

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Narrabri Shire Council

Date Received: 30 May 2024

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Contact Name:

Donna Ausling

Attention: Patrick Glynn
Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety
Parliament of New South Wales
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW 2000



By email: lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Thursday, 30 May 2024

Re: Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities – Narrabri Shire Council Submission

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the above. The corresponding terms of reference for the inquiry are acknowledged:

- (a) the drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW, particularly since the COVID pandemic;
- (b) how a whole of government approach can reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW;
- (c) the wraparound and diversionary services available for youth and families in the regions and rural areas and how they can be better matched to individuals, measured, improved and integrated into a coordinated approach to divert youth from crime, having regard to the NSW Government's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people;
- (d) staffing levels and workforce issues, including police staffing, in regional and rural areas and how services can be improved to reduce youth crime in these areas;
- (e) recidivism rates in regional and rural areas, and related impacts on the community, services and law enforcement;
- (f) the range of functions being performed by NSW police officers, including mental health assistance and youth welfare, on behalf of other agencies in regional and rural areas, and the supports required to assist police; and
- (g) any other related matter.

Local Context

Narrabri Shire is a [local government area](#) in the [North West Slopes](#) region of NSW. The primary settlement of Narrabri is located adjacent to the [Namoi River](#) and at the confluence of the [Newell](#) and [Kamilaroi Highways](#). The local government area (LGA) is strategically positioned halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, and is considered to be resource-rich. Key local industries include mining and agriculture. At the last census (2021) the resident population was 12,721 persons.

Narrabri Shire Council's vision is articulated in the Community Strategic Plan as follows:

"Narrabri Shire will be a strong and vibrant regional growth centre providing a quality living environment for the entire Shire community."

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The township of Narrabri is considered to be one of the most flood prone settlements in NSW. The community of Wee Waa, located west of Narrabri, is periodically completely isolated by flood waters for long periods (up to two weeks) and is protected by a ring levee. Narrabri Shire contains a number of vulnerable and at-risk communities that are flood-affected. These communities have a high Aboriginal population, low socio-economic base and are also ageing in nature.

Council currently actively supports a Crime Prevention Advisory Committee which assists Council in the delivery of its Crime Prevention Strategy, and aims to:

- (a) Monitor implementation of the Strategy and provide recommendations for any updates to the document.*
- (b) Provide advice and recommendations on Council policies, procedures and processes that impact on community safety and crime prevention.*
- (c) Assist in seeking funding for to aid the implementation of actions and projects identified in the Strategy.*
- (d) To assist Council in identifying opportunities to educate our community and raise awareness on community safety and crime prevention.*

Under its current terms of reference, the Crime Prevention Advisory Committee comprises the following:

- Two (2) Councillors as appointed by a resolution of Council;
- Two (2) Council Officers;
- One (1) individual from a local Law Enforcement Agency;
- One (1) individual from the Narrabri Shire Interagency Group;
- One (1) individual from the Department of Education within Narrabri Shire;
- One (1) individual from Narrabri Liquor Accord;
- One (1) individual representing Narrabri & District Chamber of Commerce, Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce, and Boggabri Business Chamber of Commerce;
- One (1) individual representing the Aboriginal community local to the Narrabri Shire;
- Two (2) community representatives; and
- One (1) individual representing the Narrabri Shire Youth Council.

A copy of the Committee terms of reference is enclosed as background.

(a) the drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW, particularly since the COVID pandemic

Council has recently reviewed its Crime Prevention Plan, the *Narrabri Shire Crime Prevention Plan (2024-2028)*, which is enclosed for the information of the Committee. This Plan is underpinned by extensive community engagement and has been developed in collaboration with the UNE Centre for Criminology. From this process, it is clear that crime, and community perceptions of crime, are inherently complex.

The relationship between social media and youth crime is becoming increasingly topical. It is noted that social media platforms are facing growing calls from the community to impose protections against the publication of content depicting criminal activities amid concerns of online material acting as an enabler of violent crimes amongst younger Australians. Furthermore, instating stronger crackdowns on youth recidivism has been a subject to increased public debate in recent times as rural and regional areas have been subject to a scourge of youth-committed offences. In this regard, Council considers that addressing youth crime should be conducted through a proactive lens, commencing with media actively working to contain the circulation of material glamorising criminality.

(b) how a whole of government approach can reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW.

Council is of the view that a whole of government approach is both appropriate and necessary. The Committee's attention is drawn to a recent Council motion made to the 2023 LGNSW Annual Conference, which is reproduced below for the Committee's information:

Crime Prevention and Community Safety:

LGNSW calls on the NSW Government to urgently establish a Rural Youth Justice Taskforce to proactively address escalating youth crime in rural and regional areas by utilising a whole of community and cross-organisational approach.

Narrabri Shire, like many remote rural and regional areas, is experiencing increasing rates of juvenile crime. There is real concern that the age of legal responsibility ('Doli incapax') will be increased without appropriate analysis and supporting measures to our communities to manage youth crime and justice issues, including but not limited to, appropriate diversion programs. A Youth Justice Taskforce, similar in nature to that introduced in Queensland, is urgently requested to enable a whole of community and government approach to this issue.

As additional context, the corresponding 2023 LGNSW resolution to this effect is also reproduced below.

63 Kempsey Shire Council - Youth crime and drugs

That Local Government NSW lobbies the NSW Police Minister and Premier to form alliances with police, local councils, NSW Government agencies, community representatives and NGOs to holistically tackle the serious increase in youth crime and drug use in NSW communities.

This issue was also raised by Narrabri Shire Council.

The importance of crime prevention to our community has been recently reflected in a recently commissioned Micromex community satisfaction survey which identifies that community safety/crime prevention has one of the highest levels of importance and the lowest levels of satisfaction.

- (c) the wraparound and diversionary services available for youth and families in the regions and rural areas and how they can be better matched to individuals, measured, improved and integrated into a coordinated approach to divert youth from crime, having regard to the NSW Government's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people.**

Council is of the opinion that further support and emphasis needs to be placed on diversionary programs, including, but not limited to the PCYC model. In this regard, the importance of these activities to the community is reflected within Council's 2023/2024 Operational Plan:

Civic Leadership 4.2.2.4 Narrabri - Investigate and advocate for a PCYC that operates outreach services across the Shire.

Similarly, Council's Crime Prevention Plan contains the following actions with a diversionary and collaborative focus.

Action:

Consider developing a 'Coffee with Council and Cops' program of regular events.

Strategies:

- *Hold 6 to 12 events annually, alternating between the three main population centres of Narrabri, Wee Waa and Boggabri so that each location is evenly serviced by such outreach.*
- *Events attended by a police officer, Council officer and possibly a Councillor (ideally those associated with the Narrabri Shire Crime Prevention Committee).*
- *These events could be held for two hours on a Saturday (for example between 11am and 1pm) when people are likely to be active in the commercial areas of their local communities and pre-post Saturday sporting and other commitments.*
- *These events may also be used to disseminate crime prevention material.*
- *Source funding internally for refreshments to provide at each event.*

Action:

Support the Narrabri Shire Youth Council in addressing crime issues which impact youth.

Strategies:

- *Engage the Narrabri Shire Youth Council to develop strategies to address crime and crime related problems faced by young people in the Shire.*

Action:

Establish new and/or maintain existing relationships with key stakeholders.

in community crime prevention, including the NSW Police Force, community representatives, organisation, and groups.

Strategies:

- *Work collaboratively with government and local agencies to promote and support programs, including but not limited to domestic violence (e.g. NDCAS); harm minimisation and the reduction of alcohol and other drug related problems (e.g. Vinnies, Sober in the Country); farm crime (e.g. NSWPF Rural Crime Investigator) etc. For example, Develop and maintain an ongoing association and collaboration with the local member of the New South Wales Police Force Rural Crime Prevention Team (RCPT) (located in Gunnedah and Tamworth).*
- *Establish a hub and spoke model for sharing information pertinent to community safety that may not have been otherwise shared.*

- Collectively identify needs, goals or targets for community safety that are clear and measurable.
- Report to the Narrabri Crime Prevention Committee.
- Once the network has grown and the hub and spoke model established, consider developing a web-based referral service for early intervention (see SupportLink program).

Action:

Promote positive community engagement in matters of crime prevention through events focused not on crime but social cohesion.

Strategies:

- Organise and deliver social cohesion events to build local culture and community connection.
 - Example: Establish participation in 'Neighbour Day' across the Shire as a whole or individually in the three main population centres of the Shire.
 - Example: Support local block parties with small funding grants to encourage cohesion building and information sharing.
 - Example: At community events, include "gratitude boards" where residents can use post-it notes to answer the statement "what I love most about my community is...".
 - Example: Support the formation of a "Town Team" to improve a particular area or place within the Shire either through the establishment of a new group of people; an existing group/sub-group within the Shire; or formed via representation of existing community organisations (it is suggested that Wee Waa be the specific initial focus of a Town Team).
- Consider livability academies that create engaged citizens through skills development related to safety, social cohesion and relationship building.
- Provide encouragement and support for the delivery of alcohol and drugfree family/community events within Narrabri Shire.
- Embed crime prevention education and messaging into 'general' community events; while not the focus, use these events to communicate evidenced based information of crime and public safety in Narrabri Shire in a positive social environment.

Action:

Investigate starting a Police Citizen Youth Club (PCYC) in Narrabri Shire.

Strategies:

- Identify potential community sites for a PCYC to be located.
- Identify funding opportunities and apply for funding for the creation of a PCYC– a co-sponsorship of this between Council and a commercial enterprise/service club could be investigated; alternatively, government or philanthropic grants can be identified and applied for.
- Interim strategy: identify current infrastructure and create initial pilot of PCYC programming to determine level of interest and desired programming in the community.

Action:

Investigate funding and opportunity to join the BackTrack Tracker Network program to service Narrabri and surrounding areas.

Strategies:

- Identify interest in establishing a BackTrack program locally, including potential leaders (local champion) and volunteers and sources of funding.
- Contact the BackTrack organisation for details on funding and necessary requirements (e.g. resources).
- Create a business case and plan for support and implementation.

Council recognises the value and importance of the above actions, however additional support is urgently needed by way of funding to assist in the delivery of these collaborative approaches. Accordingly, Council would welcome the creation of additional grant funding opportunities to assist in delivery of the strategic actions contained within its Crime Prevention Plan. The embedding of state government funded Crime Prevention Officer(s) to assist in the delivery of the previously outlined programs and strategies is strongly recommended. Council would be pleased to participate in a corresponding pilot program.

(d) staffing levels and workforce issues, including police staffing, in regional and rural areas and how services can be improved to reduce youth crime in these areas.

Like local government, it is apparent that police staffing, and support is inadequate to address youth crime issues. As detailed in the preceding sections of this submission, additional resourcing is only part of the solution and a combined and coordinated approach is necessary to address the current challenges.

(e) recidivism rates in regional and rural areas, and related impacts on the community, services, and law enforcement

As part of the preparation of its Crime Prevention Plan, Council commissioned a detailed baseline report which details, inter alia, recidivism rates and community perceptions of crime and crime prevention. The contents of this report are confidential, however, Council would be pleased to provide a copy to the Committee separately if and as required, to inform its decision-making on the basis that confidentiality can be maintained.

(f) the range of functions being performed by NSW police officers, including mental health assistance and youth welfare, on behalf of other agencies in regional and rural areas, and the supports required to assist police?

Refer preceding commentary.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to this important matter.fo Should you require any additional information or clarification in this regard you are invited to contact Council's Director Planning and Sustainability, Ms Donna Ausling at (02) 6799 6866 or by emailing council@narrabri.nsw.gov.au.

Yours faithfully,



Rob Williams
General Manager

Encl. Narrabri Shire Council Crime Prevention Committee Terms of Reference

NARRABRI SHIRE COUNCIL CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Objective

The objective of the Crime Prevention Committee (the Committee) is to provide independent assurance and assistance to Narrabri Shire Council on matters relating to community safety and the implementation of Council's current Crime Prevention Strategy (the Strategy).

Introduction

The Committee is an Advisory Committee required to make recommendations to Council. The Committee does not have the delegated authority to commit Council or management to the implementation of its recommendations.

The key responsibilities of the Committee are:

- (a) Monitor implementation of the Strategy and provide recommendations for any updates to the document.
- (b) Provide advice and recommendations on Council policies, procedures and processes that impact on community safety and crime prevention.
- (c) Assist in seeking funding for to aid the implementation of actions and projects identified in the Strategy.
- (d) To assist Council in identifying opportunities to educate our community and raise awareness on community safety and crime prevention.

1. Composition and Tenure

- 1.1 Members shall be appointed by a resolution of Council and demonstrate an enthusiastic approach to working collaboratively, and to achieve Committee objectives on behalf of the whole community.
- 1.2 Membership Term:
 - (a) Members shall be appointed for a maximum term of four (4) years, expiring 31 December in the year of an Ordinary Council Election, unless specified otherwise by the Council Resolution for the initial appointment.
 - (b) Members may vacate their position on the Committee prior to the conclusion of the Membership Term, as per Clause 1.7.
- 1.3 Members (voting):
 - (a) Two (2) Councillors as appointed by a Resolution of Council;

- (b) Two (2) Council Officers being the Director of Planning and Sustainability (or their delegate) and the Manager Tourism and Cultural Services (or their delegate);
- (c) One (1) individual from a local Law Enforcement Agency;
- (d) One (1) individual from the Narrabri Shire Interagency Group;
- (e) One (1) individual from the Department of Education within Narrabri Shire;
- (f) One (1) individual from Narrabri Liquor Accord;
- (g) One (1) individual representing Narrabri & District Chamber of Commerce, Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce, and Boggabri Business Chamber of Commerce;
- (h) One (1) individual representing the Aboriginal community local to the Narrabri Shire;
- (i) Two (2) community representatives; and
- (j) One (1) individual representing the Narrabri Shire Youth Council.

1.4 Ex-Officio Members (voting):

- (a) The Mayor; and
- (b) The General Manager.

1.5 Chairperson:

- (a) The Chairperson of the Committee is to be a Councillor of Narrabri Shire Council.
- (b) The Chairperson's role is to provide leadership and develop a cohesive team ensuring the objectives of the Committee are achieved whilst operating in compliance with statutory requirements and Council policy.

1.6 Invites may be extended to the following persons (non-voting) for specific agenda items:

- (a) Guests invited to speak on a particular agenda item; or
- (b) Other Council Officers may attend meetings of the Committee as required.

1.7 Vacancies:

- (a) A Member of the Committee may vacate their membership by written resignation submitted to the Chair.
- (b) A Member of the Committee automatically vacates their membership to the Committee if the Member is absent from three (3) consecutive Committee Meetings without a written apology submitted to the Chair.
- (c) Clause 1.7(b) does not extend to person's who hold the Membership position as Council Officers as defined by Clause 1.3(a).

- (d) If a vacancy arises, nominations shall be called for through an Expressions of Interest (EOI) and tabled at the next available Ordinary Council Meeting.

2. Committee Member Responsibilities

2.1 Members of the Committee are expected to:

- (a) Make reasonable efforts to attend meetings of the Committee;
- (b) Understand the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements appropriate to Council;
- (c) Contribute the time needed to study and understand the business papers provided;
- (d) Apply good analytical skills, objectivity, and judgement, and
- (e) Express honest opinions, ask questions that go to the fundamental core of issues, and pursue independent lines of enquiry.

3. Operating Procedures

3.1 Quorum:

- (a) A quorum of the Committee shall be constituted by the majority of the current membership of the Committee (half plus one (1)) being present at the meeting and must include at least one (1) Councillor and one (1) Council Officer.
- (b) Ex-officio members are not including for the purposes of calculating a quorum.

3.2 Meetings and Agendas:

- (a) The Committee will meet on a quarterly basis, at the discretion of the Chairperson or Council's General Manager (or their delegate).
- (b) A meeting schedule including meeting dates and times will be developed and distributed to Committee members annually.
- (c) No meeting of the Committee shall be held unless five (5) days' notice has been given to all members.
- (d) Where practicable, the agenda together with reports, documents and a list of invitees will be prepared and distributed to all members at least five (5) days prior to the meeting.
- (e) Except as otherwise provided for herein the rules governing meetings and the procedures of the Committee shall, so far as they apply, be those covered by Council (Council's Code of Meeting Practice).
- (f) No items will be dealt with, without notice therefore agendas will not include an item for general business.

3.3 Attendance:

- (a) A Member of the Committee cannot participate in a Committee Meeting unless either:
 - (i) personally present at the meeting; or
 - (ii) permitted to attend the meeting by audio-visual link in accordance with Clause 3.3(b).
- (b) A Member of the Committee may attend and participate in a Committee Meeting by audio-visual link only with the approval of the Committee. However, the Committee is under no obligation to approve the request to attend a meeting by audio-visual link. If the Committee refuses a request to attend a meeting by audio-visual link, their link to the meeting is to be terminated.
- (c) A decision to approve a request by a Member of the Committee to attend a Committee Meeting by audio-visual link must be noted in the minutes.
- (d) A request by a Member of the Committee for approval to attend a Committee Meeting by audio-visual link must be made in writing to the Chairperson prior to the meeting in question.
- (e) A meeting of the Committee may be held by audio-visual link where the Chairperson determines that the meeting should be held by audiovisual link because of a natural disaster or a public health emergency. The Chairperson may only make a determination under this clause where they are satisfied that attendance at the meeting may put the health and safety of the Members at risk. The Chairperson must make a determination under this clause in consultation with Council's General Manager (or their delegate) and, as far as is practicable, with each Member.
- (f) Where the Chairperson determines under Clause 3.3(e) that a meeting is to be held by audio-visual link, a Council Officer must give written notice to all Members that the meeting is to be held by audio-visual link.
- (g) Where the Chairperson determines under Clause 3.3(e) that a meeting is to be held by audio-visual link, it is the individual Members' responsibility to take all reasonable steps to ensure they can participate in the meeting by audio-visual link.
- (h) This Terms of Reference applies to a meeting held by audio-visual link under Clause 3.3(e) in the same way it would if the meeting was held in person.

3.4 Recoding of Meetings

- (a) A person must not live stream or use an audio recorder, video camera, mobile phone or any other device to make a recording of the Committee Meeting without the prior authorisation of the Committee.
- (b) A decision to approve a request to record a Committee Meeting, as described in Clause 3.4(a) must be noted in the minutes.
- (c) If the Committee has approved for a Committee Meeting to be recorded, Council will comply with all Privacy Principles as prescribed under the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW) and all requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW).

3.5 Minutes:

- (a) Accurate minutes including attendance records will be kept of each meeting of the Committee.
- (b) The minutes of a meeting shall be submitted to Committee members for ratification at the next subsequent meeting of the Committee.
- (c) Council will provide a Minute Secretary for the purposes of recording the Minutes of the Committee meetings and for the distribution of Minutes following meetings of the Committee.
- (d) Formal minutes of the meeting are to be kept in accordance with the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW) and made available to Council.
- (e) Minutes of meetings are to be distributed within fourteen (14) days of the meeting.

3.6 Reports

- (a) The Director Planning and Sustainability (or their delegate) will be responsible for specialist reports and all correspondence associated with the Committee.
- (b) Recommendations of the Committee to Council will be by a majority of votes.
- (c) Any recommendations of the Committee that require a Council resolution will be reported to Council for consideration. Any recommendations of the Committee shall not be considered as resolutions of the Council, unless specifically adopted by Council Resolution.

3.7 Media

- (a) In accordance with Council's Media Policy, the spokesperson for the Committee is Council's General Manager.
- (b) Individual Committee members may not issue a media release on behalf of the Committee.
- (c) Individual Committee members are not to make public or media comment; if the media approaches a member of the Committee for comment, the member should refer them to Council Communication Section.

- 3.8 Unless specified otherwise in the Terms of Reference, all Committee Meetings are to be conducted in accordance with Council's adopted Code of Meeting Practice.

4. Code of Conduct

- 4.1 Councillors, Council Officers and Members of the Committee (Council officials) must comply with Council's Code of Conduct whilst carrying out functions as Council officials.
- 4.2 Exception for Members:
 - (a) Members of the Committee must declare any conflict of interests at the start of each meeting or before discussion of a relevant agenda item or topic. Details of any conflicts of interest should be appropriately minuted (including the type of interest: pecuniary, non-pecuniary but significant, or non-pecuniary and less than significant).
 - (b) Council acknowledges that this is an Advisory Committee and that Clause 1.3 acknowledges that members may from time to time have conflicts of interest in matters before the

Committee.

- (c) Members (excluding Councillors and Council staff) will be required to declare conflicts of interests as per Clause 4.2, but will not be required to excuse themselves from deliberations. This is to ensure that comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder consultation is undertaken through the Committee and reflects that the Committee is advisory in nature and not a decision-making entity of Council.

- 4.3 For the removal of any doubt, Councillors and Council staff must strictly adhere to the requirements of the Code of Conduct.

5. Review of Terms of Reference

- 5.1 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed as a minimum in the first twelve (12) months after an ordinary election of Council. Council must adopt any changes to the Terms of Reference.

6. Dictionary

Term	Definition
Committee	Narrabri Shire Council Crime Prevention Committee
Committee Meeting	A meeting scheduled and held in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the Narrabri Shire Council Crime Prevention Committee
Council	Narrabri Shire Council
Days	Calendar days, not business days
Members of the Committee	Those persons appointed to be a member of Narrabri Shire Council Crime Prevention Committee by a Resolution of Council

History

Minute Number	Meeting Date	Description of Change
	August 31, 2017	Approved
205 / 2017	September 26, 2017	Adopted
	March 12, 2020	Reviewed
081 / 2020	May 26, 2020	Adopted
082/2023	April 18, 2023	Adopted