

INQUIRY INTO CRIME IN THE COMMUNITY: VICTIMS, OFFENDERS & FEAR OF CRIME

BACKGROUND ON THE WA LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

The WA Local Government Association is the peak body that represents 143 Councils throughout Western Australia. The mission of the Association is to be a unified, representative Local Government voice and to provide leadership and services to our members.

Our aims are to:

- Provide leadership.
- Provide a united voice for Local Government.
- Represent the views of Local Government to the State and Federal Governments.
- Provide high quality professional services.
- Communicate issues and information.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & CRIME PREVENTION

Local Government in WA has had a role in crime prevention for a number of years, particularly through involvement with Neighbourhood Watch, Community Policing and the Safety House Program.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the level of involvement that Local Government has had in community security and safety, and crime prevention. This increased involvement has seen the majority of Councils across WA initiate a number of local level initiatives in crime prevention including:

- Community security patrols.
- Undertaking community security audits.
- Provision of community surveillance services in conjunction with the WA Police Service.
- Adoption of urban planning practices such as crime prevention through environmental design and management.
- Provision of street lighting.
- Provision of graffiti management and removal services.
- Early intervention programs for youth at risk.
- Initiatives to address truancy.
- Education and awareness raising programs for seniors and other vulnerable community members.
- Support for indigenous patrols.
- Facilitation of partnerships and alliances through community development principles to address numerous community issues.

Conservative estimates indicate that Councils in metropolitan Western Australia are expending in excess of \$15million on crime prevention and community safety related issues. Councils in WA's regional centres and smaller communities are also expending resources on crime prevention and community safety initiatives.

Councils are continuing to develop both short and long term strategies to combat crime (and the fear of crime) and to provide sustainability for their communities into the future. If required by the Standing Committee, detailed examples of the initiatives being undertaken by Local Governments can be obtained through the Association. These range from town safety plans to community security audits to initiatives targeted at young people.

PARTNERSHIPS

At the local level, a number of Councils are developing partnerships and alliances with State and Federal Government agencies, non-government organisations, community groups and residents to develop initiatives to provide safe communities. It is frequently reported by Councils to the Association that one of the top priorities for community members is to live in a safe and secure environment. Local Government has recognised that this cannot be achieved without partnerships and alliances firstly between all spheres of Government and also with the community at large.

At a strategic level, the WA State Government and the WA Local Government Association are commencing negotiation of a Crime Prevention Partnership. Negotiations are in the preliminary stages, however the main purpose of the Agreement is for the State Government and Local Governments of WA to recognise the important role each party has in the prevention of crime and sustainable community safety and security.

It is proposed that the Agreement once negotiated will define the partners, objectives, principles, scope of agreement including issues, strategies, outcomes, timeframes, responsibilities and performance indicators, and management.

While this partnership agreement will define the roles and responsibilities of State and Local Governments in WA, the Association believes that a similar framework should be developed for the roles and responsibilities in crime prevention of all 3 spheres of Government.

FUNDING & AUTONOMY

The WA Local Government Association's current approach and position statement in relation to crime prevention and community security is:

“The Association has maintained a consistent position to Government that Councils must have the freedom to determine their own response to crime prevention and community security, based on audits of local circumstances and locally developed strategic plans, backed up by appropriate funding and resources to guard against cost shifting between the spheres of Government.”

While the Association maintains that Councils should have the autonomy to develop strategies and initiatives to address crime and the fear of crime in their local communities, the resources of both State and Federal Governments are required to assist with the implementation of these strategies.

Funding opportunities from both a State and Federal Government level are limited and this places considerable pressure on the rate base of Councils, many of which are required to provide an ever increasing conglomerate of services to their communities.

It is acknowledged by the Association and Local Government generally that in order for crime prevention to be successful, a whole of Government and whole of community approach is required.

To this end, it is imperative that the role that Local Government is playing in crime prevention and community safety is acknowledged by the Federal Government and that Councils are adequately resourced to continue to provide these and expanded services where required.

CONCLUSION

It has been widely recognised for a number of years that Local Government is the closest sphere of government to the community. It is also widely acknowledged that safety and security is a priority issue for the Australian community. Given this equation, it is to be expected that Local Government does play and will continue to play an increasing role in planning, facilitating and delivering crime prevention and community safety initiatives in local communities.

If State and Federal Governments are committed to forming strategic partnerships and alliances with Local Government, this must be demonstrated through the provision of sufficient support and funding to Councils for community safety and crime prevention strategies. This funding should provide for the development of long term, outcome based strategies that stimulate social capital and community sustainability. The criteria for such funding should also be flexible to enable Councils to access resources to develop locally appropriate strategies and initiatives and to engage in partnerships with the broader community.