



NEW ZEALAND
RED CROSS
RĪPEKA WHERO AOTEAROA

Area Model Review Summary Report

May 2026

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Executive Summary

Most Red Cross people are engaged, often with limited awareness of Area Model changes. A subset are feeling compounding effects of change. The Area Model is still relatively new, and many processes are working well. Some changes are still bedding in, with intended gains not yet realised. This review highlights where shifts may support alignment and effectiveness of the current model and raises three more fundamental issues to be considered as part of the Realising 2030 review.

About the Area Model review

The [Area Model](#) refers to the ways New Zealand Red Cross (NZRC) organises, supports and connects people and activities within geographic areas to deliver local impact. Significant changes were made in 2022/23 to area size, governance structures and employee roles (see breakout, this page). When the new Area Model was announced in 2022, the plan included having a comprehensive, independent review in 2026. This report is a summary version of the full review provided to the NZRC Board.

Key Findings 1-2: Communications and engagement

The significant majority of NZRC people are engaged, with 87% favourability among general volunteers. This should be acknowledged, shared, and used to guide decisions. At the same time, change friction is felt by a key subset, particularly volunteer people leaders in membership bodies (Branches, Area Councils and some Groups) who coordinate approximately 21% of volunteer activities. Transparency on review findings and two-way engagement will be a strong foundation to address current tensions.

Key Findings 3-7: Continuous improvement of the current model

The Area Model is still relatively new, and many processes are working well. Shifts have resulted in greater visibility of activities, implementing agreed standards, and greater consistency for volunteers. Some changes are still bedding in. There are opportunities to clarify roles, connect across silos, and support processes that balance local agency and strategic focus.

Key Findings 8-10: Deeper issues for Realising 2030 Review

There are three foundational issues that will not be solved through continuous improvement: the continued decline of Branches, the question of Area Council roles in a national structure, and the need for the Area Model to connect with diverse communities to seed the future. A collaborative approach to addressing these is suggested as part of the Realising 2030 review.

What's confirmed and what will change

After reflecting on the feedback, we have decided to:

- Reduce the number of Areas from 16 to seven, each with one Area Council. This will better balance the need to address current state challenges with retaining sufficient local presence and connection. The boundaries for the new Areas are set out on the next page.
- Establish one Area Support team per Area to provide direct support to the Area Chair and Council and to assist to create a cohesive Area, each comprising an Area Coordination and Planning Lead, a Senior Area Partner, an Advisor Area Support, and an Administrator. The team is described in more detail on page 5.
- Improve representation by increasing:
 - the number of National Council delegates per Area Council from the proposed two to five.
 - the number of Area Councillor positions in each Area to between five and nine (currently the Members Handbook requires between three and seven).

As part of the Handbook and Constitution Review, we will also look to consider Youth representation requirements. In the meantime, the Area Councils would be encouraged to include their youth representative as one of their five National Council representatives.



Review approach and current state

Area model context, structures, demographics, and flow of funds at Red Cross

Approach

The review consisted of a review of internal data and reports, a survey to all NZRC people (with over 1,189 individual responses), and extensive engagement in over 50 direct interviews, workshops and visits to urban, town and rural NZRC services across all seven areas. High engagement by all volunteers and employees has resulted in a strong understanding of the current state successes and challenges. An external team were contracted to ensure independence. Molly Kennedy and Don Clarke (Molly Kennedy Consulting) carried out the engagement and core analysis, with Rob Heaney (Volte) providing operating model expert input.

An evolving Area Model

The current Area Model was introduced progressively in 2022-23. The introduction coincided with a period of significant change at NZRC both internally and in response to increased disasters. Additional changes have taken place that are not *driven by* the area model but have *interacted with* it. This includes updates to the NZRC constitution and regulations (prompted by changes to the Incorporated Societies Act), introduction of the case management for volunteers, and a new single contract for Meals on Wheels. The cumulative effect is that the Area Model is still, in many ways, a **work in progress**.

Governance and Operating Structures

Governance structures: [NZRC governance](#) consists of national, area and local structures. National Council (48 members) is the highest body. The National Board (10 members) sets strategic direction. Seven Area Councils (37 members) have a governance role. Branches (32) support the NZRC mission locally, with 190 individuals in Branch committees.

Operating structure – volunteers: Nationally-led programmes (National Groups) coordinate the large majority of volunteers (5,979, or approximately 79%), compared with around 1,589 (21%) through formal member structures such as Branches, Area Councils and Local Groups. Across all

volunteers, regardless of leadership, around 92% of volunteers are active in core programmes outlined in [Strategy 2030](#) (Emergency Management, International, Migration and fundraising), with the remaining 8% active in other area plan activities (such as curtain banks or blood bank support).

Operating structure – employees: Employee support for the Area Model is embedded in two directorates (Membership & Volunteering and Coordination & Planning), whose area-based employees form the Area Support Teams. These 12 national and 38 area roles are intended to support and connect all NZRC programmes and people across Aotearoa — not only formal membership structures. As such, only a portion of their time is spent on Area Model work, with significant time going to broader organisational activities.

Demographics

Strategy 2030 aims to reflect community diversity within NZRC, including culture, age and ethnicity. While gaps in volunteer demographic data remain, these are improving. Diversity is shifting positively in many areas — retail volunteering has already passed the 2030 aim of 30% of volunteers under 30 — though membership structures that support the Area Model trend toward more long-serving and senior (65+) volunteers.

Area Model finances

Substantial work has been done to understand the finances underpinning the Area Model, with detailed data provided in the full report. Improved visibility of finances is a positive finding of this review. However, exactly quantifying the flow of funds remains difficult, partly due to the lack of current allocation of enabling services time and partly due to the intentionally integrated, matrix nature of employee roles. Financial sustainability is a key consideration, both in terms of income versus expenditure and return on investment for impact, and further financial investigation would benefit the deeper focus areas identified for the Realising 2030 review.

1 Broad engagement key to ongoing progress

Most NZRC people remain positively engaged. Some attention is required for membership bodies – particularly membership body leaders, who are more highly impacted by the Area Model changes. Share results and ensure feedback is regularly gathered to inform actions.

Engagement is positive overall, with attention needed for membership body leaders

Most NZRC volunteers and employees experience Red Cross through frontline activity — retail, emergency management, Meals on Wheels, migration support and fundraising. For the majority, the Area Model is not the primary lens through which they engage. Context is important: the issues raised in this review sit within an organisation that remains fundamentally mission-aligned and operationally active.

Four surveys were sent as part of the review, with 1,189 responses from 8,961 invited participants (13.3%), providing a strong evidence base. General volunteers (those who are not membership body leaders) are highly engaged, with 87% favourability and a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +35.7¹, while both employee groups fall in the "Good" range (NPS +15). However, for those in membership bodies — particularly volunteer people leaders — the Area Model changes have more directly impacted their responsibilities, ways of working and autonomy, resulting in a more mixed picture (72.5% favourability, NPS of -1). Employees have favourability and Net Promoter Scores within the 'good' range.

Share results and continue to listen

That most NZRC people remain positively engaged is something to be acknowledged, celebrated and shared, while recognising the real experience of those in leadership roles who are feeling the impact of change. NZRC should consider regular surveys for all NZRC people to understand engagement levels and gather ongoing feedback, ranging from larger periodic surveys to more frequent pulse checks.

1 – Favourability and Net Promoter Scores are commonly used in survey analysis. Questions like this are a high-level indicator of organisational health, because willingness to recommend is closely linked to people’s overall experience, pride,

Key Finding 1 - Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Share back high-level survey results with all NZRC people, celebrating overall engagement while acknowledging areas where attention is needed.
- 6 months - 2 years: Implement regular but proportionate surveys for all NZRC people. Ensure visibility of results and a quick response where required.

Favourability and Net Promoter scores
All respondents*

	General Volunteer	Membership Body Leader	General Employee	Area Model Employee
Favourability Score	87.1%	72.5%	76.1%	75.0%
Net Promoter Score	35.7	-1	+15	+15

* – Excludes those who answered N/A or skipped.

and likelihood of speaking positively about the organisation to others. Further detail in the full report. Unless otherwise noted, favourability scores are derived from the Area Model Survey (2026),

2 Concentrated friction a priority for attention

Many membership body people leaders are feeling overwhelmed and undervalued; this can extend to other volunteers where there is visibility of engagement and processes. This relates less to the structure of the changes and more to feeling that communication is top-down and does not take into account their contributions or situation of their voluntary roles.

Membership body leader frustration

For those engaged in the Area Model, reviewers did not find widespread concern with structural changes (e.g., shift from 16 to 7 Area Councils). However, there was significant feeling about *how* changes were undertaken - communication and processes - and the perceived underlying message to members. For Membership Body Leaders, role clarity and contribution rate highly (83% favourability), but this drops for views being listened to (52%), processes (49%), area planning (40%), and training (46%). The survey results were supported by interviews and visits undertaken by reviewers. These conversations showed that frustration is not limited to one or two outlying areas but extended to a majority of membership body and Group (Local and DWST) leaders spoken with across areas.

Communication is a key driver of concern

Several interviewees in membership bodies and Groups felt that volunteers are now treated as employees who can be told what to do from afar. Many of those people pressed reviewers to “not sugarcoat” the strength of their sentiment. Some interviewees reported that communication was the deciding factor in resignations. Others did not harbour the same intensity of feeling but still expressed concern. Conversely, frontline volunteers praised the organisation for its flexibility.

Systems and processes can overwhelm

Only 30% of Area Model employees found processes easy to explain to members. The number of documents and level of detail can be overwhelming for volunteers. Membership body leaders want personal connections with NZRC representatives and a single point of contact they can call for clarification.

Leaders desire peer discussion and collaboration

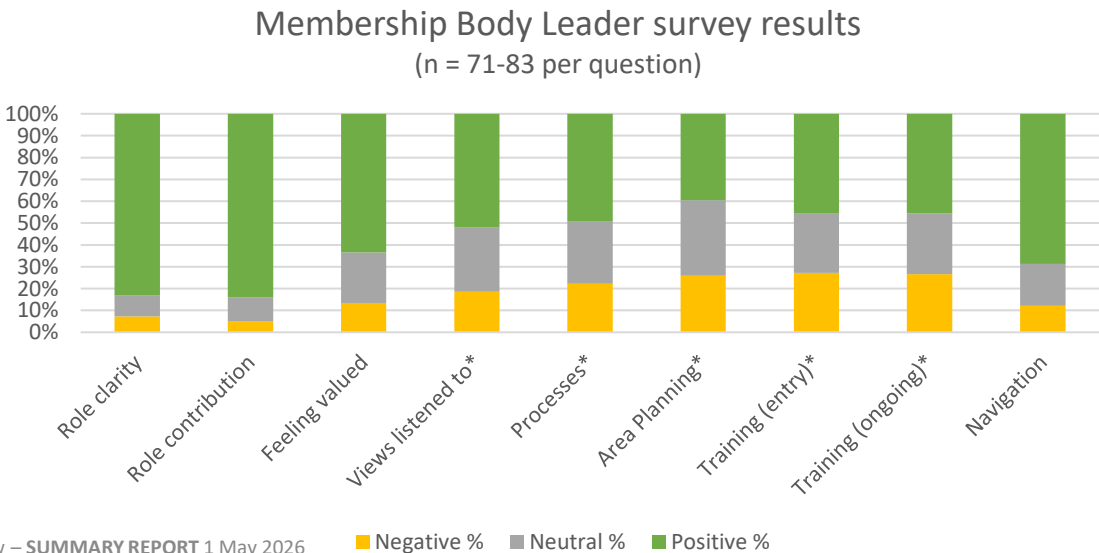
Branch leaders felt they lacked space for peer discussion and dialogue in the new structure. Area Council Chairs have regular meetings but voiced feeling that participation was limited, with the

direction set by national representatives.

Some more recent examples of collaboration – including Networks, working groups and programme leader forums – have been well received. Leaning into participatory methods would improve member buy-in and efficacy.

Key Finding 2 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Acknowledge and address tensions through transparency, dialogue, and a focus on shared solutions.
- 6 months - 2 years: Tailor communication to volunteer needs. Create space for membership body leaders to share knowledge. Lean into co-creation methods. Consider ways for decision-makers to engage with frontline volunteers.



3 Area planning showcases positive activity

The Area Plan process has allowed for greater visibility of NZRC activities – something to be celebrated and continued. In some cases, strict enforcement of regulations and a lack of flexibility in area planning has caused tension. Return on investment calculations should complement a strategic approach and allow good work to continue.

Area Plans are a positive development

Prior to the Area Model changes, it was difficult to understand the current state and cumulative impact of NZRC in all areas. Much of this visibility has been brought to light through the Area Planning process, which requires each of the seven areas to produce a plan bringing together annual plans for Branches, Groups and Area Councils.² The development of Area Plans has been seen as a positive shift. NZRC now has much improved data that allows increased visibility of activities and supports better strategic decision-making. The process has also unearthed areas of inactivity and instances where funds were spent outside regulations — these have been addressed accordingly.

A review of requirements would enhance member agency and impact

While Area Plans as a concept were generally welcomed, the process has been challenging for some at ground level, with favourability around 40% among membership leaders and Area Model employees. Stricter requirements have led to members feeling a lack of agency, particularly around funds held locally. The Area Plan process does allow Branches to propose activities and fund allocation, but this is not fully understood by all. Timing and flexibility were also raised — Area Forums were often not aligned with Area Plan deadlines, and once plans are set, there are limited options to change during the year. The overall feeling was that more flexibility was needed, while maintaining alignment with national strategy. Area planning guidance could be reviewed to maintain guardrails while supporting decision-making closer to the ground.

Consider return on investment, and letting them carry on

Around 8% of activities sit outside Strategy 2030's core focus areas. NZRC now has most of the information it requires to carry out Return on Investment (ROI) calculations on activities. Where ROI is not strong, difficult decisions may need to be made. However, where members are doing good work in legacy activities in a way that is financially sustainable, there may be value in letting them — the stated intention of "evolution, not revolution" in Strategy 2030 is applicable here.

Key Finding 3 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Continue with the Area Plan process, with short-term adjustments to dashboards and timing.
- 6 months - 2 years: Review area plan requirements to allow for greater local agency, flexibility and devolved decision-making within clear guardrails. Introduce Return on Investment calculations. Celebrate local impact of activities now that they are more visible. Where possible, let legacy activities carry on good work.

² – Other forms of this did exist prior to the current Area Model but did not require the level of information now requested and was not universally enforced or collated.

4 Compliance is important; alignment is needed

There has been necessary focus on compliance in the new Area Model, including addressing inappropriate behaviour, health & safety, and meeting regulations. However, the pace and approach has led to tension. Consider how to adapt when requirements don't match local realities or stop good things from happening.

Addressing poor behaviour has been difficult but necessary

Reviewers heard positive feedback that NZRC was now willing to address poor behaviour that had previously been tolerated or overlooked. The word "courage" was often used to describe this willingness, with direct improvements noted by both volunteers and employees. This was facilitated through the new Area Model structure, with Area Support Teams and Area Council involvement. A few volunteers felt the process was at times used to sideline those who disagreed with organisational direction; however, there was a level of objectively inappropriate behaviour, such as personal verbal attacks, that required attention.

Health and safety has improved, but needs collaborative solutions

Greater visibility of activities through the Area Model has helped NZRC evaluate and respond to health and safety risks — including exiting activities such as the leasing of uncertified medical devices. Health and safety is wanted by all parties, but a communication gap exists. Members were at times unaware of processes available to them, meaning some issues remain unaddressed. The approach to risk has at times tipped from risk management into risk elimination, with activities cancelled rather than mitigated, and compliance documentation at times disproportionate to volunteer realities. Area Support Team employees often found themselves acting as "translators" between requirements and what was practical on the ground, a role seen as a positive step.

Compliance with NZRC regulations remains challenging

There has been a strong focus on compliance, but the pace of change has felt overwhelming, and Area Support Teams are at times perceived as enforcers rather than enablers. As at March 2026, 77% of Branches did not fully meet regulations — some of which may not be practical in their current form. Reviewing which requirements are legally mandated versus those that could be relaxed could lessen the strain for both membership bodies and the employees who support them.

Offering Branches the option to transition into Local Groups carries a lower administrative burden, but reluctance remains — around loss of control over funds, fear of closures, and practical issues such as banking. Many remaining Branches are primarily focused on one or two activities rather than being broad community bodies originally intended. Changes to Group definitions and ways of operating could support alignment and make this transition easier. More fundamental changes may be required where Branch compliance is not possible due to declining membership; these are explored later in this report.

Key Finding 4 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Continue to support compliance, highlighting existing systems to meet needs in ways that resonate with volunteers.
- 6 months - 2 years: Create opportunities for enabling services to connect with frontline volunteers. Review Regulations to assess whether any can be relaxed or amended. Consider changes to support compliance through the transition from Branches to Groups.

5 Centralised volunteer systems are on the right track

Prior to the current Area Model, volunteer onboarding and record-keeping were done differently across programmes and areas. A case management system introduced through People Experience and Support – enabled in part through the Area Model – provides substantial benefits. Despite some teething issues, it is worth leaning into.

Centralised systems provide substantial benefits

Previously, each programme recruited and onboarded volunteers through its own systems with separate record-keeping. In some cases, these were onerous and posed significant risks — for example, paper-based processes could take up to three months, with a volunteer active before criminal conviction checks were completed.

The new approach aims to centralise the volunteer lifecycle — including recruitment, compliance checks, record keeping, recognition, complaints and discipline, and reporting — through the Membership & Volunteering team, working in collaboration with programme managers. The 'case management' process is still being rolled out. However, at a minimum all programmes now keep their volunteer records centrally and the application process is more consistent. Nearly all spoken with agree with the principle and practical benefits of the system.

Case management is a work in progress, with some teething issues

Implementation is strongest in Meals on Wheels, particularly in larger centres, where initial uncertainty has shifted to wide acceptance. Retail is partway through introduction, with substantial national-level benefits already evident: interviewees report increased numbers of volunteers recruited into vacancies, improved diversity of applicants, clear response time expectations (within 48 hours), and reduced reliance on single points of contact for onboarding paperwork.

The use of targeted social media to support volunteer recruitment was described as a "game changer" in reaching new volunteers. The new approach has also opened the door to volunteer opportunities outside standard programme roles — the Uber clothing driver partnership with

retail recruited 500 volunteers across three cities for a short-term, "come-and-go" opportunity.

While the national-level benefits are clear, local implementation has been more mixed — something that might be expected for a change of this scale. Shop managers note higher drop-off rates for online applicants compared to those who come in person. Questions were raised about whether all the information gathered was being required, and whether larger shops with high volunteer numbers may need different processes than small ones. A cross-programme concern was that volunteer candidates completed extensive paperwork before meeting a service representative, only to find the role was not a good fit. Migration had trialled the system but found it led to double handling.

Bedding in

At the start of case management, NZRC had approximately 1,400 vacancies. The system has now moved to a point of managing attrition rather than chronic shortages, and the team has learned to work across areas to cover for leave or imbalances in recruitment demand. As the system beds in, the key test will be ensuring standardisation where it matters while adapting to work for those on the ground. On balance, the centralisation of volunteer processes is a net positive for Red Cross.

Key Finding 5 – Summary of Recommendations

6 months - 2 years: Continue with centralised volunteer systems and the roll-out of case management, with continuous improvement to balance national and local needs.

6 Silos remain, and a desire to break them down

Silos remain across most programmes, and the Area Model has not substantially shifted the dial on this yet. Most employees and volunteers in national programmes do not have a strong understanding of the roles of Area Model employees or membership structures. Some silos are okay – address the ones that matter.

Frontline volunteers feel part of One Red Cross; most others don't

A key aim of the Area Model was to advance the concept of One Red Cross. Frontline volunteers had the strongest sense of this (>70%), though their comments related to role satisfaction rather than specific connections across services. Less than half of membership body leaders felt all NZRC people are working together as one team, and Area Model employees were least likely at only 14%. Silos remain across most programmes, and while this is a common organisational issue, the Area Model has not substantially shifted the dial yet.

Area Support Team roles are not well understood

Only a minority (40%) of employees understand what Area Support Team roles involve. National programmes understandably seek to protect their employee's time, which can limit Area Support Teams from holding relationships in their areas. The roles also operate in a matrix model across two directorates, and that the roles that are relatively new and still evolving adds to the complexity. Remote working, while practical given the geographic spread, can further limit relationship-building and visibility. Despite these challenges, Area Model employees themselves have strong clarity on their role and its contribution to the NZRC mission.

Site lead roles need attention

The Organisation Site Lead and Property Lead roles are often the most visible part of 'working together in our areas.' The Property Lead role is a particular pressure point, with workloads exceeding expectations and frequent turnover. The Organisation Site Lead role is seen as good in theory – particularly in driving team culture – but lacks clarity on the ground. The trading system used to allocate these roles has not been fully bought into, and at times has reinforced division rather than connection.

Membership bodies are not broadly understood

Understanding of membership structures varies significantly. General volunteers have limited awareness of area or national structures, and fewer than 50% of employees outside the Area Model understand the role of National Council, Area Councils or Groups. Membership bodies are expected to lead and connect locally but lack access to contact information for local volunteers. Allowing use of the centralised database and newsletter systems to allow contact without risk of privacy breaches — with appropriate opt-in or opt-out settings — could help bridge this gap.

Some silos are fine; focus on the ones that matter

NZRC people are strongly aligned with their core activities and can be wary of spending time outside of these. Opportunities for forced collaboration without a clear purpose — including some Area Forums — have at times fallen flat. The key is to address silos that are actively creating rifts and create bridges where opportunity for shared impact exists. Extensive opportunities for collaboration were raised, including opening International Delegate Webinars to all members, leveraging connections between Migration and Emergency Management, and creating easy ways for retail and first aid to support other NZRC programmes as a highly visible arm of Red Cross. Newly introduced Collective Impact meetings are a positive step.

Key Finding 6 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Ensure visibility and understanding of Area Support Team roles and reinforce permission for them to hold relationships in areas.
- 6 months - 2 years: Support Membership Bodies to contact local NZRC people. Address Property and Organisation Site Lead role pain points. Address role clarity for Area Support Teams. Take opportunities to connect services across silos where practical benefits exist.

7 Area size is not a primary concern, except East-West

The size of NZRC areas was relatively low on the list of issues raised to reviewers. The exception to this was East-West, which was seen as unwieldy and not conforming to natural connections. In the short term, the best option would be to revise boundaries across East-West and Central, using a collaborative approach.

Area size is a concern, but not a significant one for most

The size of NZRC areas was relatively low on the list of issues raised to reviewers and was generally raised only when prompted. Most Area Model employees were positive or neutral about area size, with 10% feeling it was a significant issue. Fundamentally, the size of areas was seen as less of an issue than communication, a lack of local agency, and clarity of Area Councils.

Area boundaries are not consistent, but also not a core issue

Roles in national programmes does not align with Area Model boundaries. As an example, Emergency Management has four employee leads to support areas; Retail has three, and First Aid has five. Most saw this as a minor inconvenience rather than a fundamental issue. Overall, the benefits of alignment are not seen as being worth the additional employee and change costs at this stage. However, it is worth keeping an eye out for alignment opportunities over time.

It's about resourcing and activity, rather than number of areas

Area Support Teams are uniform (four employees per area), but workloads differ significantly due to volunteer activity, member body activity (from 2 to 11 Branches per area), distance (2.5 to 8+ hours travel), and the level of behaviour and disciplinary issues. Teams are making the structure work by supporting across areas, and this is likely to evolve over time.

East-West does require attention

Significant challenges connecting over a large area (Taranaki to East Cape), working with communities that are geographically and historically dispersed. Given value-for-money considerations, an option could be to revise boundaries with Central — which is conversely the smallest area — addressing the pinch point with minimal changes while larger structural questions are pending.

Key Finding 7 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Take a consultative approach to redrawing boundaries between East-West and Central areas.
- 6 months - 2 years: Continue to evolve Area Support Team roles to meet needs, including cross-area support where imbalances exist.

8 Area Councils struggle with a mixed mandate

Area Councils have roles that purportedly govern and connect their areas and drive local activity. However, the increased national programming orientation makes genuine area governance and direction-setting challenging. Responsibilities should be reviewed and changes considered.

Documentation does not match people experience

Area Council roles are outlined in NZRC Regulations across five areas of responsibility: governance and leadership, communication and relationship building, planning and monitoring, health safety and wellbeing, and integrity. Documentation including responsibilities matrices and job descriptions were provided to support role clarity as part of the Area Model roll-out. However, those in Area Council roles struggle to understand their role in practice. Some felt this was a natural part of change that may improve over time; others felt more fundamental structural issues exist.

Governance of areas is challenging in a largely national structure

Over 90% of existing programmes are partly or wholly directed nationally. While there are good reasons for nationalisation, this means the ability for Area Councils to genuinely 'govern and oversee' services is limited in practice. Understanding of Area Councils among general volunteers and employees is low, and attempts to look after volunteers across all programmes can at times feel forced. Setting aside national programmes, there is a clear role to govern Branches and Groups — but membership has dropped significantly, and the oversight role has been heavily shaped by regulation and compliance rather than strategic leadership.

The line between governance and operations is blurred

Area Councillors are expected to identify strategic direction and useful activities, but also to operationally enact these — including rolling out centrally-developed initiatives such as Good and Ready and Young Humanitarians. People volunteer as Area Councillors expecting to be decision-makers, but end up in roles that they feel are mainly admin and compliance. This has resulted in a level of disengagement, with some areas finding it challenging to retain the

minimum of five elected Councillors or to achieve a quorum at meetings. Training provided has also run into this issue, with governance-focused content feeling misaligned with the operational reality of the role.

Area Councils do carry out a range of functional responsibilities

Practical functions carried out by Area Councillors include honours and awards, distribution of funds, compliance and disciplinary matters, health and safety oversight, making area connections, and being a conduit between local and national. However, consistency varies across areas, and while some of these are working well (the disciplinary process is valued a 'members making decisions about members'), others remain a challenge (with some concerns about health and safety oversight not being at a required level).

Looking to the future

The Area Council structure as it currently stands is not serving its stated purpose and needs attention. Two options exist: provide support and clarification within the current model, or rethink Area Councils more fundamentally — acknowledging that the decline of Branches and the inability to govern nationally-directed programmes are issues that are ongoing.

Key Finding 8 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Acknowledge Area Council issues with role clarity and the intention to address with practical steps.
- 6 months - 2 years: Invest in an in-person hui for Area Councils. Include Branch/Group understanding in the skills matrix. Review the future of Area Councils as part of Phase Two.

9 Branches face fundamental shifts

Volunteering has shifted over time, from identifying as a member within a local Branch to being role-based in a national framework. In line with this, Branch membership has steadily declined. Without a change, Branches are unlikely to exist in the future.

Branches and Groups have declined significantly over the last 30 years

Between 1970 and 1985 there were approximately 300 Branches; today there are 32, with at least three closing or converting to Groups during the review period. Local Groups have declined as well. Succession planning is an issue, with Branches often reliant on small numbers of long-serving volunteers and finding it difficult to fill secretary or treasurer roles.

Nationalisation of programmes has been a factor — Strategy 2030 pared back to three core areas, which resulted in some Branch activities stopping. Further nationalisation, particularly of Meals on Wheels, has drawn responsibility away. Uptake of alternative activities has been mixed. People leadership of around 79% of volunteers is now through national structures compared with 21% through membership bodies. This shift is in line with global trends. People increasingly want flexible, role-based volunteering within a national framework rather than membership of a local body, as outlined in the NZRC Reimagining Volunteering Report (2021)

Most NZRC people do not identify as members

Only 12% of general volunteers identified themselves as members in the Area Model survey — the primary identification was as volunteers, despite being able to select multiple options. NZRC is an incorporated society, but the term 'member-led' was intentionally not included in the Constitution or Regulations updated in 2024, reflecting a move to reduce silos and perceptions of differential status. Many local NZRC people were unaware of this shift, creating a mismatch between perceptions and the current direction set. Some members raised whether the IFRC OCAC tool could support reflection on the role of members; this had previously been considered at the 2025 National Council and was not progressed for various reasons. The core intentions, links to IFRC, an external lens, and consideration of member roles, could potentially be achieved using a structured review processes in Phase Two.

IFRC context and leadership training

Local and area-based membership bodies remain standard across IFRC societies internationally,

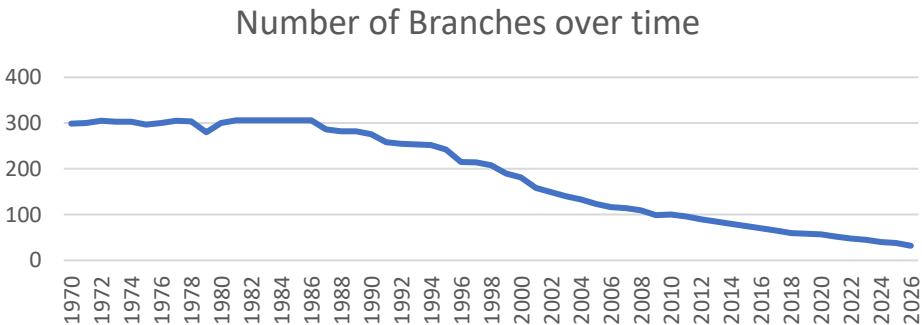
though some are consolidating in response to changed operating environments. In some cases, such as Ireland, Societies are leaning into the local model through leadership training. There has been a call from NZRC membership bodies for similar training, and past success brought youth into leadership positions including Area Council Chair roles.

Without change, local delivery via Branches is unlikely to exist in the future

Despite examples of ongoing activity, the decline in Branches over time is clear. The path forward will take time, consultation and conscious effort. In the interim, supporting existing Branches through peer collaboration and sharing best practice would be worthwhile. Leadership has indicated that active Branches will be supported to continue, despite a current perception that they are 'failing' or at risk of closure for non-compliance.

Key Finding 9 – Summary of Recommendations

- 0-6 months: Clarify to Branches that compliance focus is on supporting planning, not forcing closure of active branches.
- 6 months - 2 years: Develop leadership training for volunteers in Branches and Area Councils. Form a working group to consider the future of Branches as part of Phase Two. Integrate IFRC context and external perspective.



10 Seeding the future of Red Cross

The future of NZRC requires strong youth engagement, matching NZRC presence to areas of need, and engagement with Māori. Plans are underway nationally but are not yet embedded in areas. New approaches will be required to ensure an Area Model that meets the interests and needs of these communities.

Diversity to reflect communities is a work in progress

Strategy 2030 explicitly outlines the desire to be reflective of current and future communities. Demographic statistics show a move towards diversity in practice, though this is a work in progress. General volunteers were generally positive about this (70%), while membership body leaders and Area Model employees were on balance neutral or negative. There has been practical investment, including a Te Ao Māori Programme Plan, a Youth Strategy currently under review, and the ambitious target of 30% of volunteers under 30. Area Model changes have also improved diverse representation in governance, including at National Council level, and with local examples of driving diversity in membership.

A focus on youth has driven gains – but after some loss in this space

The move from a standalone Youth Panel to youth representatives on Area Councils and the Board has been seen as positive in integrating youth into the core of Red Cross. However, the disestablishment of Youth Activator roles and loss of local youth programmes has impacted ground-level engagement. It was intended that membership bodies and national programmes would take up a focus on youth. This has been relatively successful in national programmes, including strong youth volunteering in second-hand shops (going beyond the intended 30%) and Refugee Youth Worker roles in Migration programmes. However, effective youth engagement has been less consistent in membership body volunteering. The Young Humanitarians programme has not taken off as hoped, with coordination and resourcing seen as a core issue.

For most, te ao Māori is not yet part of the conversation

Reviewers were surprised at how little te ao Māori or partnership with Māori came up in interviews — in contrast to many other not-for-profit agencies in Aotearoa. Many in membership

structures were unaware that a te ao Māori programme existed. The programme plan is relatively new, with roll-out over 2026 intended to provide central direction. Longer-term, NZRC aims to increase opportunities to partner with iwi Māori in the design and delivery of services — crucial for success in Emergency Management and Migration.

NZRC presence does not fully match areas of need

Much of the Area Model focus to date has been internal — systems, compliance and information-gathering — leaving less time for communities not already part of Red Cross. Only 20% of New Zealand's population lives within the jurisdiction of current Branches, and three of the largest population centres — Christchurch, Hamilton and Auckland — have no local Branch. Membership body demographics do not broadly match community gender or ethnic splits. The Emergency Management Competency Framework provides potential to extend reach and could provide an opportunity for membership engagement.

Key Finding 10 – Summary of Recommendations

- 6 months - 2 years: Use review findings to inform the Te Ao Māori Programme and Youth Strategy development. Connect with other organisations on local presence and diversity. Create links between youth strategy, Te Ao Māori Programme and Phase Two thinking. Harness the Emergency Management Competency Framework for membership structure transformation.

Implementing recommendations (Phase Two) In confidence

Recommendations are grouped for ease of implementation over two years. Immediate priorities focus on rebuilding trust and capturing quick wins. Medium-term priorities strengthen how the current model works in practice. More foundational questions will need to be addressed through the Realising 2030 review.

Implementation over three stages

Phase Two is designed to move from insight to action in a way that is practical and proportionate to the findings of this review, as outlined in the Executive Summary.

- In the short term, a focus on **Communication and Engagement** (Key Findings 1-2) will enable NZRC to share positive findings of the review, while re-setting trust and addressing points of friction for the subset who have expressed concern.
- **Continuous improvement of the current model** (Key Findings 3-7) will strengthen how the Area Model works in practice. This includes improvements to systems, planning, and ways of working, alongside enabling greater local agency within clear guardrails.
- Alongside this, some **Deeper issues** (Key Findings 8-10) identified in the review will need to be addressed through the **Realising 2030** review. These relate to the role of Area Councils, the future of Branches, and how the Area Model connects with areas of need. The full report includes a recommended approach to this to ensure mission alignment and participatory practices, using insights drawn from the review.

Phase Two is not strictly linear. Early actions to address operational sticking points and rebuild trust should begin immediately and continue throughout. Improvements to the current model will be developed and embedded over time using existing processes, while longer-term structural work proceeds in parallel through a dedicated process.

There is an inherent tension between leaning into the current model and changing it. In some cases, it may be worth investing more time and support to see if challenged aspects can work. However, if fundamental change is likely, the level of investment in the current model becomes a question. Careful judgement is needed to balance these options.

10 Key Findings	Communication and engagement	Current model continuous improvement	Deeper issues for Realising 2030
1 Broad engagement key to ongoing progress	✓		
2 Concentrated friction a priority for attention	✓		
3 Area planning showcases positive activity		✓	
4 Compliance is important; alignment is needed		✓	
5 Centralised volunteer systems are on the right track		✓	
6 Silos remain – and a desire to break them down		✓	
7 Area size is not a primary concern, except in East-West		✓	
8 Area Councils are struggling with a mixed mandate			✓
9 Branches face fundamental shifts			✓
10 Seeding the future of Red Cross			✓

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