

north shore news

EDITORIAL: Unwarranted

North Shore News

February 20, 2015 09:58 AM

We are astounded at the revelation this week that the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner is investigating alleged misconduct by 16 Abbotsford Police Department members.

The case centres around one officer who is now charged with breach of trust and obstruction of justice, as well as 16 other officers in the force.

At issue is the “integrity of statements” officers used when applying to judges for search warrants in drug-related cases.

Convictions of criminals related to the investigations are already being reviewed, raising the prospect that some of them may be tossed out.

Even worse is the prospect that some of those behind bars today were wrongfully convicted. Either way, it brings the justice system into serious disrepute.

By now, police agencies ought to know judges can and will throw a case out on a technicality if Charter rights are abused.

We say the antidote to this problem is more transparency and accountability.

Already, B.C.’s police watchdog legislation is weaker than most other provinces. The police complaint commissioner doesn’t have the power to compel testimony and each step of the complaints process is carried out behind closed doors with scant public scrutiny.

The RCMP’s process for dealing with complaints and officer misconduct is even more opaque with matters going down a black hole in Ottawa and rarely heard about again.

We hope our minister of justice is paying very close attention to this and remembering a fundamental principle of policing in a free society is that authority for officers is supposed to be matched by commensurate accountability to the public they police.

© 2015 North Shore News