

**PAPER ON LOCAL CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEES**  
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## **1 Legislative and policy context**

There are more than 90 State and Commonwealth Acts which either place obligations or duties on councils, or give responsibilities or powers to councils. The Department of Local Government, as part of its charter to provide and manage a policy and legislative framework for a responsible system of local government on behalf of the State, administers the Local Government Act 1993. The Department assists councils in meeting legislative and policy requirements by providing advice through such means as Practice Notes, Circulars and articles in *Perspectives in Local Government*, the Department's quarterly newsletter. These are distributed to all councils throughout NSW.

The Local Government Act sets out a council's charter which is a set of principles that are to guide a council in the carrying out of its functions (section 8). The principles most relevant to crime prevention are:

- *to provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively*
- *to bear in mind that it is the custodian and trustee of public assets and to effectively account for and manage the assets for which it is responsible*
- *to facilitate the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and coordination of local government*

Local councils have considerable autonomy in regard to their activities, including what services and facilities they provide and how these services and facilities are provided. Councils are governed by a body of elected councillors whose responsibilities include determining policy, making decisions on project priorities and allocating resources. The General Manager and her/his staff are responsible for implementing the decisions of the councillors. The extent to which councils are involved in activities relevant to crime prevention, then, is determined by the councillors.

## **2 Findings from Police Service evaluations of committees**

There have been at least two evaluations undertaken by the Police Service of community consultative or community safety committees.

## **2.1 Findings from the 1993 evaluation of community consultative committees**

As reported in an Ethnic Affairs Commission (1994) report on the relationship between police and ethnic communities, based on an Inquiry into events which took place at the Arabic Day Carnival in October 1993, this evaluation found that two basic principles underlay the effectiveness of committees - the commitment of the patrol commander and a focus on action or results. Factors contributing to the success of committees included the following:

- they were task oriented
- they focused on local issues and solutions
- their areas of responsibility were clear
- there was mutual trust and respect amongst members

The Inquiry into the Arabic Day Carnival received a number of comments concerning community consultative committees which resulted in the following recommendations:

- members of committees be residents of the area in which they operate. Membership was often considered to be dominated by business people
- representation on committees reflects the demographic composition of the local area
- at least two representatives on each committee be young people or youth advocates
- committees be independently chaired. It was not considered appropriate for Police to chair committees
- patrol commanders consult committees to assist in the determination of the operational Police priorities for the local area and that this be included as a performance indicator for local patrol commanders. It was considered that there was a need for committees to be structured to permit and encourage their participation in policies and priorities at the local level and have input into the state level

Other comments which did not result in recommendations included the following:

- committees are not accessible to the average person in the local area
- people don't know what the committees do or how to approach them

The report includes the suggestion that a suitable model for community consultative committees is contained in the Department of School Education's *School Council Guidelines*.

## **2.2 Findings from the evaluation of the NSW Police Service trial community safety and crime prevention program**

This evaluation identified a number of issues and problems in relation to local crime prevention committees, including:

- many local councils already have community-based committees, such as community consultative and liquor consultative committees, which were utilised in the trial to address crime prevention. Where such committees exist, councils may be reluctant to establish another committee specifically concerned with crime prevention
- lack of familiarity among council staff and community members with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and community safety principles
- difficulties experienced in maintaining the interest and the commitment of committee members, perhaps due not only to lack of familiarity with CPTED and community safety principles but also to the relatively long timeframe required to effect real change in the environment
- lack of resources was identified as perhaps the greatest obstacle to local councils and community groups in not only establishing committees but also to ensuring their continued operation through the capacity to implement crime prevention strategies

## **3 Other research concerning local crime prevention committees**

Other research concerning local crime prevention committees has examined their membership and purpose.

### **3.1 Membership**

Chan (1994) cites British research which has found that committee members are usually over 30 years of age, are "respectable" members of the community and are actively involved in community affairs. Chan (1994) also cites a report by the Youth Justice Coalition which found that the membership of committees was largely representative of other bodies, including neighbourhood watch committees, local business interests, adult community groups, and churches.

Both Chan (1994) and the Youth Justice Coalition report focus on the lack of representation on committees from young people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Chan (1994) argues that young people are unlikely to participate in community safety committees because their purpose

is perceived as legitimising law enforcement activities directed at young people. The Youth Justice Coalition report states,

*Young people are more likely to be seen as the problem or the subject of the committee's attention, rather than as an appropriate constituent of it. (cited in Chan, 1994:186)*

As part of the survey of local councils carried out to assist in the preparation of this paper (see below), staff from Fairfield Council, which used to have a community safety committee, reported that it was difficult getting community representation on the committee, particularly people from non-English speaking backgrounds. However, a local immigrant/refugee women's network has since developed a strategic plan on community safety.

Chan (1994) argues that there needs to be a broader representation of the local population on committees to ensure that those groups who are marginalised from decision making processes are included, and that there may be a need to establish ethno-specific committees so that people of different language backgrounds feel free to attend.

Membership of committees has also been found to be related to perceptions about their purpose. Chan (1994) cites British research which found that some groups in the community do not participate in committees because they are perceived as public relations exercises rather than having any real power.

### **3.2 Purpose**

Chan (1994) discusses the British situation where it was intended that committees would be involved in the planning of police operational strategies. However, operational policy is rarely discussed at committee meetings because most committee members prefer to leave operational matters to the police, and because of the sensitivity of this area when police discretion is exercised. This is given as the reason for committees being perceived by some groups in the community as merely public relations exercises.

Chan (1994) cites an Australian report by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council which found "a great deal of scepticism on behalf of all involved that any concrete changes would be made" as a result of these committees. She also cites the report by the Youth Justice Council which states that procedures need to be established for committees so that representatives have more influence in the determination and review of police operational policy to ensure that it suits local needs and the needs of different groups within the locality. McNamara (1992) argues that for committees to provide an effective form of community involvement, they would need to have a role in the formulation of policing strategies, as well as identifying crime prevention concerns.

A guide for local government on creating safer communities prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria (1993) states that councils may need to develop permanent participatory structures, such as committees, involving

residents, workers and business in decision making. This is so that the community knows that there are procedures for identifying and resolving problems, and is aware of its responsibilities (as individuals or in association with others) within those procedures.

#### **4 Findings from a survey of local crime prevention committees**

Nine local councils which have established committees which address crime-related issues were surveyed in late 1996 and early 1997 about the operation and perceived effectiveness of these committees to assist in the preparation of this paper. The councils were:

- Liverpool
- Newcastle
- Tamworth
- Wyong
- Armidale
- Blacktown
- Sutherland
- Casino
- Penrith

Some other councils were also contacted. However, they were not included in the survey for the following reasons:

- the committee had ceased operating (Fairfield)
- a committee is yet to be established although it is likely that this will happen at some stage (South Sydney currently has a Street Violence Prevention Steering Committee which is overseeing the preparation of Development Control Plans for particular areas in the local government area)
- the council has not established a committee but is involved in other committees (Woollahra and Baulkham Hills participate in Police Community Consultative Committees. Woollahra has also established a Youth Issues Forum which includes Police representation)

The committees surveyed did not include any of those which were included in the evaluation of the NSW Police Service trial community safety and crime prevention program. Detailed findings from the survey are presented at Appendix 1.

#### **4.1 Summary of findings concerning the operation of committees**

The main findings from the survey concerning the operation of committees were:

- the most common type of committee was community safety committee, which along with crime prevention, also address accident and hazard reduction e.g. pedestrian safety
- most committees have been operating less than 18 months
- the number of committee members ranges from 5 to 30 members, with most committees having between 10 and 20 members
- a range of organisations and individuals are usually represented on committees, including elected councillors and/or council staff; NSW Government agencies (most commonly Police, Health, State Rail Authority, Community Services, School Education and Housing); non-government organisations (e.g. those working with young people, older people, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, women); local business; and community members
- apart from community members, committee members were usually identified and invited by the council. Community member positions were more likely to be publicly advertised and then selected by the council
- committees usually cover the local government area
- most committees meet monthly
- all committees have a formal reporting relationship to council either directly to the full council or indirectly through council committees comprising some councillors. Committees do not have any delegated authority, they can only make recommendations to the council. Council staff provide administrative support to all committees
- very few committees have a budget allocation, and for those that did the amount allocated is relatively low (ranging from \$200 to \$20,000 for a financial year). This is not unexpected given that none of the committees have any delegated authority from council
- while the issues dealt with varies between committees, they usually deal with a number of issues relevant to crime prevention, including alcohol and other drugs, the needs of young people, and urban planning
- while the tasks carried out varies between committees, they are usually involved in a range of tasks. Their tasks may be categorised as research (e.g. safety audits, analysis of local crime statistics); policy and planning (e.g. developing policies and plans, reviewing development applications,

providing input into Development Control Plans); coordination; and information and education (e.g. holding public meetings, seminars and forums). Other tasks include seeking funding for implementing crime prevention strategies

#### **4.2 Summary of findings concerning perceptions about the effectiveness of committees**

The main findings from the survey concerning the perceived effectiveness of committees were:

- because of the relatively short period of time that most committees had been operating, it was often considered premature to comment on their effectiveness
- in some cases, it was reported that councils were satisfied with the committees because they were achieving their objectives and their activities were well-supported by the community in terms of participation and/or feedback
- some were considered not to be effective at this stage because they were still in the process of establishing their membership and clarifying their role, or because there was a lack of council staff resources to adequately support the committee
- a range of features were considered necessary for committees to be effective. These may be categorised as features relating to operation (e.g. clear objectives, task-oriented); features relating to membership (e.g. broad and active community representation, representation from all relevant areas of council activity); and features relating to resourcing and other support (e.g. allocation of sufficient council staff resources to support the committee, sufficient budget allocation for implementing initiatives)
- the features most commonly identified were that committees be allocated sufficient resources in terms of council staff providing support to committees and funding for initiatives; and that there be broad and active community representation on the committee

## References

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- Ethnic Affairs Commission (1994) *Police and Ethnic Communities*, Sydney.
- McNamara, L. (1992) "Retrieving the law and order issue from the Right: Alternative Strategies and Community Crime Prevention", *Law in Context*, 10(1), 91-122.
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## **DETAILED FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF LOCAL COUNCIL COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEES**

### **1 Introduction**

This report presents findings from a survey, conducted in late 1996, of community safety committees established by the following councils:

- Armidale (Community Alcohol Strategy Committee)
- Blacktown (currently known as the Community Safety Through Crime Minimisation Peak Committee)
- Casino (Community Safety Committee)
- Liverpool (Community Safety Committee)
- Newcastle (Public Safety Committee)
- Penrith (St Clair Erskine Park Community Safety Committee)
- Sutherland (Community Safety Working Party)
- Tamworth (Law and Order Working Group)
- Wyong (Community Safety Planning Sub-committee)

The survey included questions relating to the operation of committees and questions relating to the effectiveness of committees. Findings for these two aspects are presented separately.

### **2 Operation of committees**

#### **2.1 Name**

The names of committees suggest that there are three types of committees established by councils:

- committees with a broad community safety focus which includes crime prevention (6 committees)
- committees with a general crime prevention focus (terms “law and order” and “crime minimisation” are included in the names of 2 committees, although it is proposed to change the name of one of these committees to community safety committee)
- committees with a specific type of crime prevention focus (e.g. alcohol strategy committee)

#### **2.2 Period of operation**

Committees have been operating between 6 months and nearly 2.5 years.

Most have been operating 18 months or less:

- between 6 and 12 months (3 committees)
- about 18 months (4 committees)
- between 2 and 2.5 years (2 committees)

Those committees which have been operating for less than 12 months replaced similar committees which were disbanded as a result of the council elections towards the end of 1995.

### **2.3 Size of committees**

The number of committee members ranges from 5 to 30 members:

- <10 members - 2 committees
- 10-20 members - 5 committees (1 committee varies between 10-15 members)
- >20 members - 2 committees (1 committee varies between 20-30 members)

The committee which has the smallest number of members co-opts other people depending on the nature of the issues being dealt with. Some committees either invite other organisations to attend meetings from time to time, or run open meetings which means that anyone can attend. One committee intends increasing its membership from 18 to 23.

### **2.4 Composition of committees**

The tendency for committees to be relatively large means that a range of organisations and individuals are usually represented on them. Often, committee members include the following:

#### Elected councillors and/or council staff

- councillor(s), often including the Mayor, in some cases there is more than 1 councillor (ranging from 2 to 5 councillors), usually chairs the committee (7 committees)
- the council's General Manager or their nominee (4 committees)
- other council staff e.g. Director Community Services; Director Health and Environmental Services; Manager Building Maintenance; Health, Safety and Emergency Manager; the committee's administrative support officer (6 committees), in some cases there is more than 1 member of staff

#### NSW Government agencies

- Police Service, at least 1 representative and in several cases there is more than 1 representative (7 committees - the only committee which does not have police representation is the alcohol strategy committee)
- local and/or area health service (3 committees)

- State Rail Authority (3 committees)
- Department of Community Services (2 committees + 1 committee which intends including a representative)
- Department of School Education (3 committees, 1 committee also has a representative from the Catholic Education Office)
- Department of Housing (2 committees + 1 committee which intends including a representative)

#### Non-government organisations

- 1 or 2 representatives from non-government organisations, for example, family support services (e.g. Burnside), Migrant Resource Centre, Youth Service, Senior Citizens, Women's Resource Centre, neighbourhood centre, church (3 committees + 1 committee which intends including a representative)

#### Local business

- 1 or 2 representatives of local business e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Australian Hotels Association, publicans, night club operators, shopping centre (4 committees)

#### Community members

- ranges from 1 to 4 members (7 committees)
- usually represent particular groups in the community ie. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands people, young people, older people, families, precinct committees/audit areas
- 2 committees which do not have any community members; 1 has representatives from non-government organisations working with women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and older people; the other has a small core group and co-opts additional members

Other organisations/individuals represented on committees include the following:

- university (1 committee + 1 committee which intends including a representative)
- Roads and Traffic Authority (1 committee)
- private transport company (1 committee)
- electricity authority (1 committee)
- local State Member of Parliament (2 committees)
- General Practitioner (1 committee, acted as chair)
- NRMA (1 committee)

## **2.5 Selection process for committee members**

In all except one case, all or most committee members were identified and invited by the council.

Community member positions were more likely to be publicly advertised. Of the 4 committees which had community representatives, two committees publicly advertised all of the community member positions, and one committee publicly advertised one of the community member positions. In the case of the fourth committee, the community representative was nominated by the council.

The exceptional committee was established at a public meeting and all members were selected at this meeting.

## **2.6 Geographical area covered**

All except one of the committees cover the local government area (lga). However, two committees have a focus on the CBD or focus on particular areas at certain times. One committee initially covered the CBD but was later expanded to cover the lga. Another committee does not focus on a public housing area within the lga because it has its own neighbourhood advisory board.

The exceptional committee covers two suburbs within an lga.

## **2.7 Frequency of meetings**

Most of the committees meet monthly:

- monthly - 7 committees
- bi-monthly - 1 committee
- quarterly - 1 committee. This is currently being reviewed as this committee has completed the task it was initially given

## **2.8 Relationship to council**

All of the committees have a formal reporting relationship to council either directly to the full council or indirectly through council committees comprising some councillors. This means that the committees do not have any delegated authority, they can only make recommendations to the council. Only the full council or the relevant council committee can make decisions concerning the implementation of any recommendations.

Council staff provided administrative support to committees, including the preparation of agendas, the taking of minutes, distribution of material to members and the preparation of reports for the full council or relevant council committee.

## **2.9 Budget allocation**

Four of the nine committees had a budget allocation:

- one committee had a budget allocation of \$3,000 in 1996/97. This funding was used to hold a drug and alcohol forum
- one committee has been allocated \$20,000 for 1997/98 for the purpose of carrying out safety audits and minor projects. It did not have a budget allocation for 1996/97
- one committee has a budget allocation of \$200 per annum
- one committee has a budget allocation of \$1,000 (this was initially provided by the Police)

Another committee has applied for funding for a project worker through the Area Assistance Scheme. Another committee received a grant of \$5,000 from the Minister for Police.

## **2.10 Issues addressed**

As previously mentioned, because many of the committees included in the survey were known as public or community safety committees, they deal with a broader range of issues than just crime prevention. However, most of the issues dealt with by all of the committees are related to crime prevention. While the issues dealt with varies between committees, they usually deal with a number of issues, including:

- alcohol and other drugs
- the needs of young people
- the needs of older people
- provision of community services
- urban planning
- graffiti and other environment maintenance issues e.g. overgrown trees
- safety in relation to shopping areas/malls
- New Year's Eve celebrations
- use of public space

## **2.11 Tasks**

While the tasks carried out varies between committees, they usually carry out a range of tasks. Not surprisingly, those committees which had been operating for a longer period of time were more likely to have undertaken a greater number and variety of tasks. The tasks carried out by committees may be categorised as follows:

### Research

- organisation of and/or participation in safety audits
- analysis of local crime statistics

- the conduct of research into community concerns e.g. through phone-ins, local newspaper polls
- participating in the conduct of other research

#### Policy and planning

- developing community safety policies and/or strategic plans. These usually cover the whole local government area but can also cover specific geographic areas within the local government area e.g. CBD, or address specific issues e.g. alcohol
- providing advice and making recommendations to council on law and order, community safety and social issues
- making submissions to legislative reviews e.g. concerning liquor trading hours
- preparing crime prevention sections for inclusion in Development Control Plans
- reviewing development applications

#### Coordination

- facilitating communication between government, business and the community

#### Information and education

- holding public meetings, seminars and forums on particular issues e.g. drug and alcohol, young people, crime prevention through environmental design
- provision of information about council services to community groups
- local media campaigns e.g. “good news” stories, promoting community commitment

#### Other

- seeking funding for implementing crime prevention strategies

### **3 Perceived effectiveness of committees**

Because of the relatively short period of time that most committees had been operating, it was often considered premature to comment on their effectiveness. In some cases, it was reported that councils were satisfied with the committees because they were achieving their objectives and their activities were well-supported by the community in terms of participation and/or feedback. Some were considered not to be effective at this stage because they were still in the process of establishing their membership and clarifying their role, or because there was a lack of council staff resources to adequately support the committee.

#### **3.1 Features of effective committees**

A range of features were considered necessary for committees to be effective although the number of features identified by individual council staff varied considerably. The features mentioned often reflected the barriers which were identified as having to be overcome by the committees. The features of effective committees may be grouped as follows (the number in brackets indicates the number of times this feature was mentioned):

### Operation

- members who are only interested in particular issues are not allowed to dominate (2)
- good direction (1)
- not too broad-focused (1)
- clear objectives (1)
- task-oriented (1)
- delegated some powers so that some tasks e.g. submissions to legislative reviews can be completed quickly (1)

### Membership

- broad and active community representation (3)
- all relevant areas of council activity should be represented (2)
- consistency in membership (1)
- active local government participation (1)
- all groups affected should be represented (1)
- active participation by the local police (1)
- participation and support by the local State Member of Parliament (1)

### Resourcing and other support

- allocation of sufficient council staff resources to support committee (4)
- sufficient budget allocation for implementing initiatives (3)
- committee members have appropriate skills e.g. in relation to assessing development applications. This might entail the provision of training for members or the provision of guidelines (1)
- supported local community (1)
- supported by media (1)
- supported by councillors (1)

### Other

- more focused locality wise community safety committees to identify and resolve issues at local precinct size areas (1)

The features most commonly identified were that committees be allocated sufficient resources in terms of council staff providing support to committees and funding for initiatives; and that there be broad and active community representation on the committee.