

CLARKSON POLICE STATION

Grievance

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.22 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Police and relates to Clarkson Police Station. Clarkson Police Station is not in the electorate of Ocean Reef; it is in what will soon be the electorate of Butler. However, it services the northern half of the electorate of Ocean Reef and sits some 50 metres outside my electorate boundary. I want to raise this matter because Clarkson, along with some of its neighbouring suburbs, is fast becoming—if it is not already—the crime hotspot of the north metropolitan region. I do not say this to denigrate what is, in the main, a fantastic suburb. I have many friends who live in Clarkson, and many of my colleagues bought their first homes in Clarkson. It is a suburb with some amazing and beautiful parts. In fact, I know that the minister has absolutely nothing against the suburb of Clarkson because prior to her life in this place, she invested in her business in Clarkson. I do not denigrate the suburb. The vast majority of Clarkson residents are law-abiding, hardworking citizens and, as I said, many of them are my friends. However, this area has, for a range of reasons and increasingly over time, started to attract more than its fair share of crime and antisocial behaviour. This really comes down to a small, perhaps hardened, cohort of offenders who, for whatever reason, congregate around this area, and we have a police station conveniently within Clarkson to deal with this.

With the recently proposed boundary changes, I have been surveying the suburb of Mindarie, which has just come into the electorate of Ocean Reef. Crime and antisocial behaviour for me—indeed as most members of this place know from our surveys—consistently come in near or at the top of the list of community concerns. This has especially been the case with my Mindarie surveys. I have had a lot of feedback from residents in that area, most of which has centred on issues to do with Clarkson.

Following this response, a few weeks ago I spoke with my local police based in Clarkson and arranged a Saturday night out with them. I went out on a night patrol to see firsthand what the local police are dealing with on the streets. I strongly encourage all members to take up the opportunity to do this, should they be able to find the time to speak to their local police, because it is a real eye-opener.

Dr M.D. Nahan: Was there much action that night?

Mr A.P. JACOB: There was a lot of action that night. I was warned that my first two or three call-outs would probably be domestic violence incidents. That did not eventuate this night. This night we had two call-outs to out-of-control parties, one of which was in Clarkson and was an absolute debacle. I got to see one of those firsthand. This party involved 150 to 200 youths; 14 or 15-year-olds on whatever substances, clearly many of them drunk and many of them probably on other things, and completely out of control—kids really. A large amount of police resources had to be sent to effectively play babysitter to these out-of-control kids whose parents were probably indifferent to where their children were, or had no idea. By the same token, I was sitting in the car and could hear the serious incidents coming in over the radio. However, more than half of the police resources that night were spent chasing down youth in out-of-control parties. I absolutely commend the minister for the strong stance that she and the Premier have taken on this issue. Indeed, I had an incident at my house six to eight months ago, where I had to call out the police because of an out-of-control party.

Dr M.D. Nahan: The party was not in your house.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, it was not; thank you, member.

In raising this grievance, I am not asking the minister for strategies to push the problem down the road. In fact, having a disproportionate level of crime and antisocial behaviour located in one small region, as we currently do, presents a unique opportunity to address the specific cohort that is causing this problem, in a localised and targeted way. In this way, we can not only alleviate the challenges faced by the community—this is a community with huge potential and this is probably the biggest issue facing local people in the north at the moment—but also directly target that minority of people that is so disproportionately disrupting life for the majority.

I acknowledge that the minister is new to her role, and I would like to ask her to come to my electorate and have a look for herself. She should come and hear from not only me but also local residents and business owners who have been affected. These residents have had to put up with out-of-control parties up and down their streets. They have had their businesses broken into on numerous occasions, and there have been graffiti and vandalism challenges as well. It would be invaluable for the minister to hear about these things. I know that often it is easy for backbenchers to ask for more resources to be put into an area, but there are opportunities here for not just more resources, but also to rejig some of our local policing resources and have a more targeted approach in this area, which is increasingly becoming a crime hotspot. There are also ways of doing things a little more creatively such as co-locating and improving the accessibility of various services, and perhaps getting other departments onsite as well. These are the things that I would like to talk with the minister about. I acknowledge that there is no one silver bullet to these types of challenges. If there was, I am sure we would have fixed it a long time ago.

However, I have a number of suggestions—probably too many to go through in just seven minutes. The best thing would be for the minister to come to the electorate and have a discussion with local residents, many of whom have suggested these ideas. They would appreciate it and so would I. The local community has a number of good ideas for ways in which this challenge can be tackled.

Clarkson has become the crime hotspot of the north metropolitan region, along with some of its neighbouring suburbs. I know that we can address this matter, not in a way that moves the problem down the road—that is not what I am asking for—but by tackling that small minority cohort that is ruining life for everybody else in the area.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Police) [9.29 am]: I thank the member for Ocean Reef for the grievance and for bringing this matter to the house today. Obviously, every local member would prefer to have a greater police presence in their area. One thing every police minister pretty much experiences is regular requests from members for more resources to be deployed to their area, and to make that happen. I know the member appreciates that it is the Commissioner of Police who makes the decision about where resources are deployed, but ultimately the commissioner is employed by the government. The discussion on resources and the requests that local members bring to me certainly form part of my communications with the commissioner on a regular basis.

I am satisfied that Western Australia Police is a well-resourced agency. Since 2007–08 the police budget has grown by around \$340 million. We now have a police budget of \$1.2 billion. Over that same period, the member might be interested to know that overall crime across the state is down by 9.3 per cent. I understand that this is not seen as necessarily reflected in the member’s area at the moment. Clarkson and its surrounding areas face a range of significant policing challenges, perhaps the most challenging of which is the rapid increase in population growth. On census night, 7 August 2001, there were 5 868 people in the Clarkson suburb, which I know is outside the member’s electorate but I am using this as an example of what is happening in the northern corridor. By 2006, the population of Clarkson had increased to 7 082. In 2011, there were 11 687 residents in the suburb of Clarkson, which is near enough to a 100 per cent increase in population during that period. More broadly, the suburbs that fall into the Clarkson policing subdistrict, suburbs such as Merriwa, Nowergup, Quinns Rocks, Ridgewood, Mindarie and Kinross—in the electorate of Ocean Reef—and with further expected growth in the northern corridor suburbs of Butler, Jindalee and Tamala Park, that entire region has increased in population by 46 per cent since 2006. More people obviously means more opportunities for crime and more calls for police assistance, and a more spread out population means that it is more difficult for police to respond quickly, effectively and efficiently to calls for assistance.

I am glad the member raised the issue of out-of-control parties. WA Police now log these on the computer-aided dispatch system as “public disorder incidents”, which they have done specifically to get a measure on the resources being deployed to out-of-control parties. There were 36 public disorder incidents in Clarkson between June and August this year. I know the member attended a number of call-outs with police to find out what police in the Clarkson district are doing. Those incidents were sufficiently serious to require police attendance of some nature. Out-of-control parties are a significant problem because they cause nuisance and interference to the quiet enjoyment and amenity of the suburbs and the residents who live in them, but they are also a significant drain on police resources. As the member is aware, we have brought to this place the government’s strategy to manage out-of-control parties. I know that I can count on the member for Ocean Reef’s support. I hope other members in this place will support the legislation when I bring it to this house in the near future.

Firstly, in specific response to the member’s grievance, very shortly I will be visiting the Ocean Reef electorate to meet local police to get firsthand experience on the challenges they face in that northern region. Secondly, based on the member for Ocean Reef’s earlier correspondence and indeed a number of conversations with him regarding this matter, and my own impressions of the situation, I have had a number of discussions with the Commissioner of Police about the Clarkson policing subdistrict and the resources assigned to it. The commissioner is very much aware of the situation in Clarkson, which has become more challenging in recent years. I understand that other agencies are also looking at putting resources into Clarkson. I have asked the commissioner to consider whether there might be specific measures that we can deploy into Clarkson to increase police visibility and response times in that region. Thirdly, I will push on with a number of statewide projects that will make it easier for police to tackle these kinds of problematic volume crimes, which are now police core business. The kinds of things we have identified as a priority for Clarkson—I do not specifically mean the Clarkson suburb; I mean the Clarkson subdistrict from a policing perspective—include strategies to tackle burglary and motor vehicle theft. Public and domestic violence will always remain a priority. We will announce a range of initiatives over the coming months.

I am pleased to see matters of law and order being brought to this place. Nuisance parties, as I have said before, are a significant problem and a significant drain on police resources. Members might have noticed in the media today there was a story about the training of police dogs. We have put \$1.2 million into beefing up resources to

train more of these general-purpose police dogs to help with the management of out-of-control parties and nuisance gatherings. We are on the right track. The space of law and order is one of these shifting sands sorts of environments: as soon as we seem to get on top of one policing area, another area emerges as a priority.

In closing, I thank the member for bringing this grievance to this place. I commend him for his advocacy on behalf of the constituents of Ocean Reef. I welcome discussions with local members on matters of law and order. The feedback I get from local members, and the feedback I get from my visitations to electorates, means that I can bring firsthand experience to my discussions and communications with the Commissioner of Police on where there might be gaps so that resources can be deployed. I will certainly remain in contact with the commissioner and prioritise the member's requests and concerns raised in this grievance as a matter of priority.