peninsula) and Te Atatu South. This divide appeared to underscore dissatisfaction with the relocation. As such, an appreciation of locally derived understandings of community is informative when possible dissatisfaction with station relocation is in question. Next, while participants generally strongly valued the presence of fire stations in their communities the value was diminished when a relocation had been scheduled for those living in close proximity to the new station. Issues such as noise, the imposing size of the new fire stations and the impact on property values underscored opposition to the relocation.

Within these tensions, two primary values were identified as underpinning concern about a possible relocation.

- **fire stations as a central component of the community –** those who viewed fire stations as a central community feature argued that fire stations, and more importantly actual fire fighters, contribute significantly to community cohesion. This was most notably discussed in Te Atatu and Takapuna as participants discussed a sense of loss from what was nostalgically described as 'past practice'. While relocations in Te Atatu and Takapuna involved a geographical move, it also coincided with a perceived shift towards 'professionalism': a move toward emergency response only and a purposeful move away from community involvement or cohesion. The was not the case in Katikati and this difference was interpreted as Katikati having maintained the strong sense of connection between the volunteer fire service and the community; a sense of connection that was reported to have been lost in Te Atatu and Takapuna.

- **fire stations / services as emergency responders –** the role of emergency responders underscored some participants' opposition to station relocations. In these situations, fears that relocation would result in increased response times, and therefore the risk of unnecessary destruction of property, were cited as primary objections to relocations. The NZFS's computer analysis system was strongly doubted by some participants, particularly in Te Atatu, where local geographical knowledge was deemed to be more accurate.

Primary stakeholders

The values associated with local fire stations were commonly discussed in regards to following four stakeholder groups affected by proposed and actual relocations.

Decision-makers and regulatory bodies – decision-makers and regulatory bodies included local government stakeholders (local councils and community boards). Local government stakeholders were identified because of the possible impact of the relocation of a station on the local government's ability to plan and respond effectively. Other decision-makers included other emergency services, such as ambulance and police

Fire brigades – in each of the three sites, the fire brigade was identified as a vital stakeholder group affected by proposed and actual relocations. In the case of smaller volunteer and composite fire fighter communities, these brigades were seen as a primary stakeholder group due to the rippling effect that any proposed changes would have from volunteer fire fighters through to the wider community. As such, any form of communication with NZFS that excluded or that failed to acknowledge the central role that volunteer fire fighters and their families hold in communities was regarded as insufficient.

Affected residents – two types of affected resident stakeholders were identified across the three sites: those residing beside or around an existing station and those residing beside or around a proposed station. Those residing in close proximity to an existing station were viewed as a primary stakeholder because of the stress that a proposed move was reported to have elicited regarding safety and what would happen to the old station and site. Residents in close proximity to a proposed station were regarded as primary stakeholders because of the potential impact of noise arising from an emergency response and fire fighter training as well as concerns over the visual and environment impact of the erection of a large and 'imposing' building.

The wider community – in each of the three sites, the wider community was cited as a key stakeholder because of the possible involvement and notification with the use of the existing / previous fire station.

The impact of the loss or gain of fire stations

The three participating communities reported different responses to relocation of their fire stations. Across participants, positive and negative responses fell into three time-related reactions.

Initial reaction – in each of the three sites, no negative reactions to the initial announcement that the NZFS had decided to relocate the stations were reported. These positive reactions were traced to one or more of the following:

- the community had previously identified the need to relocate and modernise the service;

- the community and key stakeholders viewed the relocation as a logical decision; and,

- the community and key stakeholders viewed the relocation as a decision that appropriately sat with the NZFS.

Short-term concerns: Anxiety, fear and a sense of being neglected to a second class status – a number of impacts, arising from the brigade relocation, were reported in Katikati and Te Atatu. In Te Atatu anxiety around safety and disillusionment arose when original plans to relocate the station within Te Atatu North was changed to Te Atatu South. This disillusionment was linked to perceived contradictory messaging from the NZFS, the location of the new site, which was discerned by the community as illogical and the subsequent impact that a move to the other side of the Peninsula would have on the volunteer fire fighters. In Katikati, there was no significant dissatisfaction with the choice of the new station site, however a lack of operational input into the building of the new station had resulted in a strained relationship between some volunteer fire fighters and NZFS.

No short-tem concerns or positive impacts were identified in Takapuna and there were a number of reasons identified by participants as to why this was the case. These included the on-going communication between the NZFS and local government, the lack of concern regarding the impact on response times, the industrial location of the new site and a sense that as the brigade comprised of solely professional fire fighters that a new build was external to community consultation.

Post-relocation concerns – post-relocation concerns generally centred on the future of the previous fire station.   In Katikati the local council owned the building and land. In Te Atatu and Takapuna the building and land were owned by the NZFS.

Due to the residential location of the old station, the future of the old building and site in Takapuna was a primary concern. Local residents voiced concern about the lack of transparency about what would become of the old site and the lack of communication regarding this. As the NZFS has acquired the land at a nominal cost from the community in the 1950s, participants strongly felt that the fire service was wrong to sell the land at a profit now. In Te Atatu the future use of the old fire station building and land had initially garnered concern, however, a sense of dissatisfaction with previous communications with the NZFS about the relocation, resulted in a depersonalisation of interest, due to the belief that attempting to find out what was happening with the old site would be a wasted effort. Although out of NZFS control, in Katikati, how the old fire station building was to be used was of concern and a lack of community input into the decision-making had caused dissatisfaction.

NZ Fire Service Communication

The effectiveness of NZ Fire Service communication was discussed according to four points in the station relocation process.

Initial announcement of the decision to relocate – sufficient communication with local government authorities and widespread community consultation was identified as important in the early stages of fire station relocations or closures. In Te Atatu and Takapuna the NZFS's initial communication with local government authorities was viewed as appropriate, however, these early stages of communication was also considered the platform to announce any prospects of considerable geographical moves. Participants also identified the importance of including affected residents in initial communications. In Takapuna and Te Atatu residents felt they had not been sufficiently consulted about their station's relocation.

The identification of the new fire station site – issues with community and NZFS communication were discussed in relation to the wider community and affected residents, those residing beside an existing station and those residing beside or around a relocated station.

In regard to wider community responses, no major dissatisfaction was reported in Katikati and Takapuna when the new fire station site was identified. This was linked to what was viewed as the logical location of the new station and improved projected response times. In contrast, in Te Atatu the community voiced a high degree of dissatisfaction with the new fire station site and felt that the wider community had not been consulted and local input had been ignored by NZFS.

In reference to affected residents, despite invitations to participate, no residents who had resided beside the old fire station in Katikati and Te Atatu participated in the study. However, participants reported that immediately affected residents had not raised significant concerns when the relocation was initially flagged. This was attributed to the local fire brigade's efforts to discuss the relocation with affected residents. Rather than NZFS meeting with communities, local brigade representatives met with communities to discuss the relocation. While this alleviated concern, participants perceived this as an inadequate approach as the onus of consultation was placed on locals and was perceived to denote a distance between affected communities and NZFS. In Takapuna, one participant who lived next to the old station discussed the loss of the station, citing a loss of a sense of safety from the relocation.

Similarly, few concerns were raised by those living next to a newly relocated station in Katikati or Takapuna. While this may reflect affected residents' decision not to participate in the study, it is noteworthy that the Takapuna relocation occurred in a commercial area and, in Katikati, initial concerns about noise was mitigated by local brigade representatives meeting with affected neighbours. In contrast, however, the Te Atatu relocation, to a fully established residential area, was met with significant dissonance. Te Atatu residents, living in close proximity to the proposed new station, reported a high degree of dissatisfaction with NZFS communication. No participating resident had learnt of the decision to build the station directly from NZFS. The decision may have been improved through the development of an affected resident communication plan which focuses on face-to-face meetings with affected neighbours in person. Further, participants advised that the communications plan should outline the responsibilities of NZFS and the local brigade in meeting with affected residents.

The build – participants in Katikati, with a close association to the local brigade, highlighted major dissatisfaction with the lack of operationally focused communication by the NZFS regarding the build of the new station. The lack of willingness to engage with the local volunteers was attributed to the negative perception of volunteer fighters. In the absence of communication from NZFS, the local brigade formed a building committee to further the needs of their brigade. Katikati participants would have preferred a collaborative form of communication with NZFS.

Post-relocation – two post-relocation communication issues were identified: affected residents residing beside or around a relocated station and future use of the previous fire station.

Affected neighbours greatly appreciated the ability to meet regularly with local brigades to discuss any issues that might have arisen and in Katikati and Te Atatu, local residents reported feeling that they had an open door relationship with the station. Establishing a clear communication pathway, at a local level, was considered to have alleviated concerns as they arose and stopped any growing frustration.

In each of the three sites, participants raised concern about the future of the previous fire station building. Participants understood that the NZFS was in a precarious position, as the NZFS does not always own the site or building. Outside of ownership considerations, participants viewed NZFS as possessing some responsibility in addressing the possible future use of the site and building at the initial communication stages. To alleviate future concerns, participants suggested the initial stages of a station relocation communication should include options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed and reported to stakeholders over time.

Strategies to ensure that the NZFS better communicate and manage station relocations in the future

A number of stakeholders and key communication points, corresponding with key points in a station relocation, were identified as informing possible communication strategies that might guide future station relocation communication.

Key Communication Strategy Components

Point in the Relocation Process	Stakeholder Groups	Suggested Approach	Potential Issues / Risks
Initial communication	Fire station building / landowners are key collaborative partners with whom a draft future use strategy can be developed to inform stakeholder communication.	In the event that NZFS does not own the building / land, develop a collaborative relationship with the fire station building / landowners and, where possible, scope: ■ options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed alongside a decision timeframe; ■ timeframes; and, ■ ways in which affected persons will be informed. In the event that NZFS owns the building / land scope: ■ options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed alongside a decision timeframe; ■ timeframes; and, ■ ways in which affected persons will be informed.	Raised expectations
	Key communication stakeholder groups include: ■ local government representatives; ■ local fire brigades; and, ■ affected neighbours (those residing in close proximity to the existing station).	Use the initial communication phase to identify potentially contentious issues that can inform future stakeholder communication and planning. Develop a draft relocation plan that includes: ■ potential relocation sites; ■ time schedules; ■ ways in which affected persons will be informed; and,	A lack of trust of computer modelling The need to take into account local knowledge when choosing a relocation site

		▪ options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed alongside a decision timeframe.	
Identification of the new fire station site	Affected residents	Develop a concise communication plan and meet affected neighbours in person. This is best conducted on a one-to-one basis but there may be an opportunity for small resident meetings Determine, in collaboration with the local brigade, the best approach for communicating with affected residents and determine NZFS' role within this communication process	Concern may include but not be limited to the impact of the relocation on: ▪ property values; ▪ changing the nature of the neighbourhood; ▪ traffic congestion; ▪ child safety; and, ▪ noise reduction and mitigation strategies.
Building	Volunteer brigades	Ensure volunteer brigades are collaborative partners in the build. Specifically, NZFS Property Managers have a more structured and consistent approach to engaging and communicating with the local brigade during the build to avoid a sense of exclusion	Local brigades, as end users, need to be treated as collaborative partners. Failure to include local brigades in a collaborative build can risk increased financial costs, a poor relationship with NZFS and a station that does not meet the local brigade's needs
Post-relocation	Affected neighbours	Ensure affected residents have a regular opportunity to raise issues of concern with the local brigade and ensure that concerns are addressed in a timely manner	Concerns may include but not be limited to noise and traffic disruption.
	Community interest groups	Where the NZFS owns the old station building / land provide interested community groups with regular updates on the intended future use and / or sale.	Extended timeframes NZFS cannot be held to account for the future of building / land that it does not own

1. Introduction

The relocation of fire stations is necessary to ensure that that the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) is optimally located to respond quickly to fire and non-fire emergencies (NZFS, 2013). The decision to relocate a fire station from one community to another is often the result of the findings of complex and scientific location-based mapping programmes. Currently, national goals require a response to fire and non-fire emergencies within eight minutes for career fire stations and eleven minutes for volunteer fire stations 90% of the time. As such, it is vital that stations are appropriately located (NZFS, 2012). The impacts of fire station relocation on the communities they are leaving and entering is significant and the loss or gain of a station can generate community distress. As highlighted by the NZFS, explaining the scientific factors motivating the relocation does not always counter the concerns felt by locals. The NZFS have identified the need to know how communities value their fire brigade and fire station, in order to develop strategies to better manage station relocation.

Kaitiaki Research and Evaluation (Kaitiaki) was commissioned by the NZFS to conduct research to better understand how New Zealand communities value their local fire stations and how knowledge of these values can be used to develop strategies to better manage station relocations. The overall aim of the project was to better understand community concerns so that the NZFS can communicate successfully with the community in regards to station location changes (NZFS, 2013). Specific research objectives included:

- understand the non-economic values that communities have for their fire brigade/stations;

- explore how the lose or gain of a fire station effects local communities;

- examine, from a community perspective, how the NZFS have communicated and managed fire station relocation in the past;

- identify, from a community perspective, what factors support the successful relocation of fire brigade/stations;

- identify, from a community perspective, what factors help generate an unsuccessful relocation of fire brigade/stations; and,

- explore strategies to ensure that the NZFS better communicate and manage station relocations in the future.

The study employed a participatory qualitative approach. The first stage of the research involved a thematic and content analysis of New Zealand newspaper articles published between 1999 and 2014. The second stage of the research involved a combination of semi-structured focus group and in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders in three locations: Katikati, Te Atatu and Takapuna. Within each community a station has relocated in the last two-to-three years. The current report presents the findings of the semi-structured focus group and in-depth qualitative interviews. The thematic and content analysis is attached as an appendix.

2. Approach

The study employed a combination of semi-structured focus groups and in-depth qualitative interviews in three locations: Katikati, Te Atatu and Takapuna.

2.1 Individual and small group interviews

Of the 33 people interviewed, six interviews were conducted with individuals. Of these three were carried out face-to-face and three were telephone interviews. The remaining participants shared their experiences in four small group interviews comprising between two and five participants.

The interviews occurred over five days in August 2014 and lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours.

The interviews were structured around participants' perceptions and experiences with the following:

- the non-economic values that communities have for their fire brigade/stations;
- the impact (both loss and / or gain of fire stations on local communities);
- experiences with the manner with which NZFS have communicated and managed fire station relocation in the past;
- what supported the successful relocation of fire brigade/stations;
- what generated an unsuccessful relocation of fire brigade/stations; and,
- an exploration of strategies to ensure that the NZFS better communicates and manages station relocations in the future.

2.2 Participants

Of the 33 participants, more males (n=20, 61%) then females participated (n=13, 39%). This may be a reflection of a gendered interest in fire stations and / or attributable to the high proportion of male participants who had been involved with the service on a voluntary capacity (n=12, 60% of males compared to n=1, 8% of females).

Participants

Participant Type	n	%
Gender		
Male	20	61%
Female	13	39%
Role		
Affected residents	7	21%
Volunteer fire fighters (current and past)	13	39%
Local government representative	3	9%
Community representatives	10	30%
Total	**33**	**100%**

2.3 Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a combination of direct invitation and snowballing methodology. In the first instance, participants were recruited through initial contact with a variety of local community groups and community boards. These contacts then communicated with their respective stakeholders about the research and invited participation. Next, where addresses could be identified, letters inviting participation to those who had made submissions relating to the proposed relocation of fire stations in each of the three areas were sent out inviting participation. Finally, at the conclusion of the interviews, participants were asked for a referral to others in the community who might want to participate.

2.4 Analysis and reporting

A grounded theory approach to data collection, coding and analysis was employed. As such, a process of constant comparative analysis was used throughout the lifespan of the research, which meant comparing:

- different individual and stakeholder perspectives; and,
- perspectives shared from the different locations.

Through this process emerging findings were consistently tested to determine the extent to which they are common across participants. In practice this meant that codes were created within an analysis framework. Throughout the fieldwork, information was defined and categorised through a continual review of interviews and fieldwork notes. As a result, emerging patterns were continually tested through the interview as well as the exploration of new questions that arose in the preceding interviews. This process of constant comparative analysis also provides an opportunity to explore, at greater depth, reasons underlying emerging patterns. Quotes are used to illustrate the various codes/themes that emerged.

2.5 Limitations

In each of the three communities a fire station was relocated. As such the research findings focus on relocation of fire stations only and do not include the impact of a complete loss of fire station through closure.

Further, this study is restricted to a series of qualitative interviews and the findings can be regarded as indicative only.

3. The value of the local fire stations

Across all participants, fire stations were valued as providing a sense of safety in emergency situations, albeit fires, road accidents or as a first responder to health-related emergencies. Participants differed, however, according to the degree to which fire stations were regarded as a central or embedded feature of the community. Appreciating this difference is, to some degree, complex as a number of tensions were identified in participants' narratives.

First, a number of passionate descriptions of 'community' were provided by those critical of the relocations. Essentially, the relocations had occurred outside of what participants viewed as their geographic community, despite the relocation having occurred within a relatively short distance. This was most evident in Te Atatu where discussions of 'community' elicited a longstanding divide between Te Atatu North (the Peninsula) and Te Atatu South. This divide appeared to underscore dissatisfaction with the relocation. As such, an appreciation of locally derived understandings of community is informative when possible dissatisfaction with station relocation is in question.

Next, while participants generally strongly valued the presence of fire stations in their communities the value was diminished when a relocation had been scheduled for those living in close proximity to the new station. Issues such as noise, the imposing size of the new fire stations and the impact on property values underscored opposition to the relocation.

> *This was an established residential area. It was changing the character of the neighbourhood. (Affected resident, Te Atatu)*

> *However, you're in two minds because it's for the common good and I'm all for the common good. I'm not against the Fire Service, but here, a new fire station, really? It just didn't make sense. (Affected resident, Te Atatu)*

Within these tensions, two primary values were identified. Each is presented separately below although some participants identified both.

It is noteworthy that none of the participants viewed the loss of an actual building as a overriding concern. In the main, the activities associated with the fire stations were discussed as the important issue. The use of the actual building was raised as secondary concern for residents, such as a derelict building, and is discussed in Section 5. In this sense, participants did not reference actual fire station buildings as a value but as an issue falling under information distribution.

3.1 Fire stations as a central component of the community

Those who viewed fire stations as a central community feature argued that fire stations, and more importantly actual fire fighters, contribute significantly to community cohesion. This was most notably discussed in Te Atatu and Takapuna as participants discussed a sense of loss from what was nostalgically described as 'past practice'. In this sense, the Te Atatu and Takapuna relocations, while involving a geographical move, coincided with a perceived shift towards 'professionalism': a move toward emergency response only and a purposeful move away from

community involvement or cohesion. Those aligned with the above position discussed the modern fire station as professionalised: fire stations providing a much needed service but not manifesting as a social or visible component of the community.

In Te Atatu, the loss of fire stations as an integrated component of the community was first discussed in reference to the geographical shift from Te Atatu North to Te Atatu South. On one hand the relocation was reported to have led to volunteer fire fighter attrition. Inherently this had resulted the end of a number of families' intergenerational involvement with the brigade as the distance required to travel to respond to a call was prohibitive which in turn led to a decreased community presence. This in turn had resulted in an end to the local fire brigade participating in a variety of community events.

> *The Peninsula [Te Atatu North] volunteers weren't just part of the Fire Service, they were part of the community. They were a team of friends who worked together and played together. And the community were invited to be part of that. They took part in our Christmas parades. The harm that was done to the volunteer fire service out on the Peninsula was great. It was devastating to some of those guys. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

> *There is less visual presence in the community now. You always saw the Fire Service in the community. They'd go out for food with their uniforms on. They've gone from being present in the community to an isolated area where they are behind the scenes. (Volunteer fire fighter, Te Atatu)*

> *Groups of volunteer fire fighters used to go for runs in New Zealand Fire Service tops. The community saw us getting fit and ready for their jobs. It was a tight community and people would see the Fire Service members and want to apply as a volunteer. (Volunteer fire fighter, Te Atatu)*

In Takapuna, two participants with an extensive knowledge of fire service history discussed the shift from community cohesion to professionalism with a high degree of nostalgia and regret. Similar to participants from Te Atatu, these participants appreciated the historical contribution of fire stations to the communities' social fabric.

> *In the old days the fire station was part of the community. The crews showed movies, held raffles, had social clubs and people would stop to ask for directions as the stations had roadmaps. Fire fighters were an attraction; especially to school kids and the bay doors were always open to the community. (Community representative, Takapuna)*

While the participants in Te Atatu and Takapuna spoke emotively of the historical role the fire brigade had played in their communities, in Katikati this depth of emotional description was not present. This difference was interpreted as Katikati having maintained the strong sense of connection between the volunteer fire service and the community; a sense of connection that was reported to have been lost in Te Atatu and Takapuna.

Of note, other participants across the three sites, stated that they had not thought about the role of fire stations in their community and, instead stated that fire stations

were an accepted and expected emergency response feature. For these participants, issues such as social cohesion and community spirit were not an important consideration.

3.2   Fire stations / services as emergency responders

All participants stated that they valued fire brigades as an essential emergency response service and perceived the existence of fire stations as a vital presence in the community.

The role of emergency responders underscored some participants' opposition to station relocations. In these situations, fears that relocation would result in increased response times, and therefore the risk of unnecessary destruction of property, were cited as primary objections to relocations. Within these contexts, the NZFS' emergency response modelling was strongly doubted as participants' knowledge of the geographic contexts, such as roading and traffic congestion, nullified NZFS' modelling arguments.

> *The computer modelling said this was the right spot for it [the relocated station], but you need to talk to people, not machines. At one level you have much better access to the motorway and car accidents, however, you also have 26,000 cars that go past each day. You [the fire engines] won't be able to get on to the motorway easily from there. The response time is a worry for the community in Te Atatu North. What if the bridge were to be destroyed in a disaster? The fire service wouldn't be able to get to us. (Community representative, Te Atatu).*

It is noteworthy that participants who argued against NZFS modelling also strongly argued that relocation of the service would be detrimental to community cohesion. Alternatively, other participants who viewed fire stations as a vital emergency response function, but with a low community profile, did not view the social integration of station as important. Rather, the fire station was regarded as providing a sense of reassurance that, in the case of an emergency, the community would be protected. For these participants, 'authorities' were trusted to have made the right decision to place fire stations in locations that would best serve the greatest number of residents.

> *The move to Wairau Road seemed logical. We weren't losing a fire station; it wasn't closing down, only moving. And it was moving to a better building, only five minutes up the road. (Local government representative, Takapuna)*

4. Primary stakeholders

The values associated with local fire stations were commonly discussed in regards to four stakeholder groups affected by proposed and actual relocations:

- decision makers and regulatory bodies;
- fire brigades;
- affected residents; and,
- the wider community.

4.1 Decision-makers and regulatory bodies

Decision-makers and regulatory bodies included local government stakeholders. This included local councils and community boards. Local government stakeholders were identified because of the possible impact of a station relocation on the local government's ability to plan and respond effectively. This was most commonly discussed in regards to emergency response plans, the granting of resource consent and in appreciation of councils' and community boards' role in information dissemination and as a point of community contact. Other decision-makers included other emergency services, such as ambulance and police. In Katikati this was important in that there had been an initial desire to co-locate emergency services within one area.

4.2 Fire brigades

In each of the three sites, the fire brigade was identified as a vital stakeholder group affected by proposed and actual relocations. The importance of the brigade occurred regardless of composition, whether volunteer, composite or fully professional.

In smaller volunteer fire fighter communities, the importance of volunteer brigades as a primary stakeholder group was contextualised in light of long-standing and intergenerational involvement with the service. As such, any proposed change was viewed as rippling from volunteer fire fighters through to the wider community as volunteers' immediate family and friends were impacted by the changes on their loved ones. Similarly, within composite brigades, volunteers were regarded as a primary stakeholder as their relationships outside of the service impacted on the degree to which any proposed change was felt at a community level.

> *Our fire station is our home. It's our family. The community owns the station. It's a place for the community to own and support. We do a lot for the community as well: smoke alarms and replacing batteries, we go to schools and talk about fire safety. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

Volunteer, composite and professional brigades were also viewed as a primary affected stakeholder because of their knowledge of the area. Participants stressed that fire fighters, regardless of type, should be consulted about any proposed station re-location. As such, any form of communication with NZFS that excluded or that failed to acknowledge the central role that volunteer fire fighters and their families hold in the two communities was regarded as insufficient.

4.3 Affected residents

Two types of affected resident stakeholders were identified: those residing beside or around an existing station and those residing beside or around a proposed station.

Those residing in close proximity to an existing station were viewed as a primary stakeholder because of the stress that a proposed move was reported to have elicited. For some participants, decisions to purchase their properties had been determined by their proximity to the station. As such, the relocation of the station raised concerns about their safety. For others residing in close proximity, station relocation raised concerns about the future use of the station building and how, in the event of a demolition and/or rebuild, their properties, landscape and views might be negatively impacted.

> *They were good neighbours. Having a manned station next door was good security wise. The brigade moving is a loss in some ways My biggest concern now is what will happen to the old station. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

Those residing in close proximity to a proposed station were regarded as primary stakeholders because of the potential impact of noise arising from an emergency response and fire fighter training as well as concerns over the visual and environment impact of the erection of a large and 'imposing' building.

4.4 The wider community

In each of the three sites, the wider community was cited as a key stakeholder because of the possible involvement and notification with the use of the existing / previous fire station. It is noteworthy that for each site, the relocation of a station was generally regarded as a positive and logical decision: providing the community with a more modern and fit-for-purpose facility. However, the use of the old building and / or land was an issue that some members of the wider community showed an interest.

5. The impact of the loss or gain of fire stations

Participants in the three participating communities reported different responses to relocation of their fire stations. Across participants, positive and negative responses fell into three time-related reactions:

- initial reactions to station relocation decisions;
- short-term concerns, including anxiety, fear and a sense of being relegated to a second class status; and,
- post-relocation concerns over the future of the old fire station building and/or land.

5.1 Initial reactions

In each of the three sites, no negative reactions to the initial announcement that the NZFS had decided to relocate the stations were reported. These positive reactions were traced to one or more of the following:

- the community had previously identified the need to relocate and modernise the service;
- the community and key stakeholders viewed the relocation as a logical decision; and,
- the community and key stakeholders viewed the relocation as a decision that appropriately sat with the NZFS.

In Katikati, the local fire service had identified the need for a new fire station that should be located to a more appropriate site well before the NZFS had decided to relocate the station. The volunteer fire fighters and the wider community were reported to widely acknowledge that the existing station was too small and inappropriately located on the main street. As such, NZFS' suggestion that the fire station was to be relocated to an area that would allow ease of access and provide a more modern and fit for service structure was viewed as logical by the local community and resulted in little negative reaction. In this sense, participants asserted that the relocation was positively accepted because NZFS' suggestion to relocate was viewed as confirming a community-derived need and was therefore not a decision imposed on the local station and community by 'Wellington'.

> We were excited that we were getting a bigger premise. Where we were was on the main highway. There was a problem with parking and it was difficult getting into traffic. Where the station is now is more easily accessible. (Community representative, Katikati)

Similarly, the relocation of the Te Atatu and Takapuna stations were generally viewed as a logical decision in that the suggested relocation and simultaneous improvement of the fire stations was welcomed as a new, purpose-built station was regarded as something of direct benefit to the two communities.

5.2 Short-term concerns: Anxiety, fear and a sense of being relegated to a second class status

A number of impacts, arising from the brigade relocation, were reported in Katikati

and Te Atatu. In Te Atatu these concerns were reported to have undermined the relationship between the community and the NZFS and were believed to have negatively impacted on the community in relation to emergency response times and community social cohesion. In Katikati, a lack of operational input into the building of the new station had resulted in a strained relationship between some volunteer fire fighters and NZFS. This dissatisfaction, however, was not perceived to be long lasting.

In Te Atatu, concerns arose when the original plan to relocate the station within Te Atatu North was changed to Te Atatu South. NZFS had always intended to build the new station close to the motorway, on either side at Te Atatu. The station's relocation to a site in Te Atatu South, rather than Te Atatu North, resulted in a distance of a few hundred metres from any potential relocation site on the northern side of the Peninsula. However, the decision to locate the station in Te Atatu South was perceived as a NZFS failing to adhere to what was believed to be an initial promise. Te Atatu participants reported having received a number of contradictory messages from NZFS. As an outcome they described being disillusioned and extremely dissatisfied with NZFS.

> *They [NZFS] just did not know what they wanted from the beginning. At first they told us that the new station would stay on the Peninsula. They told us that if resource consent wasn't granted then the Fire Service has deep pockets and would appeal the decision. Then all of a sudden they announced that it was going to be built in Te Atatu South. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

> *They said it [the new station] had to be built in Te Atatu South because the Waitemata Headquarters was going to be here. That way they could justify building such a large building. All of this changed and the Waitemata Headquarters (HQ) moved to Takapuna. So what they have is a huge building. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

Strongly associated with the frustration arising from the perceived contradictory messages was a negative impact on the volunteer fire fighters and how this has impacted on the wider Te Atatu North community. As previously discussed, the relocation to Te Atatu South had led to volunteer fire fighter attrition. This had resulted in the end to a number of families' intergenerational involvement with the brigade as the distance required to travel to respond to a call was prohibitive which in turn led to a decreased community presence. This in turn had resulted in an end to the local fire brigade participating in a variety of community events.

> *We lost a lot of volunteers who lived on the Peninsula. They were a team of friends. We would all get involved to the their award nights [Te Atatu North]. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

> *All of these guys who had given 20-odd years were treated like garbage. If you can't get to the new station on time then, bye-bye. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

This became even more of an issue with what was perceived as an illogical choice of a site for the new station, given a lack of appreciation of traffic congestion. Despite voicing their concerns, the community felt that the NZFS did not take their local

knowledge into consideration and ignored their input.

> *They ignored our concerns. At a meeting they showed us a computer model of the whole area. They said the computer knew best. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

> *They ignored local input. We tried to raise our concerns about the traffic flow but we were completely ignored. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

In Katikati, no significant dissatisfaction with the choice of the new station site was identified. Rather, both volunteer and community representative participants reported a high degree of dissatisfaction with what was perceived as a lack of local input into the new station's build, after the design was agreed. This lack of input can be understood given NZFS's practice of tendering station builds to construction firms for a fixed price. Within this arrangement the contractor has full responsibility for the build and, without a NZFS requirement, there is no onus on the contractor to liaise with local representatives.

> *There was a lack of communication and planning. There was a lack of project management coordination which was wasteful. They didn't want our advice. Instead of getting our input they brought a crane out five times from Tauranga. If they had listened to us they could have made one trip only. It was like the Fire Service didn't have a process. It was like they had never built a fire station before. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

What was believed to be a lack of willingness to engage with the local volunteers was attributed to negative perception of volunteer fighters.

> *Permanents don't treat us as equals. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

No short-tem concerns or positive impacts were identified in Takapuna. Participants suggested a lack of concern arose from a combination of:

- NZFS' regular contact with local government representatives who were reported as being fully informed of the NZFS' intention to relocate;
- a sense that the existing service, comprising of a professional / permanent brigade, was entitled to engage in a build external to community consultation;
- a belief that the relocation would not compromise service response times; and,
- the selected new site was within an industrial area and thereby did not result in a perceived negative impact on a residential neighbourhood.

5.3 Post-relocation concerns

Post-relocation concerns generally centred on the future of the previous fire station. In Katikati the old fire station building and land was owned by the local council. In Te Atatu and Takapuna the building and land were owned by the NZFS.

In Katikati, some residents communicated dissatisfaction with decisions about how the old fire station building would be used. Underscoring this concern was dissatisfaction that the local council had not engaged in an appropriate and transparent tender process that would safeguard the historical value of the building.

> *There is some concern about the future of the building. The building is an icon. It is*

> *Council owned and it is in the process of accommodating the new museum. It needed a lot of work to keep it standing. (Community representative, Katikati)*

In Takapuna, residents residing in close proximity to the old station described a high degree of frustration and concern over the future of the building.

> *One of our main concerns is what is going to happen to the land now. We don't want the place to go to wreck and ruin and be taken over by kids. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

> *The old building is just standing there. We have a right to know what is going to happen to it. If they [NZFS] sell it off to a developer then there is a high chance that a high rise will be built. That would really impact on us, casting shadows and raising noise levels. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

Further, while Takapuna participants communicated little dissatisfaction with the initial announcement of the fire station's relocation, considerable dissatisfaction was reported about the NZFS decision to sell the land on which the old fire station had been based. At the heart of this dissatisfaction was the fact that the community was believed to have sold the land at a nominal rate in 1950s. As such, some participants strongly felt that the NZFS was wrong to sell the land at a profit. Further, this decision occurred in what was viewed as a surprise and outside of a transparent and planned process that participants believed should have been communicated when the relocation of the station was first announced.

In Te Atatu, some participants had discussed originally being concerned about the future use of the old fire station building and site but, given dissatisfaction with previous communications with NZFS, had decided to depersonalise their interests in the future of the building as they believed that any vested interest in the site or building would be a "*waste of time*".

One post-relocation positive impact was reported by an affected resident. Essentially, as the shock of having a station built beside the participant's property had waned, the participant reported having identified some positives.

> *Over time, once the shock wore off, I began to realise there are some positives. Even though it is a large building you get use to it. There are people here 24-hours a day. It's handy that it's next door when a fire breaks out. And they are good neighbours. (Affected resident, Te Atatu)*

6. NZ Fire Service Communication

The effectiveness of NZ Fire Service communication was discussed according to four points in the station relocation process:

- initial announcement of the decision to relocate;
- the identification of the new fire station site;
- the build; and,
- post-relocation, concerning the future use of the land and buildings.

In the main, the initial decision to relocate the fire service was well regarded. However, the NZFS was viewed as not engaging in the best forms of communication at some of the other points in the relocation process. In Te Atatu and Katikati, community representatives and volunteer fire fighters described communication with the NZFS as one sided: denoted by local residents and staff asking for information and transparency with little commitment on behalf of the NZFS to treat the community and the local station staff as partners in the relocation. In Takapuna, communication with NZFS was not perceived negatively and this was attributed to the professional nature of the local fire service and the fact that NZFS owned to the land.

6.1   Initial communication

Participants in the three case study areas reported different communication experiences with NZFS. In Te Atatu and Takapuna the NZFS was reported to have sufficiently communicated the decision to relocate the fire station with the relevant local government authorities, including community boards. Katikati participants reported limited community notification.

> *There wasn't any public consultation. From what I understand they [NZFS] wrote to the community board. (Community representative, Katikati)*

Participants discussed the need for widespread community consultation at length. In each of the communities, no concerns were raised about the need for a new station and the relocation of the fire station was generally seen as a practical and necessary consequence. Within this context, the majority of participants reported that NZFS' approach, engaging with local government, to announce its decision to relocate the station was appropriate. The caveat to this however, was that no significant geographical moves were flagged by NZFS when the relocation was announced.

> *Consultation occurs here for certain things only. Like the Town Plan, Council comes to town and puts on display what they are proposing. We have a strong community so if we need to be consulted we will jump up and down. . . The station was run by volunteers so there was no big issue with the relocation. No one is paid and it was about looking after the volunteers. The community realised that the facilities and the gear were not up to standard to deal with emergencies. . . . (Community representative, Katikati)*

> *I don't remember any consultation. It was more logical than anything because they had run out of space. (Community representative, Katikati)*

In Te Atatu, little dissatisfaction with the proposed relocation was traced to an early NZFS assurance that the new station would remain on the Peninsula.

> *We were told that they were going to shift the fire station to a reserve in the Peninsula. There was a reserve designation on it and the designation was lifted to allow the station to go there. We were relatively happy with that. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

In Takapuna the local community board was reported to have been kept well informed through an initial NZFS presentation and then regular updates.

> *The local board was kept well informed. About three years ago a uniformed officer came and talked about the review of service reach and signalled a likely move. The move did not inspire any real concern. (Local government representative, Takapuna)*

> *There was very little community concern raised by the relocation. I had four emails about response time but the bulk of the emails were from those neighbouring the old fire station site asking what was going to happen to the old building. (Local government representative, Takapuna)*

Less satisfied, however, were affected residents who reported a high degree of concern about how the relocation might negatively impact on them.

> *There was a lack of communication from NZFS. We never had anyone from NZFS come over and say this was happening. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

6.2   The identification of the new fire station site

Issues with community and NZFS communication were discussed in relation to the wider community and affected residents, those residing beside an existing station and those residing beside or around a relocated station.

Wider community responses

In Katikati and Takapuna, little dissatisfaction was reported with the identification of the new fire station site. In Katikati, the site was perceived as logical and avoided existing difficulties of accessing a congested traffic area. In Takapuna, some community members had raised their concerns with the community board about emergency response times but these concerns were reported as occurring on a small scale and were alleviated by the community board communicating project response time provided by NZFS.

In contrast, Te Atatu participants reported a high degree of dissatisfaction with the choice of the new fire station site. Once the decision was made to move the station from Te Atatu North participants strongly felt that wider community engagement should have been undertaken.

> *There was no public consultation about the station going to the South. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

> *People were happy when the new station was going to stay on the Peninsula. Keeping it there would have meant keeping the volunteers and reinforcing a sense of community. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

These frustrations were exacerbated by what participants described as NZFS

ignoring local input, namely concern over traffic congestion and the loss of volunteer fire fighters from Te Atatu North.

> *Such stupidity putting it [new station] on Te Atatu Road. The traffic volume is really high, it is an established residential area. They have changed the character of the neighbourhood. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

> *This is a stupid place to put a station. They are only going into two lanes. The cars don't have anywhere to go. When the cars are on the bridge there is nowhere to go. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

Affected residents residing beside or around an existing station

In Katikati and Te Atatu, despite direct invitations to participate, no residents who had resided beside the old fire station participated in the study. However, participants reported that immediately affected residents had not raised significant concerns when the relocation was initially flagged. This was attributed to the local fire brigade's efforts to discuss the relocation with affected residents. Rather than NZFS meeting with communities, local brigade representatives met with communities to discuss the relocation. While this alleviated concern, participants perceived this as an inadequate approach as the onus of consultation was placed on locals and was perceived to denote a distance between affected communities and NZFS.

> *We had to address any community concerns ourselves by saying that we needed it. We got the local paper involved. We had open days for people to understand why we use the siren. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

> *Bill Ellis, who worked for the Fire Service, went to every house on Covil and showed them plans. (Community representative, Te Atatu)*

In Takapuna, one participant who lived next to the old station discussed the loss of the station, citing a loss of a sense of safety from the relocation.

> *We were really upset when they announced that the station would be relocating. It has always given us a sense of safety living beside a fire station. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

Affected residents residing beside or around a relocated station

No immediately affected residents, from Katikati or Takapuna participated in the study. Little concern was reported in Takapuna and this was attributed to the commercial area where the new station was built. In Katikati concern over noise had been initially raised by newly affected residents. These concerns were mitigated by local fire station representatives deciding to meet with affected neighbours and outlining a variety of noise reduction strategies and the rationale for the use of the siren.

> *People who lived by the new station told me that they felt like they were being selfish about the alarm. Meanwhile there were mums with young babies. It doesn't go off that often, the guys [fire fighters] have pages but if they are in work they often don't hear their pages so we need the siren. (Katikati, Community representative)*

> *Affected residents needed to know that the station's relocation was a practical and*

important move and that any noise from sirens would be short-term and infrequent. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)

Te Atatu residents, living in close proximity to the proposed new station, reported a high degree of dissatisfaction with NZFS communication. No participating resident had learnt of the decision to build the station directly from NZFS. In two cases, the residents had found out about the relocation through local real estate agents making contact to see if they would be interested in selling.

The first I knew about it was when a real estate agent phoned and asked if my home was for sale. (Affected resident, Te Atatu)

In addition, the decision to relocate the station to an established residential area was greeted with considerable dissonance.

Initially, it was hard to see any positives. There was this big entity within the residences. I was in shock. You feel that you are living in an established area and then you are told there is going to be a large building put in the middle of you all. (Affected resident, Te Atatu)

The decision may have been improved through the development of an affect resident communication plan which focuses on face-to-face meetings with affected neighbours in person. Further, participants advised that the communications plan should include the role of the local brigade and NZFS in meeting with affected residents.

6.3   The build

In Katikati, those with a close association with the fire station described a high degree of dissatisfaction with the lack of operationally-focused communication engaged in by NZFS.

There was no operational consultation. To the best of my knowledge they never came and asked if we had any concerns with the build. We had to address them ourselves. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)

Rather than consultation it was communication between the Fire Service and Headquarters. It was a distant relationship. It felt like it was us and them. You had to send a fax everyday until you got a response. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)

As previously discussed, the lack of willingness to engage with the local volunteers was attributed to negative perception of volunteer fighters.

They [permanent staff] don't treat us as equals. May be because we are volunteers and the fact that we treat a station as home we are used to having a voice, having input. This is different for permanents. They have a structure they work within. They are trained to do as they are told. It is a similar hierarchy to the police and the military with an overlay of bureaucracy. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)

This difference was believed to negatively impact on NZFS' communication with the local volunteer brigade. Whereas permanent fire fighters were viewed as working within a strict hierarchal organisation, reflecting paramilitary organisational structures and similar to police organisational structure, volunteers were characterised as a

family-type network and within this context, possessing a history of having a voice.

> *The Fire Service seemed to just see the fire station as a building. They didn't seem to care about the staff and just treated it like a project. (Community representative, Katikati)*

Katikati participants would have preferred a collaborative form of communication with NZFS. This appears to reflect the values associated with volunteer brigades. Underscoring the need for collaborative communication, participants stressed that the unique needs of the local brigade needed to be taken into account with the new build. Further, by not engaging in a collaborative form of communication, NZFS were portrayed as working outside of potentially invaluable sources of local knowledge.

> *We had maybe two visits from HQ. It was probably adequate but they could have spent more time with us at the beginning. It was almost like HQ and brigades are not a team. It would have been good if they had spent some time with us, talk about how they generally go about a build and ask us if there was anyway it could be improved. It was like they didn't identify what our needs were from the beginning. They didn't appreciate that they are building our home. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

> *They gave no consideration to the water truck we had. They hadn't supplied the water truck so they wouldn't give it housing. So we had to do our own fundraising. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

In response, the local brigade formed a building committee. The intention of which was to further the needs of the local brigade.

> *HQ said this is what you are getting". So we set up a building committee. We had to fight but we were able to make comments on the proposed structure. For instance, we had to fight to put a hydrant on the section. (Volunteer fire fighter, Katikati)*

6.4 Post-relocation

Two post-relocation communication issues were identified: communication with affected residents and communication regarding the future of the previous fire station.

Affected residents residing beside or around a relocated station

Affected neighbours greatly appreciated the ability to meet regularly with local brigades to discuss any issues that might have arisen. In Katikati and Te Atatu, local residents reported feeling that they had an open door relationship with the station and had had a number of meetings about concerns, which when they reported had been rectified to both parties satisfaction. Although, in Te Atatu this relationship took time to establish, the open communication with the brigade that developed over time impacted positively on relations between the affected residents and the local brigade.

> *They said right from the start that they wanted to be good neighbours and they have been. But early on I felt like the nagging neighbour. They have to realise that they are part of the community. (Affected resident, Te Atatu)*

Establishing a clear communication pathway, at a local level, was considered to have alleviated concerns as they arose and stopped any growing frustration.

Future use of the previous fire station

In each of the three sites, participants raised concern about the future of the previous fire station building. Participants understood that the NZFS was in a precarious position, as the NZFS does not always own the site or building. For instance, the NZFS owned the land and building in Te Atatu and Takapuna while the local council owned the land and building in Katikati. Outside of ownership considerations, participants viewed NZFS as possessing some responsibility in addressing the possible future use of the site and building at the initial communication stages. In cases of NZFS lease, community expectations centred on a joint NZFS building / landowner stakeholder communication process.

> *There has been no real communication about the future of the old building. We are told it is "in the pipeline". Because there is no concrete communication there has been a lot of hearsay and conjecture. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

> *It feels as though NZFS has walked away and left it. (Affected resident, Takapuna)*

To alleviate future concerns, participants suggested the initial stages of a station relocation communication should include options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed and reported to stakeholders over time.

7. Strategies to ensure that the NZFS better communicate and manage station relocations in the future

A number of stakeholders and key communication points were identified that can inform communication strategies that might guide future station relocation communication. The communication points reflect key points in the station relocation process. These points and complementary strategies are outlined in the table below.

Key Communication Strategy Components

Point in the Relocation Process	Stakeholder Groups	Suggested Approach	Potential Issues / Risks
Initial communication	Fire station building / landowners are key collaborative partners with whom a draft future use strategy can be developed to inform stakeholder communication.	In the event that NZFS does not own the building / land, develop a collaborative relationship with the fire station building / landowners and, where possible, scope: ▪ options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed alongside a decision timeframe; ▪ timeframes; and, ▪ ways in which affected persons will be informed. In the event that NZFS owns the building / land scope: ▪ options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed alongside a decision timeframe; ▪ timeframes; and, ▪ ways in which affected persons will be informed.	Raised expectations
	Key communication stakeholder groups include: ▪ local government representatives; ▪ local fire brigades; and, ▪ affected neighbours (those residing in close proximity to the existing station).	Use the initial communication phase to identify potentially contentious issues that can inform future stakeholder communication and planning. Develop a draft relocation plan that includes: ▪ potential relocation sites; ▪ time schedules; ▪ ways in which affected persons	A lack of trust of computer modelling The need to take into account local knowledge when choosing a relocation site

		will be informed; and, ■ options for future use of the existing station building and how this will be assessed alongside a decision timeframe.	
Identification of the new fire station site	Affected residents	Develop a concise communication plan and meet affected neighbours in person. This is best conducted on a one-to-one basis but there may be an opportunity for small resident meetings Determine, in collaboration with the local brigade, the best approach for communicating with affected residents and determine NZFS' role within this communication process	Concern may include but not be limited to the impact of the relocation on: ■ property values; ■ changing the nature of the neighbourhood; ■ traffic congestion; ■ child safety; and, ■ noise reduction and mitigation strategies.
Building	Volunteer brigades	Ensure volunteer brigades are collaborative partners in the build. Specifically, NZFS Property Managers have a more structured and consistent approach to engaging and communicating with the local brigade during the build to avoid a sense of exclusion	Local brigades, as end users, need to be treated as collaborative partners. Failure to include local brigades in a collaborative build can risk increased financial costs, a poor relationship with NZFS and a station that does not meet the local brigade's needs
Post-relocation	Affected neighbours	Ensure affected residents have a regular opportunity to raise issues of concern with the local brigade and ensure that concerns are addressed in a timely manner	Concerns may include but not be limited to: ■ noise, and, ■ traffic disruption.
	Community interest groups	Where the NZFS owns the old station building / land provide interested community groups with regular updates on the intended future use and / or sale.	Extended timeframes NZFS cannot be held to account for the future of building / land that it does not own

Appendix A: Thematic and content analysis

The value of fire stations and the management of relocations from a community perspective: Exploring print media reports of fire station closures and relocations

prepared for the

New Zealand Fire Service

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30 July 2014

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1 Introduction

The relocation of fire stations is necessary to ensure that that the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) is optimally located to respond quickly to fire and non-fire emergencies (NZFS, 2013). The decision to relocate a fire station from one community to another is often the result of the findings of complex and scientific location-based mapping programmes. Currently, national goals require a response to fire and non-fire emergencies within eight minutes for career fire stations and eleven minutes for volunteer fire stations 90% of the time. As such, it is vital that stations are appropriately located (NZFS, 2012). The impacts of fire station relocation on the communities they are leaving and entering is significant and the loss or gain of a station can generate community distress. As highlighted by the NZFS, explaining the scientific factors motivating the relocation does not always counter the concerns felt by locals. The NZFS have identified the need to know how communities value their fire brigade and fire station, in order to develop strategies to better manage station relocation.

Kaitiaki Research and Evaluation (Kaitiaki) was commissioned by the NZFS to conduct research to better understand how New Zealand communities value their local fire stations and how knowledge of these values can be used to develop strategies to better manage station relocations. The overall aim of the project was to better understand community concerns so that the NZFS can communicate successfully with the community in regards to station location changes (NZFS, 2013). Specific research objectives included:

- understand the non-economic values that communities have for their fire brigade/stations;

- explore how the lose or gain of a fire station effects local communities;

- examine, from a community perspective, how the NZFS have communicated and managed fire station relocation in the past;

- identify, from a community perspective, what factors support the successful relocation of fire brigade/stations;

- identify, from a community perspective, what factors help generate an unsuccessful relocation of fire brigade/stations; and,

- explore strategies to ensure that the NZFS better communicate and manage station relocations in the future.

The study employed a participatory qualitative approach. The first stage of the research involved a thematic and content analysis of New Zealand newspaper articles published between 1999 and 2014. The second stage of the research will involve focus groups with key stakeholders across three different communities in which a station has relocated in the last two to three years. The current report presents the findings of the thematic and content analysis.

2 Methodology

The thematic and content analysis was guided by the following three questions:

- What non-economic values do New Zealand communities have for their fire stations?

- How does the loss or gain of a fire station affect local New Zealand communities?

- What concerns do New Zealand communities have surrounding how the New Zealand Fire Service handled station relocations or closures?

1.1 Sample and data collection

In total, 189 articles were analysed (a full list of articles is available in Appendix B). Articles consisted of opinion pieces, letters to the editor, news articles and feature articles. Only 112 of these articles included the opinions, concerns of views of locals, community groups and local community representatives; the remainder provided general information about station relocations and closures.

The articles came from two sources, the NZFS media library and the Newztext database. The Newztext database and NZFS library were used to locate New Zealand newspaper articles and commentaries published between 1999 and 2014 making reference to fire station relocations and closures. In all, 189 relevant articles, letters and opinion pieces were located. All of these articles were used in the thematic analysis of content. Sometimes an article (from a Fairfax paper) was published in more than one newspaper; when this happened only one instance of this article's appearance and paper was recorded. Any repetition in article appearance was not included in the total number of articles analysed.

It should be noted that Newztext does not store every article published in Fairfax or APN papers. The articles stored tend to be in the commercially sold papers, which are metropolitan or provincial, but not all such articles are stored on the database. Articles from local newspapers were predominantly sourced from the NZFS library. However, it should be noted that while the best efforts were made to source articles, the 189 articles collected do not represent all the articles published on fire station relocation and closures and only form a sample of those published in New Zealand papers between 1999 and 2014.

Keyword combinations were used to find appropriate articles. A NZFS staff member conducted the search of the NZFS library. The keywords used were fire brigade' 'fire station, 'close, 'relocation' between the years of 1999 and 2014. Newztext searches are restricted because it searches for exact phrases and only allows the searcher to use one additional criterion. This resulted in the restricted use of combinations of 'fire brigade' 'fire station, 'close, 'relocation' (as well as the plural combinations) in the first search with an additional criterion of the name of stations that the fire service has closed in the last 15 years.[1] The search was restricted to articles between January 1 1999 and 31 May 2014.

The most successful search technique involved the combination of 'fire station' and the 'station name' (for example 'Paihia'). For each station between 0 and 161 articles were generated in each search per year. Relevance was determined by first reviewing each article to ensure whether a reference was made to station closure or relocation. If a reference was made the entire article was downloaded.

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[1] The NZFS Property Team provided a list of stations that had closed or been relocated between 1999 and 2014. The list can be found in Appendix A.

7.1 Data analysis

Quantitative analysis

A member of the research team completed the analysis of the articles. Various identifying information about each article were analysed and the information entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The following attributes were examined:

- newspaper;
- type of article;
- focus of article;
- inclusion of community voice;
- location of station; and
- key themes.

Although key themes were often represented more than once in an article, the appearance of the theme was only counted once. This enabled a general idea of the extent to which particular themes occurred across the texts.

Qualitative analysis

The NZFS project team provided possible key themes that could arise in the analysis. These themes guided the qualitative analysis, in addition to other additional themes that were identified through a two-step process.

The first step involved the analysis of all 189 articles in which broad themes were identified that related to community concerns, how communities value their fire stations and fire service communication of closures and relocations. At this stage the identification of the 77 articles that did not include a community viewpoint occurred and in the second step of analysis only the remaining 112 articles were analysed. These articles were read and the initial seven themes that arose were highlighted in each article and examples of text from the articles, which represented each theme, were recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

3 Findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings of the thematic and content analysis are presented below.

7.2 Quantitative findings

To provide context to the thematic analysis, simple descriptive analysis (frequency counts and percentages) of the articles was carried out.

An overview of the sample

The 189 articles included in the sample came from a range of metro dailies (n= 41, 21.7%), regional dailies (n=13, 6.8%), and local community newspapers (n=135, 71.4%). The table below outlines the sample distribution across newspapers.

Table 1: Sample distribution of articles across newspapers

Newspaper	No. of articles	%
Auckland City Harbour News	2	1.1%
Bay of Plenty Times	1	0.5%
Central Leader	1	0.5%
Dominion Post	14	7.4%
Hutt News	6	3.2%
Independent Herald	23	12.2%
Manukau Courier	5	2.6%
Nelson Mail	1	0.5%
New Zealand Herald	8	4.2%
Newlands - Paparangi Post	5	2.6%
North Shore Times	11	5.8%
Northern Advocate	11	5.8%
Northern Courier	40	21.2%
Norwester	30	15.9%
Petone Herald	3	1.6%
Rangitikei Mail	1	0.5%
The Evening Post	14	7.4%
The Evening Standard	1	0.5%
The Press	4	2.1%
The Whangarei Leader	2	1.1%
Waikato Times	1	0.5%
Wainuiomata News	2	1.1%
Weekend Sun	2	1.1%
Whangarei Report	1	0.5%
TOTAL	**189**	**99.9%**

South Island newspapers were under represented in the sample. This is largely due to the location of the stations that were closed or relocated over the preceding 15-year period. However, the sample contained a high number of Wellington metro and local newspaper

articles. This was attributed to a high level of controversy, vocal local community and media attention that the proposed closure of the Khandallah and Newlands fire stations received. As illustrated in the below table, a large majority of the articles related to Newlands (n=110, 41.8%) and Khandallah (n=45, 17.1%).2

Table 2: Sample distribution of articles by station

Newspaper	No. of articles	%
Alicetown	5	1.9%
Avalon	4	1.5%
Hokitika	2	0.8%
Johnsonville	13	4.9%
Kamo	1	0.4%
Kaniere	2	0.8%
Katikati	3	1.1%
Khandallah	45	17.1%
Lower Hutt	2	0.8%
Manukau	1	0.4%
Manurewa	4	1.5%
Mount Roskill	5	1.9%
Newlands	110	41.8%
Onehunga	1	0.4%
Onerahi	6	2.3%
Paihia	9	3.4%
Papatoetoe	6	2.3%
Paraparaumu	2	0.8%
Petone	9	3.4%
Point Howard	6	2.3%
Ponsonby	2	0.8%
Ratana	1	0.4%
Seaview / Gracefield	5	1.9%
St Heliers	1	0.4%
Takapuna	11	4.2%
Te Atatu	2	0.8%
Waterloo	2	0.8%
Whitianga	1	0.4%
Woodend	2	0.4%
TOTAL	**263**	**100%**

Note: Some articles referenced more than one station, thus the total exceeds the 189 articles that were analysed.

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2 No articles relating to the relocation of Mount Manganui station and Orawia station were sourced. A number of stations that were not closed or relocated, but were perhaps considered for closure or relocation (for example Newlands) were also included in the analysis.

The majority of the articles were about the closure of a station (n=117, 62.0%) and the remaining articles focused on the relocation of a station (n=72, 38.1%). The below table illustrates the type of articles across the sample, with the majority of the articles being news stories.

Table 3: Sample distribution of type of articles

Type of article	No. of articles	%
Editorial	0	0%
Feature	3	1.6%
Letter to the editor	23	12.2%
News	159	84.1%
Opinion	4	2.1%
TOTAL	**189**	**100%**

Themes

From the total sample of 189 newspaper articles, 112 (59.3%) of the articles presented community values and concerns surrounding the closure or relocation of a fire station and perspectives on NZFS communication about these changes. In total, seven high-level themes associated with the values, concerns and impacts of the closure or relocation of a station were identified. The most frequent themes present in the articles were a distrust of the NZFS (n=38, 20.0%), environmental concerns related to the relocation of a station (n= 38, 20.0%), poor communication by the NZFS (n=39, 20.5%) and safety concerns associated with the loss of a station (n=40, 21%). Themes are discussed in greater depth in the following qualitative section.

Table 4: Sample distribution of key themes related to community values, concerns and NZFS communication

Theme	No. of articles	%
Community loss	20	10.5%
Distrust of NZFS	38	20.0%
Economic concerns	9	4.7%
Enhanced service	6	3.1%
Environmental concerns	38	20.0%
Lack of consultation	39	20.5%
Safety concerns	40	21%
TOTAL	**190**	**99.8%**

Note: Some articles referenced more than one theme, thus the total exceeds the 189 articles that were analysed.

7.3 Qualitative findings

1.   Distrust of New Zealand Fire Service

A distrust of the Service's rationale behind the closure or relocation of fire stations was present in one third of the articles analysed (n=38, 20%). The distrust of the NZFS presented in the media reports manifested in a number of ways and underlying much of this distrust was the feeling that a large government organisation was steamrolling unpopular closures and relocations. The distrust of the NZFS was attributed to a number reasons:

- wariness surrounding the real reason behind the closure / relocation;
- degree of scepticism about the computer analysis system;
- loss of faith in the NZFS; and,
- closures the beginning of other major changes to fire service.

The sub-themes that emerged in the articles associated with distrust in the NZFS are explored below.

Wariness surrounding the real reason behind the closure / relocation

Wariness within the community surrounding the true reason(s) behind the closure or relocation of stations was apparent in articles related to the proposed closure of the Newlands fire station.3 Ulterior motives for the closure of stations and communities being used as pawns in a "wider game" appeared in the following three articles.

> *Ohariu-Belmont MP believes that the decision has been in the works for years and the allocation model is just an excuse for the Fire Service to close the Newlands station, as they have tried to on previous occasions. "The Fire Service is willing to have industrial peace at any price and the 'model' is just an excuse to get rid of an awkward bunch of volunteers" he says (Bishop, 2003).*

> *The real reasons behind this debacle should now be revealed. The reality is that local residents are being used as pawns in a much wider game, a game in which the future of the Newlands and Khandallah stations counts for nothing ("The 'real' reason behind", 2002).*

> *The Fire Service had a further, and much greater, agenda behind their determination to shut down the Newlands station. Their decision was in part of a national scheme to close a great number volunteer fire stations around the entire country, or to change them from unpaid volunteer staff to paid union staff. This is a highly contentious and serious issue of national concern that cannot be dismissed. Their decision to downgrade the service has huge ramifications on the general public (Patterson, 2003).*

Degree of scepticism about the computer analysis system

Community members questioned the predictive accuracy of a new computer analysis system and its predicted response times.

> *The President of the NPPA [Newlands Paparangi Progressive Association], Mr Ray Good, says he has "severe doubts" about the way the response times have been worked out. "The computer model they've got doesn't appear to allow for hills, especially hills the size of Stewart Drive", Mr Good says ("Axing stations a bitter blow", 2001).*

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3 The Newlands Station did not close as planned due as the NZFS reversed its decision after a 22-month consultation with the community.

The fact that the modelling used old census data was also of concern to community members.

> So an edict has been issued from on high – the Newlands Fire Station is to be closed. It's been bandied around for years but there has been no recent public consultation. But the computer said close it – who can argue with a computer? I've got not faith in it myself. The result of a computer program basically depends on the assumptions fed into it, which we have no knowledge of. I think it's a jack-up to produce the outcome the Fire Service wants (Graham, 2001).

> The reason why the Newlands Community is bitterly opposed to the Newlands station closure is that we will be getting a substantial lower level of service under the proposal that Mr Jones supports…How can a reduction from three fire appliances to two be a better level of service. That's a 33 percent reduction in fire resources in the northern suburbs. The Fire Service cannot reach the response target from Johnsonville to areas of Newlands now, so how are they going to meet it under their new plan (Swain, 2002). 4

Loss of faith in the NZFS

The distrust of NZFS motives and the scientific evidence that supported fire station closures led to a loss of faith in NZFS by some community members. This loss of faith and credibility was also linked closely to a perceived inadequate level of consultation with the community about the decision to close of relocate a station. A quote from a local politician in the Newlands area illustrates the concerns.

> "I think what they have done is sour the relationship with people in the northern suburbs…They have chosen to behave in the most arrogant way imaginable, and they will now bear the consequences from the local community", he said. ("Fire service forging ahead", 2002).

The notion of hidden agendas and what the author believes is a lack of respect for the community is apparent in an opinion piece by Grenada Village Community Association's chairperson.

> The Fire Service's handling of the whole situation has been poor and their cavalier attitude has created a lot of public hostility. This has deeply affected its credibility and long-standing reputation (Patterson, 2003).

Closures the beginning of other major changes to fire services

Community concerns about the closure of local stations being the start of other major changes to fire services were mentioned in reference to the Newlands closure and the closure and relocation of a number of stations in the Hutt Valley.

> The Fire Service plans to axe the volunteer Newlands Fire Brigade, and also do away with the Khandallah Fire Station. But that will just be the beginning he says [local politician]. If they succeed in Wellington's Northern Suburbs, then the rest of the country can expect to face similar scenarios ("Fire Service plans cuts", 2002).

The fear that this was the start of other sufficient changes to the services communities received in New Zealand was apparent in a letter to the editor from a Grenada Village resident.

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[4] Although Mr Swain's letter to the editor was signed off Newlands resident, he was also a member of the Newlands Volunteer Fire Brigade.

It is now your [Chief Executive of the NZFS] turn to yet further downgrade the NZ Fire Service, Mr Hall? It is not so much about what the Fire Service is publicly saying, it is more about what the fire Service is not publicly saying that is of paramount concern and there certainly is a lot that is not being brought out into the open (Patterson, 2002a).

2. Economic concerns

A small number of articles (n=9, 4.7%) highlighted economic concerns associated with the closure and relocation of a station. For instance, the impact of the closure of a local fire station on insurance premiums was raised by the president of the Newlands Progressive Association.

They [residents of Newlands] were also worried insurance premiums would go up without a station (Fleming, 2001a).

One economic concern was associated with the Fire Service levies and the feeling that if a community lost a station, they were somehow being short-changed by the NZFS.

Grenada Village Residents Association President Bruce Patterson said Newlands and Grenada Village residents pay $500,000 a year in Fire Service levies and they expect something for their money. "You are funded by the people and it's about time that you wake up and realise that this is a people's paid service" (Kousal, 2002).

The cost of refurbishing the fire station that was to respond to the Newlands community following the closure of their station was an economic concern raised in the NPPA's submission to the Auditor General

The first is that there appears to be a budget blow-out for this project. The Government Administration Committee was told by the Fire Service that the project would cost $900,000. Yet before work on it has even begun "they are now saying it is $1.6 million," Mr Good says. "We will be asking why there is a budget blow-out ("Fire Service probe sought", 2002).

Another manifestation of economic concerns is referenced in one article that noted business owners' concerns over the impact fire station relocation on businesses located next to the existing site. Essentially, business owners feared loss of the fire station would negatively affect their businesses (Hawkes, 2002a).

3. Enhanced service

While the majority of media related to closures and relocations of stations were negative, in a small number of articles (n=6, 3.1%) the relocation of a station was reported as an opportunity to have a more efficient service. In a letter to the editor of the Hutt News, a resident of Avalon positively responded to reports about the closure and relocation of a number of stations in the Hutt Valley.

The reason is to provide a quicker, better response to fires in the industrial area (as this is where they tend to happen often). Additionally, coverage is able to encompass Point Howard, and back up to both Eastbourne and Wainuiomata, where volunteers struggle to get a crew during the day (Bristow, 2002).

Similarly, the relocation of the Onerahi fire brigade to a new purpose-built station received praise from the local mayor due to its impact on the local environment and the fact that it would positively impact on public safety.

Mr Brown said the area concerned was not significant from an environmental point of view and

suggested that with suitable landscaping, the presence of the station could actually improve the amenity of the area. He also noted the fire service was making a concerted effort to raise its public profile in the wake of a number of recent fire deaths. "We are losing too many people from fire accidents" (Johnson, 2001)

4. Environmental concerns

Concerns about the environmental impact of a relocated station and the ensuing noise pollution, traffic implications and the impact of a new building on surrounding land were frequently represented in media reports (n=38, 20.0%). Two environmental concerns were highlighted in the articles:

- noise, traffic and visual pollution, and,
- use of land / building post-closure.

The sub-themes that emerged in the articles associated with environmental concerns are explored below.

<ins>Noise, traffic and visual pollution</ins>

Eight articles made mention of concerns that neighbours had regarding the noise associated with a relocated or new fire station.

> *As far as the stupid siren is concerned, yes it does concern me. Especially my friends who have very young children who wake up early in the morning and take forever to get back to sleep (Churchill, 2002).*

The arrival of a new fire station raised concerns about the impact that the extra fire service traffic would have on the safety of children and motorists was mentioned in nine articles. Opponents of the relocated Woodend station voiced their concerns surrounding increased traffic associated with a newly relocated station and fears that the safety of children would be compromised. The concerns of a local resident are outlined in an article in The Press.

> *She fears that children will be put I danger by volunteers' cars rushing to respond to a fire alarm, and said that the station would create noise, and diesel and visual pollution (Bristow, 2000).*

The placement of the Johnsonville station and the danger to motorists at peak hours with fire engines getting out of the station was also raised, in addition to being linked to traffic impacting on response times.

> *"It's an outright danger," Mrs Jackson says. "How will the fire engines get out when they're called during peak hour?" (Town, 2002).*

The potential of visual pollution caused by a new fire station, on a previously empty site, was voiced in Onerahi, with opponents voicing a number of environmental concerns.

> *Opponents were concerned about the traffic and noise which could be created by the station's activities and the loss of recreation land and views which it will block out ("Onerahi fire station", 2002).*

The loss of a large car park in Paihia due to the relocation of their station was also an issue that was present in media reports about the relocation (de Graaf, 2011).

<ins>Use of land / building post-closure</ins>

A major community concern following the closure of a fire station reported in the media was

what would happen to the fire station land or buildings post-closure (n=21, 11 %). The fate of the Takapuna Fire Station post-closure generated strong community interest. Suggestions that the site should be used for community purposes and the fear that if left for too long the empty building could become an eyesore are expressed in the following piece.

> *The station's neighbours are keen for the site to be used to extend neighbouring Killarney Park overlooking Lake Pupuke…Mr Gunthorp said it was important they didn't become derelict eyesores used by street kids (Willis, 2013).*

A sense of community ownership over a local fire station was a common sub-theme that emerged throughout the analysis. In the case of the Papatoetoe relocation, as the station was gifted to the NZFS in the 1950's, when it was closed the community wanted it returned.

> *Papatoetoe Community Board chairman Gary Troup says the fire station would be an invaluable asset for the people of Papatoetoe and he is "desperately keen" to get it back….the fire station building should be retained as a community facility, Mr Troup says ("Fire station row heads", 2004).*

This was also a concern voiced by the community in the proposed closure of the Newlands fire station. The Newlands Paparangi Progressive Association (NPPA) asked the Auditor General to investigate a number of issues associated with the Newlands closure, including the ownership of the station that was gifted by the community.

The fate of trees and a memorial plaque at the Papatoetoe fire station site was also of community concern. The memorial plaque and trees were donated in remembrance of volunteers who went missing during a fishing trip. This link to the building and its importance to the family and community highlight the strong ties that community's have to their fire stations.

> *The Fire Service has offered to move the trees and memorial plaque to a new station in Lambie Drive, Manukau if the old station is sold. But Ray Upton says that station is his family's link with the boys who were lost. "It wouldn't be the same to move it", he says (Hawkes, 2002b).*

5.   Community loss

The value of fire stations to New Zealand communities was particularly evident in the articles that expressed what the loss of a fire station represented to a community (n=20, 17.9%). As with fire station land and buildings, the community also have a sense of ownership over the fire brigade, especially when community volunteers manned a station. In addition, the NZFS is a publically funded community-based organisation, which could contribute to a community's feeling of loss at the relocation or closure of a station.

For example, a local resident of Grey Lynn drew attention to the link between the fire station and the community.

> *"Generally they [the community] all appreciated the Fire Service is an important part of the community" (McCraken, 2008).*

The history of the presence of a fire station in a local community was reported as deeply felt and the potential loss of a station was commonly described as being deeply felt by residents. A quote from Newlands resident and the Chief Fire Officer of the Newlands Volunteer Fire Brigade at the time illustrates this.

> *"Brigades like ours were started by members of the community, to the community, for the community. So long as the service can be provided by brigade members who are the*

community, then the community must have ownership. How can something community-owned be taken away because a computer model says so….You can have all the latest and fanciest appliances, stations and equipment in the world, but if you don't have the community behind it" he said, "it will never work" ("The community owns Newlands", 2002).

An excerpt from a letter to the editor from a Paparangi resident highlights that fire stations are not just valued due to their ability to respond to fires, but also the other community work they do to prevent fires.

One of the interesting things which came out of the progressive association meeting was that only about 10% of the incidents firefighters attend are actual fires. Firefighters are involved in a wide range of other emergency situations, comprising the other 90%. They are really a community's front-line emergency response service. We want to keep this comprehensive service close to the large, and growing population area east of the motorway (Graham, 2002).

A nostalgic tie to local fire stations and their buildings was expressed in an article about the closure of Papatoetoe station. Representatives from the community were quoted as saying.

"Although the 1950s building is no architectural beauty, the memories connected to it are an important part of Papatoetoe history, he says [spokesman for the Papatoetoe Old Boys Fire Association]…It's performed a valuable role to the people of Papatoetoe, and would a reminder of the deeds performed by our firemen to safeguard their community…It has a historical significance for Papatoetoe and is part of our culture and history. It shouldn't be allowed to disappear, " he says. "I'll do all I can to make sure it stays in Papatoetoe [Manukau Mayor] (Hawkes, 2002b).

The importance of having a fire station located in a community is expressed in an article that reported on the establishment of a Newlands station website and the comments of support that were left on the site.

"New Zealand as a country would be brought to a standstill if it weren't for the community volunteers in all areas, but surely, FIRE stands at the top of all volunteer groups" ("New web site proves", 2002).

6. Lack of consultation

A predominant concern (n=39, 20.5%) was the lack of consultation that the NZFS engaged in when proposing the closure or relocation of a fire station. This was especially salient in regards to the proposed closure of Newlands and Khandallah stations and, in the early stages of station closure planning, the community felt uninformed.

"It is now high time the Fire Service came clean with its plans for the northern suburbs, and faced up to the inevitable anger from the local community" [Local politician]….he [local politician] believes the Fire Service is "drip feeding" information about decisions it has already made ("Preparing to battle", 2001).

What was seen as a lack of consultation in regards to the closure of Newlands station, resulted in petition being signed by approximately 3000 residents. In regards to how the NZFS dealt with the communication of the station closure an article on the issue stated.

To date, the Fire Service's handling of the whole situation has been poor and anyone who has questioned their actions has been treated with contempt and suspicion. They have dismissed a formal submission by more than 3000 residents opposing their proposal. There has been very little public consultation despite what they are now saying (Patterson, 2002b).

Another article authored by the Save Our Fire Stations Committee noted.

The process by which the Fire Service has developed the downgrading of this vital and essential emergency service, sought no public input. The Fire Service has failed to tell local residents the full story and the resultant implications of their actions (The Save Our Fire Stations Committee, 2002).

The lack of information about the plans in Paihia to relocate their station to a new site resulted in frustration in the local community.

"We'd be much less annoyed if we knew what was going on, and what we were waiting for. We're sick of being told 'We'll let you know in a couple of weeks'. You wait a couple of weeks and nothing happens so you poke them again, and they say 'There's been a bit of a hold-up'. It's become a local joke…(de Graaf, 2010).

7.   Safety concerns

A recurrent concern that emerged from the analysis of the articles related to safety and the loss of community safety that would result from the closure of a station. Safety concerns appeared in 40 of the articles analysed (21.0%). One major safety fear was slower response times, which could endanger lives.

Residents fear slower response times, and blocked access to Newlands in the event of a major earthquake, isolating them from emergency services (Fleming, 2001b).

I feel it is vitally important to have a fire station situated in close proximity to a populated area such as yours [Newlands]. Your service is one where minutes, even seconds count in saving lives – you can not put a price on life ("New web site proves", 2002).

James says many people they know are hardly mobile and could not easily escape their house if there was a fire "It's a lifeline. People get very annoyed when you talk about that going," he says. "If you've only got tow engines what happens if you've got a fire in Johnsonville and an accident on the motorway?" he asks indignantly. [A local politician] says that feat is typical of elderly in the suburb. "They are scared of what's going to happen..." (Fleming, 2002).

The headline *'Village 'paranoid' about fire cover'* ("Village paranoid about fire", 2002) highlights the fear that the closure of a station could create in a community. In a letter to the editor a Grenada Village resident expressed this fear.

It may well be that someone's house will burn down, or an accident victim die because the fire appliance has to travel the extra distance. (Nobelen, 2002).

Even a rumour of the closure of Kamo station raised by the opposition government in 2002 concerned the local community, with one article noting.

Raising fears of closure in a community which included families still reeling from fire related tragedies and still coming to terms with the loss of loved ones, was despicable ("Fire station closure", 2002).

4 Summary

Fire services are valued as an integral part of the community. A sense of ownership over the buildings and members of the NZFS was expressed by those represented in print media. Local politicians were vocal in the print media and the community utilised elected members to voice their concerns, especially in regards to the proposed closure of Newlands station. This is perhaps underscored by the fact that the NZFS is a publically funded community-based organisation. The articles highlighted that community members felt they were integral in helping build fire brigades and as their community members have volunteered and worked in the stations, they valued their local fire brigades highly and the potential loss was felt deeply. Those represented in the print media valued the safety that a local station brings to the community and fears surrounding longer response times and inadequate service from another brigade were raised. Although there was a dearth of articles on the positive aspects associated with the gain of a modern and new station, a more efficient and effective fire response was valued by a small and less vocal section of those represented in the print media.

A number of concerns were presented in the print media. These included a lack of consultation and inadequate communication in relation to proposed closures, especially in relation to Newlands station. Scientific explanations underpinning station closure and relocation were questioned and regarded with suspicion. This was especially associated with a fear that a closure indicated future service reductions. Earlier consultation and transparent information provided by the NZFS could help counter the concerns expressed in the media. Early consultation could potentially ensure that communities fully understand the reasons behind relocation and closure and aid in maintaining a strong relationship with the community going forward.

Other concerns represented in the media included the economic impact of closure and relocation on homeowners and business, as well as the costs of building a new station. Environmental concerns associated with the noise a relocated fire station would generate in its new residence, the visual impact of a new building on the landscape, concerns about what will happen to the old station and land, plus the impact on road safety were referenced in the articles analysed.

The second phase of this research will further explore the values and concerns uncovered in the content and thematic analysis. The focus groups will endeavour to uncover, from a community perspective, what factors supported the successful relocation of a fire station and what factors generated an unsuccessful location. An exploration of what strategies can be used by the NZFS to better manage and located station closures and relocations in the future will also be a focus.

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6 Appendix B: New Zealand Fire Service station closures and relocations 1999 – 2014

Table 5: NZFS relocated and closed between 1999 - 2014

Relocated stations	Closed stations
Hokitika	Kaniere Volunteer
Kaitkati	Khandallah
Manurewa	Manukau
Mt Maunganui	Petone*
Papatoetoe	Point Howard Volunteer*
Ratana	Waterloo*
Mount Roskill	
Culverden	
Avalon	
Paihia	
Seaview	
Paraparaumu	
Lower Hutt	
Springfield	
Takapuna	
Te Atatu	
Whitianga	
Woodend	

 *Note: Although these stations were closed their service were relocated to Lower Hutt. Avalon and Seaview as part of a strategic plan.

Appendix C: List of articles included in the content and thematic analysis

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