

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF
PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES FOR ALCOHOL AND
ILLCIT DRUG PROBLEMS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT KUNUNURRA
MONDAY, 2 AUGUST 2010**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)
Mr P. Abetz (Deputy Chairman)
Ms L.L. Baker
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr I.C. Blayney**

Hearing commenced at 8.15 am**GAFFNEY, MR GARY****Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Wyndham – East Kimberley, examined:****MILLS, MR FRED****President, Shire of Wyndham – East Kimberley, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and for your appearance before us today. I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners past, present and future of the land upon which we are meeting.

The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia. At this stage I would like to introduce myself, Janet Woollard; Mr Ian Blayney; Dr David Worth, our research officer; and we also have Keith Jackman from Hansard. This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. This hearing is a formal procedure and therefore commands the same respect given to the proceedings in the house. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to your submission and questions we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the “Details of Witness” form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today’s hearing?

The Witnesses: Not at present.

The CHAIRMAN: We will start with Fred and then Gary. Would you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today.

Mr Mills: My name is Frederick Evan Mills. I am the shire president for the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley.

Mr Gaffney: I am Gary Edwin James Gaffney. I am the CEO of the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley.

The CHAIRMAN: You have had an opportunity to look at the terms of reference. This week we have been focussing on alcohol, cannabis and illicit drug problems in the Kimberley. Last year, and earlier this year, we had hearings in other regional areas, and metropolitan areas. We now really want you to paint the picture particularly for this local area in relation to those areas—preschool, school, groups assisting people, treatment programs and social costs to the community. We can start with Gary and then go to Fred. Will you try to paint us a big picture, or would you prefer Fred first?

Mr Gaffney: I am quite easy.

Mr Mills: Gary can go for it and then I will fill in the blanks.

Mr Gaffney: We have done a little bit of work; work between some of the councillors and some of my staff. I think the overall picture is that we have an alcohol problem probably greater than the illicit drug problem. The alcohol problem is prevalent on our streets, in our communities, and tends to be exacerbated by moving on from other areas where they have created dry communities. We cop it at the end when people come in from the communities and save up big time. They come here and basically go on a bender for a couple of weeks, either crowding out our community or creating camps around the town which we then have to administer. We see a lot of that. I suppose in the more permanent-type settlements of Wyndham we see more use of marijuana, but we are not seeing pills and tablets. We are not seeing GBH, we are not seeing uppers, and we are not seeing a whole range of the party-type drugs come to town. We are seeing probably more alcohol in the younger people. Our programs at our youth centre, we are seeing the effects of that with some of our Wunan girl participants that are coming in who are 12, 13 and 14 with the effects of alcohol from the night before. Drinking over age scales is quite a problem. That creates a lot of our youth problems around town in two ways—some of them have been drinking but more so the kids who are getting out of their houses because it is safer to be on the street than in the houses where the alcohol and gambling is having an effect. I think as a community we are copping the brunt of other communities. As I said, we get mobs from the East Kimberley, but we are getting mobs from across the border, the Wungu, the Port Keiths. We are getting the desert mobs, the Balgos, coming up. We are even getting the mobs out of the NT coming in because of the non-alcohol restrictions on this town. I know it is a very vexed issue; it is a vexed issue because we are also a tourist town and 50 per cent of our economy is based on our tourism. Tourists come in. You have seen caravans go past here every hour. They come in, restock and head out. That is a thing that I suppose the locals are saying, “We’ve got an economy here. How is that going to be taken into account if we get alcohol restrictions?” What we are also seeing is once that occurs, if you go and talk to our guys, which is great, we are seeing things like our centres, the centres that we are getting here for sobering up are actually being taken over by the out-of-towners. There is not enough there. There is probably not enough adequate policing and training to do it. The overnight patrols, I feel pretty sorry for them because they are the ones that cop the brunt of it. We probably need another 10 police in town just to assist in patrolling and breaking this up. It is a widespread town. If they have a problem a couple of kays out of town with some drinking, they just do not have the adequacy of numbers to cope with some of it. Not being too harsh, but there has been pretty much an “ease-out” when people have been brought before the courts about a whole range of drunk and disorderly issues. We do not turn it around into some real community service instead of “pretend” community service where people have to go and start cleaning up some of the mess. I put up a slide the other day about one night’s drinking from when the Oombulgurri mob came to town last Thursday. It was a pretty confronting image of what 25 to 30 people have consumed in one night, the mess they have made to an area just in one night —

The CHAIRMAN: That is a photo you showed people, is it?

Mr Gaffney: It is the photos I took last Thursday morning after I sent seven of my staff to clean up one area that had been totally trashed in one night’s drinking. I am talking a couple of hundred cans of beer. I can get that brought up for you pretty quickly if you would like to have a look at that.

The CHAIRMAN: That would be very useful. I was wondering if you could tell us a bit about the number of people in the town, the number of Aboriginal people; the number that might have a problem with alcohol.

Mr Gaffney: We have a 50–50 split between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. We would have —

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Has that changed over time?

Mr Gaffney: I think it has been pretty constant. The problem with that census data, even the ABS is claiming it was at least 25 per cent out. We have staff members going. Mine was never collected, so

it was a pretty poor census take; therefore our numbers have been grossly probably understated. I would say understated by up to 2 000 people, which is a lot of —

The CHAIRMAN: How many people do you think you may have?

Mr Gaffney: I think this community, the East Kimberley, my own estimate is that we probably have 8 500 to 9 000 people. I look at the shire president, he has been here longer, but if you look at our supermarket usage, that is huge. The other thing is we probably get another 4 000 to 5 000 people during tourist time. You are looking at the caravan parks at the moment are basically 95 per cent to 100 per cent capacity. We have got over-capacity in some of them. All those caravan parks filled up. The numbers that are continually going through—we probably cater for an extra 4 000 to 5 000 people per night in the tourist season. This town of, say, 7 000 to 7 500 could be a 12 000 municipality town because of the impact of service during the peak tourist season. Coming into September, bang, that is gone. That eases out again.

The CHAIRMAN: For that 9 000 I think you said roughly 50–50 —

Mr Gaffney: That would be correct.

The CHAIRMAN: — for Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The problem with alcohol is with both?

Mr Gaffney: I would say the majority of our alcohol problem is not 80–20, it is 90–10. Ninety per cent Indigenous; 10 per cent non-Indigenous population. The thing is we do not see the non-Indigenous impact as much as the Indigenous impact. The Indigenous impact is confronting within the street. We probably do not see the non-Indigenous alcohol problems as much as maybe some of the health professionals. Fred might have something.

Mr Mills: I just think it is fair to say, though, that the alcohol problem, in my perception, with the Indigenous people is probably only 20 per cent. It would not be more than 20 per cent of the population. I think that people —

The CHAIRMAN: Twenty per cent of 4 500?

Mr Mills: Yes. It may even be less than that because the people that we certainly see around town, our understanding is that the majority of those people we see are from out of town. Down at the end of one street we have a gathering of the Halls Creek people. There might be 50 people camped down there. Behind our community out the back here we have 30 people out there. They are Oombulgurri people. Are Oombulgurri out here?

Mr Gaffney: No. Oombulgurri down the bottom.

Mr Mills: Kalumburu out here. Down there we might have 20 to 30 people that are from Oombulgurri. While they hang around the streets during the day, they head off down there and camp down there at night; and camp down here and camp down there.

Mr Gaffney: Or overcrowd our community that we have already got. Then they come and pull the “cousins” trick. You hear some pretty horrifying stories of the families that are trying to do something, suddenly have 25 people in their house and their house is wrecked within a day, or they do not go for three or four weeks and bang, it is a real problem. With the drinking comes the gambling. We have had some real spikes of really open public gambling. Our biggest problem is it is not illegal to gamble. When I break up games at 10 o’clock out the front here of kids as young as eight and nine—I am not kidding—kids as young as eight and nine gambling with adults. My wife is a youth worker here. She has been given rolls of money, “Hey, Sue, hang onto this, please.” She goes, “Where did you guys get this money?” “From cards.” It is \$200, \$300 and \$400 in fifties. Her kids have come down to the youth centre between about nine and 14. This is what we find, the kids are pretty smart. They wait until the adults get pretty drunk and then they rip them off basically. There is a double social whack there. We had a voluntary code with all the traders to not sell cards for a month. It actually may have pushed the problems back indoors. It took it out of the streets for a while.

The CHAIRMAN: I want to ask you about the numbers for the control centres but also come back to the gambling.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Do you have a TAB in town?

Mr Gaffney: Yes. The mobs play cards amongst themselves; the big card games. I think the police were telling you phenomenal amounts of money have passed hands in this township. They are talking \$70 000 to \$80 000 a night in gambling. I suppose to me the BasicsCard needs to be extended to not just Indigenous but everybody so we get a good thing on that. The other thing that we do see is when we get not only cheques —

The CHAIRMAN: Tell me about the BasicsCard. I missed a bit as I was looking at a question.

[8.30 am]

Mr Gaffney: The BasicsCard is so that people have not got as much cash, and they have to spend it on food and other commodities.

The CHAIRMAN: We have heard in some other areas that taxidriviers and other people will put money on the BasicsCard and they buy alcohol for people.

Mr Gaffney: It is not a perfect system.

Mr Mills: There are always ways they get around it.

Mr Gaffney: We were talking to our local police, and they have gone pretty hard on the taxidriviers about some of their behaviours up here. I think they will get tougher if they do not see the taxidriviers complying. I think, apart from the days when people get cheques and get their money, we have problems when they get bonuses, and we also have problems when the royalties cheques come in—when there has been a distribution of royalties cheques you just know that things will spike. There are always spikes, whether it be around grand final, when there are real problems with the mobs coming in; around royalty cheques there are real problems when the mobs come in.

The CHAIRMAN: Several people have mentioned the royalties cheques. What are the royalties cheques for?

Mr Gaffney: For mining royalties.

Mr Mills: For mining royalties. I think the arrangement is that a lot of the traditional owners still get money through Argyle and different mining companies for the right to mine or explore on their lands, and they get them either two or four times year, and they are not small amounts; \$70 000, \$80 000 is not uncommon.

The CHAIRMAN: If that was distributed on a more even basis—on a weekly basis—rather than three or four times a year would that help?

Mr Mills: It may help, but Argyle implemented a process a few years back whereby they only pay out a certain amount and the rest goes into a trust that is being managed for the future. There could be some management scheme for it. You go out here and a lot of Aboriginal or Indigenous people drive better cars than we do because the royalty cheques are that high. I do not begrudge them buying a better car than me, but the fact is that they get their hands on that amount of money. I was at the rodeo yesterday, and we have a coffee van and kids were coming up who could not reach the bottom of the van who were regularly putting their hands in their pockets and coming out with \$20 or \$50. There is a lot of money in their hands, and some use it wisely; others do not. I think one of the things that is important in this town is that a lot of the local Indigenous people fear the shame and embarrassment of the visitors who come in. They are at pains at times to say, “We’re local; we’re not one of those. We don’t want to be tarred with the same brush”, because, of recent times, the humbugging has increased. I have only been here eight years, and when I first came up here there was very little humbugging in the street. There was very little in the way of people lying around on the footpath drunk and out in the parks, and there was not the litter.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that what you mean by humbugging on the streets?

Mr Mills: Humbugging is begging; it is a local term. Over the past couple of years the amount of drunken Indigenous people lying in the parks, lying on the footpaths outside the entrance to Coles has increased. I will give you another example: the receptionist at the local medical centre down here was just recently relating that in the last couple of days there had been a smell of urine. There had been an awful lot of medicals for the Ord stage 2, and they thought maybe it was just that. But they just found, underneath their building, which is about this high, swags and food stashes and faeces where they have been camping under there and urinating and so on. That is where the smell was coming from. Anywhere they get, because there is no accommodation for these people, that is their toilet—they do not bathe—and that is where they leave stuff. As I say, that has happened more in the last couple of years, and I think it ties in exactly with the Fitzroy restrictions.

The CHAIRMAN: Are the bans in the other areas making Kununurra more attractive?

Mr Gaffney: You are just moving the problem on. The hardcore drinkers will move on, and then those who want to go out and those who then need to get out and have their wild session will come up and spend a week or two here and then they will move back once the money runs out. I think that is what you are seeing.

Mr Mills: We have actually had people here from Alice Springs; they have said they have come this far because they can get full-strength alcohol here.

The CHAIRMAN: Full strength to take away?

Mr Mills: Yes.

Mr Gaffney: The other problem we have encountered is that due to some changes and bans on, say, the wine cask, people are now drinking heavier spirits and we are getting a whole lot of glass smashing. The glass smashing has all these other problems associated with it, such as people cutting themselves, and if you talk to the police, there have been more stabbings. We are getting drunk fights and slashings, which has had a compounding effect in the medical area. We have had to go and buy a special machine—hopefully I will show you a picture of it very soon. This was one night, these are just photographs of an area on one night, and these are the effects of a mob just camping on the edge for one night.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Where were they from?

Mr Gaffney: That was Oombulgurri. This is what my guys get confronted with.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Was this over towards Lakeside?

Mr Gaffney: Yes, this was actually right on the lake, just where that little shelter is.

Mr Mills: Just below the big boab.

The CHAIRMAN: While you are showing those photographs to us, we are happy to accept copies of those as a submission.

Mr Gaffney: We will organise that. It is really interesting that Cam, one of my young Indigenous guys, goes down there and says, “Gary, where do they get the money for this, mate? I work full time and I couldn’t afford to drink like this.” That is really interesting. He is one of the guys that has to clean it up, and he gets pretty annoyed. Do you see that machine?

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: It was parked out the front here this morning.

Mr Gaffney: Yes. That is a machine we have invested in just to get glass up because of the cost of getting a road sweeper in and a whole range of issues. That cost us \$21 000, and it just helps us get all the glass and stuff off roads and footpaths.

The CHAIRMAN: Does it suck it up?

Mr Gaffney: Yes; it is a big vacuum cleaner, basically. We have had to go out and spend money on that because of the smashed glass around the streets.

The CHAIRMAN: That was obviously a significant cost; apart from the social costs to the community, what other costs are there to the shire?

Mr Gaffney: The clean-up.

Mr Mills: It is costing us \$260 000 a year now, which is up probably 50 per cent on what it was a couple of years ago.

The CHAIRMAN: For?

Mr Gaffney: That is just for general clean-up around the central business area, and these are on top of that. We incur significant costs in clean-up, so that is out-and-out cost, but the other cost is the cost to the community. Our community is getting increasingly upset at the continual problems and mess in the parks. They see parks being cleaned up every day and they see drunk people lying in parks, so that has some real effects.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Can they buy full-strength alcohol here?

Mr Gaffney: Yes.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Where is the next closest place?

Mr Gaffney: You can buy it at Wyndham.

Mr Mills: You can buy it at Wyndham, but then after that the next place is Broome.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Is it Katherine going the other way?

Mr Gaffney: Yes, but Katherine has an alcohol card system in place, whereby if you buy more than one bottle of spirits and a carton, they can track it.

Mr Mills: Timber Creek is just 300 kilometres down the road.

Mr Gaffney: There is a ban there.

Mr Mills: It is supposed to be a ban, but you can get alcohol there quite freely; it does not matter what colour your skin is.

The CHAIRMAN: What about the restrictions? Do you support the restrictions that the Director of Liquor Licensing, Barry Sargeant, is assessing for the area—the section 64?

Mr Gaffney: I would defer to the shire president.

Mr Mills: As far as the proposed restrictions, I guess the general consensus is that we do not oppose the principle, but we would oppose some of the suggestions if they are left as they are. For argument's sake, in relationship to tourism we have the Hoochery Distillery—their business is tourism—and they open seven days a week. A restriction would mean that they, and other businesses around here, could not sell alcohol on a Sunday. That would have a huge effect on their business, because there is no point in them opening for that time.

The CHAIRMAN: I went by one place that opens at 10 o'clock.

Mr Mills: It is the northernmost legal distillery in Western Australia. Restrictions will have some effect, so I think that the proposed restrictions probably need to be thought out a little bit more than has been presented to us for discussion.

The CHAIRMAN: But you support the principle of the restrictions; you, basically, just want to finetune them.

Mr Mills: We just do not think they go far enough. As a council, we do not think they go far enough as far as back-up. It is a bandaid over alcohol sales without the support. As Gary alluded to just a while ago, the support needed is alcohol rehabilitation. We have a rehabilitation centre out at

Wyndham that now has a 12-months waitlist to get into the place, and it has just expanded dramatically.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a rehab centre here in town?

Mr Gaffney: We have a dry-out centre; we do not have a rehab.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the dry-out centre the sobering-up centre that you mentioned before?

Mr Gaffney: Yes, but the dry-out centre at Wyndham is where people can go in for a length of time and get treatment and actually get somewhere. The sobering-up centre, basically—this is the interesting part—picks them up, they put them in there, give them a shower, wash their clothes, give them food, and the next morning they are back out on the street.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Ready to go again.

Mr Gaffney: All we are doing is circulating the problem. Whoever gets in actually gets a shower, gets their clothes washed, gets a meal, and gets back out on the street. We can do that for drunks. If we are having problems with domestic violence, we have safe havens for that, but we have nothing for our kids because we are not allowed to—I think that is a gap. But the other gap I think that we are really seeing is the long-term fix. One of the things we have talked about is that maybe we need to have Oombulgurri set up as a proper long-term rehabilitation centre for families. Generally it is mum and dad who both have the problem, and the kids are not going to school. If you look at absenteeism in this place, it is huge. If you could send people out there for six months, where it is fully set up —

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think that is needed just in one of the communities, because you mentioned several communities that are attached to Kununurra.

Mr Gaffney: I think that is one, and the other thing is that we should set up a completely new community for alcohol rehabilitation, and to try to help get people set up for work and get their kids reintegrated back into the education system. If we have a 20 per cent success rate, it is better than what we have right at this point in time.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that something the shire wants to do, or are you supporting a non-government agency?

Mr Gaffney: We are supporting a government agency. I think we are supporting anything that would help our community come to terms with this problem.

[8.45 am]

Mr Mills: We suggested Oombi because there are some issues with Oombi now that it has been declared dry. At the moment, the people at Oombi are the people who wanted it to be dry, so there is about 40 people now in a community that could carry about 400 people. Wyndham and Kununurra now have the balance of the people that were living in Oombi.

The community was set up with government services. It had a police station. It now has an ex-policeman as the administrator. It is hard to get to—you get there by barge or by almost impassable road or by aircraft. For people who need isolation, there is a facility that could be readily utilised without having to build a new one. That was our thought for that.

Mr Gaffney: I suppose the other thing there is that it could then be court directed.

The CHAIRMAN: It could be what?

Mr Gaffney: It could be a court directive whereby, instead of these people being continually drunk and disorderly and on waiting lists, you put them into a program. If they really want to sober up and if they really want to get their family working together, you can send them to a place where there is help, where there is training and where there is reintegration. You can set up something instead of the, I suppose, bitzer programs that we have; we can sober somebody up, but we cannot get their

kid back to school. We can provide some on-the-job training. I think they are some of the problems that we have here. We have all these young guys who have a real opportunity. We are starting to see some of them get into a work ethos and some really great things like Want to Work and the Ord stage 2 and Argyle. Everybody is trying their hardest. But these kids come home after their job, and they have to put up with a party going on all night. People say, “Why are you going to work, mate? It is easier to sit back here. You get paid to sit down.”

Mr Mills: I will give you an example. When I worked at Argyle, I had a number of Indigenous trainees who had been earmarked by Argyle. I was in the underground project. Two young lads came to work for me, or under me. They were 18-year-olds. Both, in my opinion, certainly had the brains and the ability to become either mine managers or at least foremen. One of them still works out there. They went from earning \$14 000 a year to \$80 000 a year—both of them. One still works out there; the other one is back in town. The difference being, the one who still works there and who has worked his way up almost to shift boss stage—and this is in about four years—has the support of his family, but the other fellow, every time he came home, he had the money and they would say, “Hey, give us some money, bro; you got the money.” Their culture is almost one of what is mine, is yours. I saw him in town and he said, “Fred, I can get the dole and have more money in my pocket at the end of my pay week, than I can working at the mine earning \$85 000.” He said when he was at home, he was being humbugged all the time and pressured by the family and the extended family. He said it was not worth it. He said he could not do it. That was the difference for those two.

You asked about the cost. I have some things here that I would like to touch on. The cost to the town involved in litter, glass, reticulation, graffiti and the stench of urine around the town—and the kids at risk as an offshoot to that—around the business district, over the past couple of years, there has been an increase in smashed windows—down at the main shopping centre, it was almost a weekly occurrence; and break-ins, shoplifting, graffiti—again—and the stench of urine and faeces on the footpath. We had our markets here on Saturday. I went into the toilet at one stage and there was a bloke passed out on the floor, lying inside with his green can unopened in his hip pocket. He was sleeping it off on the floor in the urinal. And there is the cost of humbugging. As I said earlier, the tourists who come to town are asked, “You got a dollar, mate? You got \$2? You got \$5?” and so on. Those are the costs that we see every day and that have increased over the past couple of years.

As we have said, for basic services, the police are the only 24/7 service, really. In a recent incident, a couple was picked up for drink driving and the police found a baby in the car.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Yes, the coppers told us about that last night.

Mr Mills: They told you; so you know about that one.

The CHAIRMAN: If you would like to tell us about it, we will put it on the record.

Mr Mills: They found a baby in the back of the car. They contacted a support agency. Because it was after nine o'clock, the support agency said, “No; we are not coming out. Are you sure they're drunk?” The copper said, “I have been 28 years in the business and I am pretty sure they're drunk, but I will breath test them.” He had to breath test them before they would come. But then they would not come to pick the baby up, the police had to take the baby around to the agency. Now that is not an uncommon occurrence here. Government agencies here—so-called support agencies—knock off at four o'clock. After four o'clock you struggle to get help. I understand that there has been money just put into the budget for one of the support agencies. I understand that agency is going to move into a new office. I understand that the guy driving it—he is based in Broome now—is committed to improving that service. But I guess up till now the backup support has been lacking. I am a fairly busy practising JP. I have been fairly busy over there. I have had children in court before me—I have to say that we have a new magistrate now; I think there were some issues with our previous magistrate—who had been bailed out to, for example, an 80-year-old grandfather and the kid would be before me in court on Saturday, 24 hours later. The coppers had found the kid, two

hours after he had been bailed out, breaching his bail. When they went around to his home, there was no-one there. When they caught up with the grandfather, he said, “I didn’t know that I had to stay there. I didn’t know that I had to watch him.” So the kid was bailed out and was back in court before me on a Saturday to stay there until Monday when he went before the magistrate again. The kids are in there on their own. There is no Department for Child Protection, there is no youth services. The kids front up to court with no-one because it is outside agency hours. There are those issues and other issues with the children. I do not understand it and I have not been able to get an answer. My understanding is that the law says children should be at school between certain hours. I do not understand how the school can suspend kids and kick them off the school grounds during school hours. We see youngsters down the shopping centre and ask them what they are doing. They tell us they have been kicked out of school. We ask them why and they tell us it is for doing what they are doing now—messing around. They know the rules. They know. I just do not understand how we can have 30 or 40 kids running around this town during the day on a school day because they have messed up at school. Perhaps —

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Some of the places have just had—I know one has been put in at Geraldton—a special behavioural management unit put in at the school. If you do not have one of those, that is certainly something that should be on your list.

Mr Mills: I do not know whether we have; we have a timeout room.

Mr Gaffney: I do not think that we have; we have a Clontarf —

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: No; this is another unit; two have been put in this year—one, I think, in Kalgoorlie and one in Geraldton. I wanted to ask you a question that is related but perhaps unrelated, I suppose, about the nature of local government. Because you are so far away from Perth, I have no doubt that that causes you problems with the bureaucracy—the further away you are, the harder it is to impact it. In your longer term thinking for the shire, would you see yourselves becoming more involved in these areas? Not that you would expect the income to come with it, but having it more locally run, than having it run out of Perth or run out of Broome. Is that something that you would like to see?

Mr Gaffney: I have been talking to council about—I am pretty new; I have only been here six months—starting to look at a thing called the East Kimberley 25 000 people and what that may look like. I am just trying to get some money out of government to create that. It will look at the community tipping points and ask, for example, when we get to X-amount of population, what do we really need and what are the services that we may need to move forward? One of the other things that I have been working on is the collocation of government services. At the moment, we have about 22 different government departments and government bodies in this municipality, located in 17 different locations. So we have the court and the police, but then if you want to get child protection involved, that department is in another street. If you want to get Indigenous affairs, DIA, involved, it is in another area. My concept was to bring everything into one governance area, for example, in the justice precinct. The justice precinct could be set up and across the road we could have state government bodies, NGOs and a whole range of other bodies. So if we have a problem in the court—for example, a child protection problem—we can walk straight across the road to almost be triaged and seen. And then we have local government bodies and at some stage we could hopefully bring in our corporations, our NGs and Gelganyems and that under the same roof. To me, that is a lot of dollars, and it is not an easy fix. But because we are so far away, I think we have to be smart and get joined-up government services. The reason I see this model working is that has worked in other areas in Australia, but we have collocated a lot of our youth providers into our youth hub. So you have Wunan, you have the shire services, you have got Save the Children, you have got DCP, and now you are getting DIA. So we are getting people collocating. So they are starting to say, “Blinky has been a bit of a problem. Did you know that we are looking after him here?” Nobody knew, so they could actually start managing the problem across agencies; not

individual silos trying to manage some of the problems. To me, it might take a few years to get it working, but I think that in the long run you get a better proposition. We are already seeing work through that, with, say, the Wunan connections program, which is reconnecting young girls back in, trying to get them back into education, and these kids are 11, 12 and 13. We are seeing the kids come down three nights a week to the lounge and to the chilling space. We see the same mob moving from the lounge to the chilling space and then onto the streets because they do not want to go home. But what we are finding is that if we start feeding them, looking after them and giving them some focal points to go to, we do not see those kids are not starting to create the problems that they used to. I have now been talking to the police. We are trying to get some police, without all their badges and fruit on, going down there as people, because we are finding that that there was a real disconnect between the young people and police, because the police were always chasing young people. So how do we get that reconnection? I would say that 95 per cent of our youth connections program is Indigenous. There is not a lot of integration from the other side with our kids. We are seeing that, and we are also seeing that the connection programs—slowly. They are absolutely minute baby steps, but as Fred says, when he gets a kid in court on a Saturday morning, where is the backup for that kid? We have not even got it. If we had a multipurpose one-set organisation, they could bring them across the road or the name get said around a table. It will work. I know that the police have been doing work. They picked the six hard-core problem children in town and did a lot of work on those. Only one of those six reoffended; because they brought all the agencies in to manage the family, to manage the kid and put it together. I think that if we can do it on that smaller level, some big investment in a multi-agency is probably important.

The CHAIRMAN: As a lot of the problems are related to alcohol, how many ministers and bureaucrats would you have had up here in the past year to discuss the alcohol problems with? Can you name anyone?

Mr Gaffney: I think almost every minister and every politician —
[9.00 am]

Mr Mills: We have spoken to everyone who has come here about the issues we have—Kim Hames; the Minister for Housing, who at the time was Troy Buswell; the Premier; the mental health and water minister, Graham Jacobs; the Minister for Education, and Tourism, Liz Constable; the Minister for Regional Development—so whenever we have the opportunity, we do talk about those issues.

The CHAIRMAN: Then you discuss the problems in relation to alcohol in the area.

Mr Mills: Yes, but I think it is always easy to do that because it is in their face; every time they come here there are things that relate to it so the discussion is easy to have. We have seen some steps. You asked about local government involvement, one of the things that we spoke about was in relationship to housing and the housing problems that we have, which, again, are affected by alcohol and so on. We proposed an East Kimberley housing trust or a housing board to take over the function of state housing up here. It was supported quite strongly by the Minister for Housing at the time and strongly supported by Kim Hames and by Brendon Grylls. We had a forum where we had all stakeholders come along and we were told quite strongly by one of the bureaucrats from the Department of Housing that it would not work and there is a whole heap of reasons why it would not work because they needed the business and we did not; we wanted to have a joint board with FaHCSIA, state housing, the Aboriginal Health Council and so on. She said, “And you wouldn’t get the support of the ministers anyway.” I said, “Well, I happen to have a letter here.” We did not hear any more from her from that day; they were going to go away and work on it. Up till now we have heard nothing back. We just felt because we have vacant land out here that the Department of Housing was in control of, if we knock the houses down we still have 21 blocks in this town, which —

The CHAIRMAN: Could we have a copy of that letter?

Mr Mills: Sure, but I will have to send it to you.

The CHAIRMAN: We are happy to take that by way of supplementary information with your transcript because that might be something that the committee could follow up on.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: That to me sounds like a fantastic idea.

Mr Mills: It was not something that we wanted to take over ourselves; we wanted a joint agency, but with people who knew the business here and knew the problems here. So, I will do that.

Mr Gaffney: What we find with that tenancy-type stuff is that when we get a good housing officer they will last about four months.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: What is your waiting list here?

Mr Gaffney: I could not tell you off the top of my head.

Mr Mills: My understanding is that if we had 300 homes now we would fill them all. I understand the waiting list is greater than that but that is what I was told in recent times.

Mr Gaffney: The other issue that we are having with local government is the delivery of municipal services. That is a large issue—the delivery of municipal services. We have had the federal and state government join up to the Bridging the Gap program but they sort of forgot local government. Now they have remembered local government is the one that they want to deliver those municipal services and we are going through an engagement process at this point in time. We are saying, “That’s fine, we would sign up to it but we need to do a whole lot of work finding out what we need to do and what sort of service communities want; whether they would be on the edge of town, out of town or right out of town.” We want to do some good work on that and we believe that we could probably deliver those services at far less cost than the state and federal government would be able to do that. But what we are saying is, “Let’s get rid of some of the bureaucracy that comes out of Canberra and comes out of Perth, if you want us to manage this.” Because it is no good saying these are the dollars that we put into it because, after all, those are the dollars the administrative costs are taken out of. If you asked what is the real cost of delivering services to remote Indigenous communities, you have to take out the bureaucratic cost and that, not just the cost that they are putting on the ground because that is the end of the dollar. Let us be realistic: it costs \$10 000 for a senior bureaucrat from Canberra to visit our community here. That is a real cost. For us on the ground, for me, to deliver that service may cost \$100 because I am here and the other \$9 900 would actually go into the service. I suppose that is what we are saying: let us be realistic; let us not say that the last bit dollars on the bottom that actually gets put into the service is what they want us to deliver at. Let us look at the whole cost of delivery of this service.

Mr Mills: I can see you are going to ask a question but before you do, I just say that I suspect that with these hearings you will hear what we need—what is needed. I just wanted to touch on one thing, if I could. One of the things that was highlighted to me was the need for health workers or mental health workers. We have one mental health worker who, I understand, services the Kimberley. There are auxiliary health workers but the majority of them are women. The discussion between a male, who has a problem, and a female of even the same skin colour is pretty hard to happen, so one of the things that they need in the Kimberley is more male health workers or mental health workers. I do not know how we could achieve that but, certainly, there are a lot of guys who will not front up to a woman and talk about their problems, whether it be alcohol or he is a victim of assault or anything across the board, to address some of the issues. I do not know what the answer is but it is something that we do need. I think that we also need more assistance for the one health worker who has to cover such a vast area.

The CHAIRMAN: We obviously are very interested and you might like to, by way of the supplementary information you are giving us, describe what the needs are because, unfortunately, with such a tight day we cannot go through each of them. I was going to ask you about your relationship with the shire across the border in the Northern Territory in terms of alcohol and drugs,

and then maybe in your response to that question, because I can only give you two minutes each, could you also sum up this area? Realise that we will send the transcript to you and that there are things that we have not covered, so you can give us more information by way of that supplementary submission. Shall I go with you, Gary, first about the relationship with the shire and then a summary?

Mr Gaffney: We probably have not got what we would term a formal relationship. We have occasional chats across the border into the Northern Territory and it is probably an area that we really need to spend a bit of time on. Up until now I think it has just been that they are on the other side of the border.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Local government in the Territory does not have anywhere near as much power, does it, as you do?

Mr Gaffney: It has been reformed and I think that they are still going through a really large reform process. The shire is based in Katherine, so it is 500 kilometres away.

Mr Mills: It did encompass 12 councils when they made it greater when they had the reformations; it is the Victoria Daly council now.

Mr Gaffney: So I suppose that relationship has not been strong, but can I say that the Kimberley Zone of Councils is a very strong group and we have been working together in a real collaborative arrangement on a whole range of issues, including that of Indigenous service delivery municipal services.

Just summing up, I think that it is our community and we are part of the solution. We see the problem: we need to be powerful on how we deliver a solution. I do not think the solution is a one-minute fix; I think it is a decade of moving towards how we fix our longer term problem. The longer term problem has been brought about by easy money, I suppose; the whole sit-down money phenomenon is now ingrained into generational thinking. It is not just a one-off thing. We have got two, now going probably into three, generations of people now coming onto benefits, so we have not weaned, or learnt how to wean, people off benefits and back into meaningful employment. So I think that giving people something to do is a really important thing about this, also the whole alcohol control thing. Once you see people control that, you see amazing results. I have Indigenous employees at Wyndham, one has 25 and one has over 30 years working for the shire, and both of those guys are reformed. I think that we need to spend more time on getting the community role models as the examples, getting them working back into the community. I think that, again, is that generational change. We need those people walking round the mobs during the day as workers, so I think that instead of investing \$1 million or \$2 million we need to invest \$10 or \$15 million into a decade-long program of bringing more community mentors in who can say, "Hey mate, you've got a problem. Hey sister, you need to come down and talk." So walking around showing people how their lifestyle can be a hell of a lot better. I think while we are doing that, we would also need to do some more work up here identifying the problems within the non-Indigenous community because there is a big drinking culture amongst a lot of people up here; not only do we have to do work in our Indigenous culture—and that is probably the confronting and the larger part of what we have—but we still have an undertone there that we need to have a look at as well on that culture.

So I think that we need all levels of government and agencies working together and that is why I am keen on promoting a joined-up government facility here spending real dollars. I know that the Premier has given us a little bit of a tick and the Minister for Lands; Regional Development is very keen on this process. Probably my problem has been that the department of justice has money to build a court and they want to go for it come hell or high water without taking a step back and asking, "How do we get everybody on a co-located site?" I know you need a justice precinct that is separated, but I think that if we do it properly and do it right, we will go into the next five decades with something that will work up in the north because we are a long way—we are closer to Singapore than we are to Perth.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Fred, your 60 seconds.

Mr Mills: My two minutes! I think the thing that concerns me greatly is the children. I drive a school bus and every day I see the benefit of supporting families. I mentioned to one parent one day, “You’ve got two really nice kids.” He said, “They’d want to be; I give them a kick up the—if they weren’t!” But generally those kids have got good support. We see out here every night 30 or so children; it is safer for them out on the street. They get up to mischief because, again, we do have support with night-time basketball and so on and they go to that but there are still those who choose not to and they wander the streets in mobs. I think it is all a product of the alcohol issues and the overcrowding. They are the things that need to be addressed. I am not convinced that restricting the alcohol is going to solve the problem. We had a guy here who was a prolific letter writer to *The Echo* always spouting about his religion until he was busted grog-running—it was \$100 a bottle. So there is always a way, there is always someone with the cards that Gary mentioned earlier. All the retailers in town observed the ban but there was an itinerant who thought, “Jesus, this is a good thing—\$20 a pack.” He got in 2 000 packs or whatever it was, so there is always someone. The bandaid of the alcohol restrictions, sure, will have some effect. If we went back to casks where they could get a litre more than they are able to get now, but they get a litre of alcohol versus a glass bottle of spirits that is double the alcohol strength, we would cut down on that problem and we would cut down on those injuries. We just need to look at the housing, I believe, to split families up so that they are not overcrowded. There just needs to be more backup support out of hours. We need to have, as I mentioned earlier, rehab centres that are within proximity that can be used. I think if we address the alcohol problem and the housing overcrowding, it will move a long way to the children, but we also have to look at what we can do with those kids who are out on the street during the day who are put there at the direction of a government agency—the education department. I will send more to you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you both for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 28 days from the date of the letter attached to it. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. However, should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee’s consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence.

Finally, thank you very much for allowing us to use your facilities today for the hearing. It is very nice here and I am sure that it will be a very good day.

Mr Mills: Thanks very much. When I was elected to council, just three years ago, I had three projects: one was new council facilities because these guys are working under—I do not know how they do it, if you see the rabbit warren out the back; to upgrade the airport; and to upgrade of that lake down there. The lake used to be pristine water about eight years ago, but the cumbungi weed and so on has taken over. It looks like we are on the way with this, the airport terminal has started, as you probably saw when you flew in, and I had some good news about the lake so we might get movement on that.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: You will have to think of something else to do!

Mr Mills: Properly retire! Thanks a lot.

Hearing concluded at 9.17 am