It is possible to combat police corruption – as long as leaders are committed and the right capacity is available. The South African Police Service (SAPS) recently announced that it is establishing ‘a dedicated capability in the Detective Service to conduct criminal investigations against members allegedly involved in corrupt and fraudulent activities’. This policy brief offers a number of arguments for why this approach makes good sense.
Tackling police corruption effectively is not an easy task but it can be achieved if there is an integrated strategy that seeks to meet three key objectives:

- Building an organisational culture that promotes integrity and supports professionalism
- Increasing accountability of those involved in police misconduct and criminality
- Promoting community awareness of and engagement with the strategy

The SAPS has developed a draft anti-corruption strategy, which according to the SAPS Annual Report 2015/2016, they planned to finalise during the 2016/17 financial year. However, at the time of writing (April 2017) there was no indication as to the status of this process.

Although meeting all three key objectives of the strategy is crucial to reducing incidents of police corruption, this policy brief limits its focus to what is needed to support the second objective: increasing accountability of police officers involved in corrupt activities.

### Recommendations

- Selecting the right people for the anti-corruption unit is crucial. The selection process should therefore include thorough psychological and integrity tests.
- The head of the anti-corruption unit should be an officer of senior rank with the authority to get things done within the organisation.
- All unit commanders and other senior staff must have top security clearance.
- The unit should have its own dedicated budget, specialised equipment and logistics support.
- Investigating police corruption is a high-risk undertaking that requires a secure database and information systems.
- The South African Police Service Act (68 of 1995) should be amended to provide for the functioning and powers of the unit.
- Continual training of personnel, tailored for those involved in specialised investigations, is essential.

An internal unit aimed at investigating cases of police corruption is crucial for at least three reasons

The policy brief explores the specific objective of establishing an effective anti-corruption unit within the SAPS. This is particularly important, as an internal unit aimed at investigating cases of police corruption is crucial for at least three reasons:

- The unit will ensure that the SAPS itself can hold corrupt police officers accountable, which should act as a deterrent to this type of activity.
- It will promote public confidence in the SAPS, as it will demonstrate that the SAPS takes the matter of corruption seriously.
- It will serve to promote police morale, as those who are falsely accused of corruption can be formally cleared.

Currently, responsibility for tackling police corruption appears to rest with a number of ‘mechanisms’ that are located in various structures of the SAPS. According to the SAPS Annual Report 2015/16, there are ‘several internal and external mechanisms’ to be used by members of the SAPS for reporting corruption and fraud. The same report identifies some of these mechanisms as the Integrity Management Unit of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks); the Inspectorate Division; the Internal Audit Component (including its forensic-audit capability); and the Integrity Management Section of the Personnel Management Division.

Apart from the Hawks Integrity Management Unit, these mechanisms are designed for reporting and detecting corrupt or fraudulent activities, and not for investigating them. Moreover, the mandate of the Hawks is limited...
primarily to the investigation of corruption allegations against members of the Hawks, and of other SAPS members only if they occupy the rank of colonel and above. Acts of corruption committed by all other ranks (and by other SAPS employees) are investigated at station level. This is inappropriate, given the challenges that are associated with colleagues at police stations investigating one another.

There is an indication that this situation may change, however. The SAPS Annual Report 2015/16 stated that a process was under way to establish ‘a dedicated capability in the Detective Service to conduct criminal investigations against members allegedly involved in corrupt and fraudulent activities, alongside the DPCI [Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations] and IPID [Independent Police Investigative Directorate]’ (emphasis added).

This brief aims to contribute to this initiative and to promote public understanding as to why it is critically important to have a dedicated anti-corruption unit within the SAPS.

**Overview of SAPS anti-corruption investigative practices**

With the establishment of the new post-apartheid SAPS in 1995, many things had to change within the police service to align it with the interim constitution of 1993. The ability to combat police corruption effectively was one of the new capabilities needed in the SAPS and consequently led to the formation of a national Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) in January 1996, located in the SAPS National Management Services.

A study conducted by the Institute for Security Studies in 1997 found that, from its early days, this unit faced several key difficulties. Firstly, it was not adequately independent from the SAPS and was therefore viewed with some scepticism by the public and there was hostility towards it from within. Secondly, as the Independent Complaints Directorate had been set up to investigate complaints against the police, the long-term future of the ACU appeared uncertain. And, thirdly, members of the unit were uncertain about their brief and there was a shortage of skilled personnel and resources. In addition, there may also have been inadequate internal integrity checks for members attached to the ACU.

The South African Public Service Commission, in its 2001 report on anti-corruption agencies in South Africa, expressed the opinion that positioning the ACU within the SAPS was ‘something that potentially hampers the effectiveness of the unit, since police investigating police is not an ideal situation’.

The police are the ones best placed to tackle the ‘tricks of the trade’ used by corrupt officers

Conversely, of course, the authors would wish to point out that there are also strong arguments in favour of an internal capacity to investigate police corruption. These are, among others, that nobody knows the police better than the police themselves and therefore that they are the ones best placed to tackle the ‘tricks of the trade’ used by corrupt police officers. Experienced police detectives attached to such a unit not only bring with them their police experience, but they are also able to develop a unique expertise for this kind of investigation. It is important, however, that members of such a unit are specially selected, regularly evaluated and tested, and protected from intimidation and influence by colleagues whom they may have to investigate.

According to the SAPS Annual Police Plan for 1998/1999, the mandate of the ACU at the time was to reduce corruption in the SAPS by increasing detection of incidents, and apprehending and dismissing offenders. However, in 2000, soon after Jackie Selebi became National Commissioner of the SAPS, the unit was moved from police Management Services to the Detective Service. The change was ostensibly to position it as part of a group of specialist investigative services along with the organised-crime and commercial-crime units. At that time, some 4 000 cases were being investigated by the ACU. With 250 personnel, this meant that each detective was investigating approximately 16 cases, which was difficult but not unmanageable.

The question of where the unit should be based in the organisation later became contentious. The ACU felt it...
would be more suitable under the commercial crime branch of the SAPS, the reason being that, as ‘corruption always has an element of fraud, of abuse of official power, and misrepresentation, it would fit more comfortably within [the] commercial crime [unit].’

Continuing attempts at reorganising the ACU had an inhibiting impact on the unit and its staff. For example, in the Public Service Commission’s report of 2001 it was found that uncertainty around the restructuring of the unit was ‘impacting on the morale and effectiveness of the unit, and … the budget of the unit as well as the dedicated staff appear to be declining with the restructuring process of the SAPS … and … the cases of corruption dealt with by the unit were increasing’.

There was no justification for closing down the ACU, as the success of the units as well as the conviction rates were extremely high

In 2003 the unit was closed down and its functions dispersed among other divisions of the police service. Responsibility for investigating corruption relating to organised crime was moved to the Organised Crime Unit; intelligence gathering in connection with corruption was moved to the Crime Intelligence Division. All other corruption-related investigations became the responsibility of the police stations, which had the impact of destroying the last vestiges of dedicated anti-corruption activities in the SAPS.

According to Selebi, the closure of the ACU was necessary because corruption occurs in the context of organised crime and, at the time, the number of cases being handled by the unit was decreasing. However, although it is true that many corruption cases in the police happen as a result of organised crime, it is also true that most are completely unconnected to organised crime. It is significant that Selebi’s assertion that corruption was on the decrease was based on a distortion of the facts. Having closed down half the provincial units in 2002, Selebi used the resulting reduction in cases being handled by the ACU as evidence that levels of police corruption were declining. However, other more objective sources, such as the Public Service Commission’s review of South African anti-corruption agencies in 2001, found to the contrary that cases of police corruption were on the increase.

Marius Bouwer, a former senior member of the ACU, believed that the closing down of the ACU was an irrational decision. Bouwer said in 2009: ‘There was no justification for closing down the ACU, as the success of the units as well as the conviction rates were extremely high. The investigations were of such a nature that some identified suspects were too close for comfort to the decision-makers.’

Bouwer gave no indication of who he was referring to by ‘decision-makers’, but at the time the ACU was aware of disturbing irregularities in relation to
former SAPS national commissioner Selebi. In fact, in 2002 the ACU had become increasingly concerned with Selebi’s regular contact with certain individuals who at the time were under investigation for organised crime. Consequently, the ACU cautioned him, through one of the deputy national commissioners, to the effect that he was running the risk of being called to testify should the concerned individuals be charged.

Selebi was later convicted in 2010 on a charge of corruption for contravening Section 4(1)(a) of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act (12 of 2004). He was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Given Selebi’s irrational and dishonest public reasons for closing down the ACU, and his subsequent proven involvement in corrupt activities, it now seems plausible that his decision to close down the ACU was taken as a measure to avoid probes into his own activities.

One of Selebi’s more problematic decisions during his term in office related to restructuring the SAPS in 2006. The detective division was the worst affected by this initiative, as most specialised units were shut down. According to the late Colonel George Mason, then national head of the South African Narcotics Bureau, this new approach resulted in a tendency to move almost all cases that required some level of specialised investigative capacity to the Organised Crime Unit. This had a detrimental impact on the capacity of the SAPS to investigate cases not related to organised crime, such as rape, child abuse and many cases of police corruption.

It is primarily for these reasons that all allegations against members of the service, irrespective of rank, should be investigated by a single, dedicated unit that is off-site, is not part of a police station and is not attached to other police units. Moreover, such a proposed unit must have its own infrastructure, intelligence-gathering capacity, including the ability to run undercover operations, and management capabilities.

Developments in tackling police corruption

With the demise of the ACU, the SAPS appeared to try to fill the gap by developing various anti-corruption strategies intended to tackle the problem both proactively and reactively. Moreover, responsibility was placed on the IPID, which was given a limited mandate in 2011 to investigate police corruption. This section considers these initiatives.

Developing an anti-corruption strategy in the SAPS

Probably as a result of the planning process for the SAPS 2000/2003 Strategic Plan and the identification of police corruption as a major obstacle to effective policing, the police service began working towards developing an effective anti-corruption strategy. Between 1999 and 2010 they first developed a Service Integrity Framework, followed by a Service Integrity Strategy and, subsequently, a more comprehensive Corruption and Fraud Prevention Plan. In 2010 this was renamed the SAPS Anti-Corruption Strategy (ACS) and approved by the SAPS National Management Forum in September 2011.

There is some uncertainty as to why the ACS has not yet been fully implemented, given that it is over five years since it was formally adopted. According to a senior police officer, the then Minister of Police, Nathi Mthethwa, refused to support the strategy for the disconcertingly odd reason that many members in the employ of the SAPS had criminal convictions. Its implementation was consequently fragmented because top police management were ostensibly reluctant to drive the initiative forward as a result of the minister’s lack of support. However, according to the SAPS Annual Report 2015/2016, the finalisation of the department’s Anti-Corruption Strategy, was delayed due to the change in top
management and has been prioritised for completion during the first semester of 2016/2017 to ensure that it will be implemented during the same financial year.\textsuperscript{26}

The current management of the SAPS appears to be set on finalising and implementing the ACS, although at the time of writing (April 2017), progress in this regard is still unclear. The ACS is based on the corruption-management approach recommended by the Department of Public Service and Administration and focuses on the following four pillars:

- **Prevention.** The SAPS would ensure its compliance with the policy framework for the national prevention of corruption by introducing policies that regulate conflicts of interest and the receiving of gifts. There was also to be a review of the SAPS discipline management policy and the establishment of an ethics management capacity in the SAPS. It would also conduct risk assessments, anti-corruption training and awareness raising, and develop a communication strategy around the ACS.

- **Detection.** The SAPS would develop an integrated approach to corruption detection, which would include policies for supporting whistle-blowing and incentivising the reporting of corruption. It would also create a centralised information-management system for identifying and monitoring reports of corruption.

- **Investigation.** The SAPS would clarify the process surrounding the investigation of corruption, including policy, procedure and standards relating to the investigation of corruption, as well as initiatives to be undertaken in cooperation with other government departments.

- **Resolution.** The SAPS would establish policy and procedures to rectify police systems that are compromised by corruption, integrate a loss-management policy into the SAPS enterprise risk-management framework and finalise discipline policy and procedures.\textsuperscript{27}

Besides renaming the Corruption and Fraud Prevention Plan as the ACS, very little else is publicly known about how the strategy is being implemented or its progress. From the available information, it was possible to determine that in 2010 the SAPS Strategic Management Component, responsible for developing the ACS, put a great deal of effort into developing and implementing the strategy. Material aimed at sensitising police members to the dangers of corruption was developed, training was conducted and a regular newsletter was sent to members. Unfortunately, largely because of the lack of support among SAPS senior management (which was the case at least until 2015) to endorse and drive the strategy, that initial progress was
not followed through and the strategy has still not been fully implemented.\textsuperscript{28}

From the SAPS Annual Report 2015/16, the most promising development in the fight against police corruption is the stated intention to re-establish a ‘dedicated’ anti-corruption ‘capability’ albeit within the detective service.

**Independent Police Investigative Directorate**

The independent police watchdog, the IPID, is also mandated to investigate police corruption, prescribed by Section 28 of the Independent Police Investigative Directorate Act (1 of 2011). The subsections of Section 28 pertaining to this responsibility read as follows:

1. The Directorate must investigate …
   - (g) corruption matters within the police initiated by the Executive Director on his or her own, or after the receipt of a complaint from a member of the public, or referred to the Directorate by the Minister, an MEC or the Secretary, as the case may be …

2. The Directorate may investigate matters relating to systemic corruption involving the police.

Section 1(g) appears to be clear, although it obviously limits the IPID’s ability to initiate corruption investigations unless a complaint is made by those parties mentioned in the wording of the Act. Given that corruption occurs between two parties, both of whom are committing a criminal offence, it is very rarely reported.

By comparison, the ACU in 2000 investigated approximately 4 000 corruption cases against members of the SAPS before its capacity was curtailed and it was eventually shut down three years later.\textsuperscript{31}

The IPID’s mandate in terms of Section 28(2), the investigation of ‘systemic corruption’, is less clear. This term is not defined in the Act, but in its annual report for 2012/13, the IPID defined it as ‘… an institutionalised, endemic manipulation of a system by individuals or networks/organisations, taking advantage of weakness in the processes and systems for illicit gain, where there are leadership deficiencies, collusion and/or abuse of power’.\textsuperscript{29}

**Why a specialised anti-corruption unit is important**

Arguably, the establishment of a specialised investigative unit in a police agency can be justified only where there is a persistent problem requiring special skills and expertise on an ongoing basis. In the case of the SAPS, the establishment of a specialised unit for the investigation of police corruption can be justified precisely because it has been found that corruption is a persistent problem. In this context the authors wish to associate themselves with the advantages of police specialisation pointed out in a 2001 publication on police administration:\textsuperscript{32}

- Assigning responsibility. Responsibility for the performance of a specific task can be assigned to particular units or individuals.
- Development of expertise. Attention and skills can be targeted at specific complex crimes, such as police corruption or online fraud.
- Encouraging an *esprit de corps*. Groups of specially trained individuals sharing similar tasks, and who are to some degree dependent on one another for the successful outcome of these tasks, can form cohesive units with high levels of morale.
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness. Specialised units tend to show a greater degree of proficiency in task performance than general investigative units.

It is therefore uncertain whether, in this instance, the IPID can initiate investigations into systemic corruption. The wording of the Act further complicates matters. Unlike Section 28(1), which obligates the IPID to investigate a certain category of cases (the operative word is ‘must’), Section 28(2) allows the IPID a choice (the operative word here is ‘may’).

The reason for this disparity is not immediately clear, but the limitations on the IPID’s mandate are apparent in the annual report for 2015/16, which reveals that the directorate received only 112 cases of corruption and 11 of systemic corruption.\textsuperscript{30} By comparison, the ACU in 2000 investigated approximately 4 000 corruption cases against members of the SAPS before its capacity was curtailed and it was eventually shut down three years later.\textsuperscript{31}
The authors also found support for their arguments in favour of a specialised anti-corruption unit for the police in the 2001 report of the Public Service Commission (PSC) that criticised the ongoing restructuring and placement of the police’s anti-corruption unit. At the time there was a tendency in the SAPS to increasingly move the responsibility of specialised investigations, including the investigation of police corruption, to the Organised Crime Unit. In this regard, the PSC commented as follows:

The amalgamation of these units under the organised crime structure, or the devolution of their functions to police stations, [does] not necessarily make sense either for the existing units or for the units into which they would be merged … Moreover, they are not [all] typical organised crime cases. Linking these investigations to other organised crime investigations would, therefore, make little impact on effectiveness.

Conclusion and recommendations

It has been argued in this brief that nobody knows the police better than the police themselves, so the establishment of a dedicated internal unit for the investigation of police corruption makes good sense.

Such a unit, however, will always have an intrinsically difficult task, in that it needs to fulfil its mandate in an environment that often is extremely hostile to its objectives. Members of an anti-corruption unit will be expected to investigate their colleagues, many of whom are seasoned and streetwise police officers. Experience has shown that detectives charged with investigating colleagues are often looked upon by some as disloyal and traitorous. In more serious cases, this could lead to intimidation and retaliation – actions that may compromise the safety of investigators. For these reasons, the men and women selected for such a unit must be exceptionally skilled individuals and able to meet a number of minimum requirements.

Failure to separate the unit’s resources from the SAPS will compromise its ability to undertake covert investigations

To set up and maintain a specialist anti-corruption unit within the police service, there will be certain essential requirements, including dedicated staff and resources, and unwavering management support. The following are some of the more pertinent of these requirements:

- Selecting the right people is crucial. It will be a serious challenge to recruit people with the right temperament, suited to undertake investigations of fellow police officers. Applicants would need to be thoroughly evaluated to ensure they possess the necessary psychological ability for the rigours of anti-corruption work. The selection process therefore must include psychological testing and thorough background checks. In addition, it is
crucial that staff undergo polygraph and other integrity tests as part of the selection process, and thereafter at regular intervals. It is advisable that external service providers conduct these tests to ensure that they are carried out in a fair and consistent manner.

- **Dedicated logistics and budget.** The anti-corruption unit should have immediate access to certain specialised tools and processes, including surveillance, air support, tactical support and intervention, safe premises, fronting and unconventional investigative methods. The ACU should control its own budget, and approval of and access to funds should not be subject to the approval of officials who are not associated with such investigations and who do not have secret or top-secret security clearance. Should it become necessary for goods or services to be procured, the departmental and Treasury regulations should be complied with only on a need-to-know basis.

Failure to separate the unit’s resources from the SAPS will compromise its ability to undertake covert investigations, which are crucial for its success. Therefore, the unit should have its own dedicated premises and facilities, separate from other police divisions. For example, it should have unmarked vehicles that are not normally associated with the regular police service.

- **Secure database and information systems.** Information is the lifeblood of any investigation and this is particularly the case where investigations into corruption are undertaken. Unlike conventional investigations, where the focus is on criminal offences, corruption investigations focus on people – police officers in this instance. Investigations into police officers tend to be more difficult and often riskier than conventional investigations, given the nature of their work, their experience and their access to information. For this reason, the databases and information systems of such a unit must be secure and should be protected from unauthorised access. Those seeking to undermine anti-corruption investigations might well manipulate unsuspecting colleagues or friends to gain access to information held by the unit.

- **Status of the commander.** The rank of the unit’s head should be no less than lieutenant-general. This is to ensure the unit is endowed with a certain status, and it is important for practical operational purposes, too, such as negotiating with outside agencies and authorising services, such as travel. As far as international travel is concerned, the only people involved in the process should be the national commissioner and the minister. The decision to launch or initiate an investigation should reside solely with the head of the unit. External parties, such as the national commissioner or the minister, should be informed only after an investigation is concluded. The authority and powers of the head of the unit should be laid out in the terms of the South African Police Service Act and its regulations, and in an official policy document authorised by the national commissioner.

The unit’s databases and information systems must be secure and protected from unauthorised access

- **Powers and functions of the unit.** The objective of the unit should be the investigation of allegations or evidence of corruption involving members of the SAPS and civilians who act in concert with corrupt police officers. Corruption-related offences usually entail abuse of power, nepotism and defeating the ends of justice, where any form of reward is received for acting or failing to act as required by law. The nature of corruption is such that it may well be cloaked in what is perceived as a disciplinary offence. In such cases, close attention is needed to ensure an act of corruption is not overlooked.

Ideally, the ACU should also have the authority to investigate any serious criminal charges against SAPS members in instances where threats to the investigation exist or where investigative expertise is required.

- **Training.** Continual training tailored for specialised anti-corruption investigative work is essential. This should include overt and covert investigation techniques, as well as the ability to gather intelligence. It is also important to learn from the experience of successful units in other parts of the world, notably Hong Kong’s Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.
• Other requirements. In addition to the requirements listed above, it is important to ensure that all unit commanders and other senior staff qualify for and are given top-security clearances, with other ranks within the unit qualifying for at least secret clearance.

A mechanism must be established that will enable the unit, in consultation with certain commanders in the SAPS, to co-opt specialised staff in circumstances where the head deems it necessary. This mechanism should provide for information sharing where it is regarded as in the best interests of policing.

It is imperative that police unions are consulted throughout the process of setting up the unit and that they agree with its structure and mandate.

Tackling police corruption effectively in the SAPS requires a comprehensive approach aimed at improving overall professionalism and integrity. Initiatives to ensure that only the most dedicated and honest people are recruited to become police officers, who are properly trained, resourced and motivated, and that only the most competent become commanders, will go a long way to improving policing. However, there will always be some level of corruption in every police agency given the powers and discretion that police officers have by virtue of their profession. Where officers succumb to the temptation to misuse their powers for personal gain, they must be made aware that there is a high risk of losing their jobs and being criminally prosecuted. The only way to achieve this objective is through a well-resourced, separate and motivated investigation unit dedicated to protecting the integrity of the SAPS from those who become involved in criminality and corruption.
Notes

2. Ibid., 250.
3. Ibid., 21; 250.
4. Siame Lebakeng, South African Police Service, Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations, workshop titled Towards understanding the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) mandate for addressing police corruption, organised jointly by the Crime and Justice Programme of the Institute for Security Studies and the Independent Complaints Directorate, Durban, 16 and 17 September 2010. That this was still the case by 2013 was confirmed by an anonymous senior SAPS officer (personal communication, 7 July 2013).
7. Stefan Grobler, presentation to the Portfolio Committee for Safety and Security, Cape Town, 2001 (date unavailable).
9. Within the SAPS there is an untested perception among some members that corruption within the unit was a contributing factor to its closure in 2003 (personal communication, anonymous senior SAPS officer, 4 October 2016).
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
18. Personal communication, anonymous senior SAPS officer, 4 October 2016.
19. Ibid.
22. Personal communication, anonymous senior SAPS officer, 4 October 2016.
23. IPID, Annual Report 2012/13, 34.
29. Ibid., 48.
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About the authors
Dr Johan Burger is a consultant on crime and policing with the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. He is a former major-general in the SAPS, and has degrees in law, strategic studies and policing.
Stefan Grobler is a former brigadier in the SAPS. He was a career detective and served in both the fraud and commercial branches before he established and commanded the SAPS Anti-Corruption Unit between 1996 and 2003.

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