

REPORT OF PUBLIC FORUM BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 3

REVIEW OF INQUIRY INTO CABRAMATTA POLICING

¾¾¾

At Cabramatta on Friday 24 May 2002

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The Committee met at 2.30 p.m.

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PRESENT

The Hon. Helen Sham-Ho (Chair)

The Hon. John Hatzistergos

The Hon. Greg Pearce

The Hon. Peter Primrose

Ms Lee Rhiannon

The Hon. Ian West

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CHAIR: I welcome each and every one of you to this afternoon's community consultation. Before I start, I acknowledge my two parliamentary colleagues, your local members Ms Reba Meagher and Ms Julia Irwin. In terms of the process of the consultation, I emphasise that this is not a formal Committee hearing. Those addressing the Committee will not be giving sworn evidence. It is a little less formal than the Committee hearing that was held this morning. That will ensure that everyone who wants to address the Committee is able to do so. At the same time, however, as this is not a formal hearing, I would caution those who speak not to say anything that could possibly be construed as defamatory. In other words, you do not have privilege.

I ask those who will address the Committee to begin by clearly stating your name and the name of an organisation that you may represent. In view of the number of people present, I ask that you limit your statement to five minutes. If you take longer I will gong you. You should feel free to tell the Committee your views. Committee members will ask you questions. I see some familiar faces and a fewer unfamiliar ones. We would like to hear from those who are here for the first time. I remind everyone that we are not reopening the inquiry, we are undertaking a review. The terms of reference are: What has changed with policing in the Cabramatta area since March 2001, including police and community relations? What changes are still required in relation to policing within the Cabramatta area? I believe my parliamentary colleague wants to speak first.

Ms Julia IRWIN: I am the Federal member for Fowler, which takes in Cabramatta and goes right out to Liverpool. I represent the community as a whole today. I have a written statement that I have decided I will read out for the record. Thank you very much for allowing me to make this brief statement to the Committee today. I will be very brief. While this inquiry is about policing in Cabramatta, I think we would all agree that you cannot separate the issue of policing in Cabramatta from the issue of illegal drug abuse in the area. Policing alone will not solve the problems of drug abuse in Cabramatta. I say from the start that we have a major drug problem here in Cabramatta, but that is not news to anyone here today. It seems that down in Canberra they do not think we have a problem here. This is the area I want to address.

How else could you explain the lack of funding for locally based programs to deal with drug addiction in Cabramatta? There are a number of those organisations here today. If I could give the Committee some figures that show how the problem in Cabramatta is ignored by the Federal Government. When you look at the Government's Tough on Drugs program, it has spent \$158 million over four years. Out of the \$158 million Cabramatta has received a total of \$153,736. That is less than 1 per cent of the amount spent. Here in the so-called drugs capital of Australia, all we got was 1 per cent of the money allocated to Tough on Drugs. You wonder why we still have a problem here in Cabramatta? If you look at the New South Wales funding allocation the picture gets worse. Out of \$17 million allocated to New South Wales in the non-government organisation treatment grants program not one project in this area was funded. In fact, not one project in the Fairfield or Liverpool local government area received any funding. Applications were made for more than \$2 million in funding for local treatment projects, but again not one project was funded.

We did get a very small amount of \$78,736 to provide recreational activities for 11- to 14-year-olds aimed at promoting a drug-free environment. That is a wonderful worthwhile project but it is a drop in the ocean compared to what this community needs when it comes to providing treatment and support for drug addicts and their families. It will do very little to reduce the high levels of illegal drug abuse that are the cause of much of our crime problem in our area. I think what we have to realise is that illegal drug abuse is causing our crime problems in the area, especially in Cabramatta. That funding came under the Community Partnerships initiative and works out at 8 per cent of the New South Wales funds and 2 per cent of the national figure.

In the first round of community partnerships funding, Chatswood, Manly and Byron Bay received similar amounts to Cabramatta. This definitely shows how this issue has been ignored by Canberra. On a brighter note from Canberra—I do not knock it all the time—in the last Parliament the social policy committee was given a reference to look at substance abuse in Australia. The committee did this at Cabramatta last year and gained some insight into the problems here. I am still a member of that committee and I have been elected as its deputy chair. I can say that a lot of the committee's attention has been given to Cabramatta, and I know that our committee was interested in your earlier report, and I am sure we will follow your next report with great interest.

As I said at the start, policing alone will not solve the problems faced in Cabramatta. I know that the Committee's focus is policing, but I ask the Committee to consider, if only in passing, the issue of funding the drug treatment and support services in the Cabramatta area.

Just as we have realised that it takes a special effort directed at policing in Cabramatta to make a difference, we also must realise that we need to make a special effort here in dealing with drug abuse. We must always realise

that one without the other will lead us back to where we started, and none of us here wants to see that. I, as the local Federal member, and our community as a whole do not want to see this happen.

Mr Mark STEVENS: I have been a local resident for some 17 or 18 years. I made a submission to the inquiry in 2000 and formally gave evidence in December 2000. I have since put in a supplementary submission, which I hope is before the Committee.

Firstly, there has definitely been an improvement in the police response to crime in Cabramatta in a general sense. The level of crime and street-level drug dealing has decreased markedly since March 2001. I have to give credit where credit is due. However, I am concerned that within the last six to seven months the situation has started to go retrograde, in reverse again. Since shortly before Christmas last year I have noticed during my walks around Cabramatta that there seems to be a lot more drug dealing again. The level of drug activity has not returned to pre-March 2001 levels, but we are in a downhill spiral again out here. Why that would be the case, I am not really sure. It has been suggested in some quarters that a worldwide heroin shortage may have had something to do with the fluctuation.

The other thing I am concerned about is that while your Committee has been in existence there has been a strong incentive for the State Government to do something about the situation in Cabramatta. It is my personal belief that if it were not for your Committee there would have been no change out here whatsoever. The State Labor Government has been dragged, screaming and shouting, into the public arena and forced to do something about it. There is a State election pending next year in March, and there is an incentive between now and then to do something about it. But my huge fear is that once your Committee is wound up, once that State election in March next year is over, there is going to be no incentive for a continuation of cleaning up Cabramatta.

I would like to see something done. I do not know whether it is possible to set up some sort of an all-party standing committee, established on a permanent basis, to oversee what is happening out here in Cabramatta in relation to the police response to drugs and crime. I do not see why that should not be possible. I cannot see any reason why such a committee could not be set up.

As I said at the time of my submission in December 2000, because of the magnitude and complexity of our problems, Cabramatta needs to be treated as an exceptional case. The drug and crime problem out here is different from anywhere else in Australia, and the past history of neglect by successive State governments of both political persuasions leads me to be very frightened about what will happen after March next year unless there is some sort of permanent supervision of what is going on out here.

I also put in my supplementary submission part A and part B. I do not know whether the Committee members have had a chance to read my recent submission. I wanted to deal with police community relations. A glossy brochure appeared in my letterbox on Monday morning—obviously designed to influence public opinion ahead of the hearings here today. It trumpets the achievements of the State Government in the last 18 months or so in terms of Cabramatta. Amongst other things, they talk about increases in penalties for people recruiting children into gangs and people pushing drugs to children. They are talking about drug education.

I find that quite extraordinary because, although I do not want to mention anybody by name because of the lack of privilege covering today's proceedings, I am personally aware of a man in the area who went to Cabramatta police station in the last six to 12 months to report that his 14-year-old daughter had run away, and was out on the streets with a 30-year-old man who was reputed to be in the habit of supplying drugs to underage girls, giving them a habit, and then recruiting them into under-age prostitution.

The distraught father told Cabramatta police that there was a video surveillance film of his daughter and this man in John Street, Cabramatta, and suggested that the police get the video surveillance film and view it, to try to identify this person and trace his daughter. Do you know what the police response was to that? The police response to that request for the police to view the surveillance film was, "This is not sufficiently important for us to view the video surveillance film."

Here is a suggestion that there is a 14-year-old girl on the street with somebody who is a known drug dealer and a recruiter of under-age prostitutes, and Cabramatta police told this child's father that the matter was not sufficiently important for them to view the surveillance film—it would take too long for them to do that; they would have to sit and wait until the particular image appeared on the screen, and they did not want to do that.

They also refused to use mobile phone technology to try to trace the runaway child through calls made to and from her mobile phone. They were told that that type of technology is available, that the calls can be traced, but again it was not sufficiently important for them to spend the time and money doing that. The father also supplied a residential address where he thought the girl might be staying with this particular individual, and pointed out that DOCS had told the father that an offence was committed if a child was staying with an adult. The police said that they had never heard of that particular provision of the Child Protection Act, and the father had to take a photocopy of the relevant section of the Act and supply it to the police because they had never heard of it before.

In terms of being genuine about stopping young people from getting involved in crime and drugs, I think what appears in this brochure is absolute hypocrisy.

CHAIR: If there were a case study such as this, I think the Committee could probably ask the police to follow it up. Thank you for your contribution.

JENNY: My name is at Jenny, I have a business in Cabramatta.

CHAIR: You do not want to give your surname?

JENNY: No. Since last year's parliamentary inquiry the drug crime has lessened. I thank the parliamentary inquiry for coming to Cabramatta to look after us. On 13 May there was fighting in Cabramatta right in front of BKK. I saw that extraordinary thing and I thought I should bring it up. Two druggies were fighting, one nearly died. There was a private security officer looking after one of the shopping centres. He ran out and got the guy, because one man almost killed the other one. Meanwhile he called the police. I was watching that for more than half an hour before the police came. Two police came and the security man was going to hand over that guy to the police. After they were talking the police said to just let him go. That is the end of my story. But there was terrible fighting in the middle of the town. Without the security man one of the men would have died. The police said "Don't worry about that, just let him go".

CHAIR: You mean that the police were too lenient?

JENNY: Yes. The police should do something about this to keep our Cabramatta safe.

CHAIR: Do you want to make any short comment about any changes since you appeared before the Committee last year?

JENNY: There is a lot of change. I saw a lot of arrests, yes, sorry, I was going to mention that. I saw quite a number of detectives dressed up like they were going to get something, buy something, and they arrested a lot of drug dealers. I can say that.

CHAIR: So some things have improved?

JENNY: Yes.

MARK HANKIN: I am employed as a Youth Development Councillor for South-West Sydney. I am based in Cabramatta and have held this position for almost 11 years. I have lived and/or worked in the area for all of my 41 years. I speak in regard to policing issues and young people. In regard to police and community relations it is still somewhat tenuous and many have claimed to me that police are not necessarily seen as being there to help them. Also young people have recently alleged inappropriate treatment in regard to the way they were spoken to or treated, including bad language, intimidation and coercion to make statements or provide information. That still occurs at times.

Certainly I probably condone some of Julia's comments in that some issues are based in the social realm; that is, disadvantage and poverty. Partnerships between all levels of government and non-government are being developed in Cabramatta, of which I am part. We are making some headlines in filling some of the gaps in service provision. This will go only so far without additional resources to meet the higher range of needs. Issues around the peripheral of drug use still exist in huge numbers, such as youth prostitution as has been suggested, homelessness is still a great problem in Cabramatta as are mental health issues. We have young people on the street with those.

It is my opinion that as recommendation 21 suggests, procedures for youth, the Government suggests that it already has in place sufficient processes and protocols to meet the concerns of the recommendation. I do not feel

that that is based in the reality of what is really happening. There are still issues around the way young people are being treated and that goes some way in pulling them away from seeing the police as being there to help them.

CHAIR: Mark, how do you expect to improve the relationship between police and youth?

Mr HANKIN: As a matter of the Cabramatta youth team we have nine funded programs which provide services to young people in Fairfield and through to Liverpool. We have gone some way to do in joint projects, particularly with the Police Citizens Youth Club and also through a multicultural youth festival which was held here and run in conjunction with the Police Citizens Youth Club. Those sorts of activities seem to go a long way in breaching the gap between police and young people. We are looking to perform more of those, and there are some in the pipeline.

PARTICIPANT A: I am a resident of Cabramatta and a member of the Christian Democratic Party. I gave a submission when the first parliamentary inquiry into policing was held in Cabramatta. Recently I spoke with Detective Senior Sergeant Szalajko. It was confirmed to me by him that it is unlawful for a prostitute to solicit customers in a residential area or near a place of worship, which is a church, or near a school. If that is the case, the law is being disregarded and broken every day and night in Cabramatta.

Starting from the Stardust Hotel and proliferating into Fisher, Longfield and Cumberland streets, female prostitutes solicit males openly on the streets. Every day I have to walk to the station and walk home and bypass this. Everyday I see them ply their trades. I have rarely seen police there. I have seen them in the car park and around the Stardust Hotel occasionally. But I see the same prostitutes over and over again. In most cases prostitution has proliferated as a means to feed the person's heroin addiction. In my opinion as long as heroin is available in Cabramatta prostitution will worsen.

Prostitution has actually worsened. I used to live on the west side and I have moved to the east, and I have seen changes. In the first submissions I said I used to pass drug dealers every single day, the same drug dealers. I used to often speak to the constables and say, "Look, I've just seen a drug deal. What is going on?" They were selling like lollypops. The changes I have now seen on the east side, right in front of my house, and on Cumberland, Fischer, Broomfield, and Longfield streets are cars stopping just for one minute. The deal is done and off they go.

I have seen the number plates and rung the police, but I do not know whether it was followed up. I have talked to a lot of constables, and I think they are very good in doing their job. One day I was physically assaulted in broad daylight in Cabramatta. I went to the little corner Police station and had to talk into a microphone. I could not see anyone. I said that I was just physically assaulted and they said, "Just wait". It took ages and ages before the police arrived on bikes. I am not putting any blame on the constables, I think they do a great job, but there doesn't seem to be enough of them.

By the time the police came the person who assaulted me had fled. I was quite angry about that. As a woman I find it quite demeaning to walk past this prostitution trade because you get all the undesirable males loitering around. I also am wondering whether loitering is an offence. There is a lot of loitering in Cabramatta east at the bus terminal. People cannot sit there and wait for a bus, because of all the males waiting for the prostitutes and the drug addicts. I have seen changes and the drug deals are not being done openly on the streets like they were when I was living on the west side. But the drug deals have not gone away, they have just changed. There is still quite a lot of heroin. I do not think we are getting the help we need from the people who work for us in this community.

MARIA HEGGIE: I am a councillor with Fairfield City Council and a lifetime resident of Cabramatta. Thank you for the opportunity to return to address the Committee. I definitely agree with the statements made by Mark Stevens about the usefulness of having this upper House inquiry, the recommendations and some of the positive changes that have occurred since those recommendations were brought down. That is true, that has happened. However, I am concerned about prostitution.

In December 2001 street prostitution was raised at the crime prevention reference group, of which I am a member. As a result, the mayor of the city wrote to the local area commander. Several months later a reply came, but still no satisfactory action about street prostitution. I have received a number of personal representations from residents who live in the area of Fischer, Broomfield and Longfield streets. I raised this issue as a question without notice at the council meeting in April 2002.

The local newspapers printed a small story, reprinting my question without notice, which was to bring to the attention of the entire council the problem of street prostitution, the streets which the complaints had come from, and would the mayor on behalf of the council write to the local area commander, and the regional commander as well, seeking action. You can imagine my distress when, the day after the newspaper was printed, I received a telephone call from a police officer from Cabramatta. That telephone call was threatening to me because it related directly to the questions that I had asked about prostitution.

What alarmed me about the telephone call I received was: How is it that I, in the course of my duty simply asking questions and representing the community, should get such a reaction from an officer of the Cabramatta police station? The thing that disturb me was the manner in which I was spoken to, the tone of the police and the sorts of things that were being said. There seemed to be more concern about the prostitutes than the residents who had kerb-crawlers and prostitutes fighting outside their bedroom window at 1, 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the morning. When residents were calling the police, sometimes the police came. And when the police came they would speak to the prostitutes, and of course the prostitutes would continue to solicit, the kerb-crawlers would pull up, there would be disagreements, foul language, shouting and slamming of doors, and of course complete frustration for the residents.

I do not think anyone living in a residential street and raising a family should have to put up with this. This is something that has come in the last few months. This is not something that Cabramatta has had to put up with. It concerns me that if I do my duty and ask questions at a council meeting I should get that kind of response from the police. I think it is unacceptable. A resident was also told, "Don't ring us any more." Sorry, I thought street prostitution was illegal! I do not think it is acceptable for police to be doing their duty in that manner. Cabramatta does not need street prostitution. We have not had it in the past, not in the way it is occurring now. I don't think we should have to put up with it. I think it is wrong for police to be making telephone calls complaining that I have raised the issue of prostitution.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Councillor Heggie, I am not sure whether you were here this morning when there was quite a bit of discussion about the CCTV system. Where you the mayor at the time CCTV was introduced here?

MARIA HEGGIE: I certainly was the mayor when CCTV was implemented in 1996. No, I was not here this morning. I was attending a mental health subgroup meeting this morning. However, I would like to say that the council received a one-off contribution of \$300,000 for the establishment of the CCTV system, for which we were very grateful. Of course the local member assisted the council in getting that money through the then Minister for Police, the Hon. Paul Whelan. What worries me about the closed circuit television system is that the council has just looked at a five-year review of the system, and the review makes it clear—and those documents can be made available to the Committee—that the incidents identified by the closed-circuit television are not matched with action from the police. In fact it is inaction. If you look through it, you will see in that five-year period—specifically in some timeframe—something like a quarter of an arrest per shift for drug dealing.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Do you think it is worth council spending money on closed-circuit television?

MARIA HEGGIE: The concept of CCTV I think is a good one, however it is the council and the business community that must continue to pay for it. When Fairfield council first decided, along with the business community, to introduce the closed-circuit television system we were the first local government area in New South Wales to do so. We put our bid in to the Government to assist us not only with the implementation and setting up of the closed-circuit television system but also the monitoring, for which we were not successful. But George Street, Sydney has closed-circuit television, which is monitored by the police. Fairfield City Council pays \$400,000 a year for monitoring by a private security firm 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We must be the only council area in New South Wales that actually pays rent for a shop that the police used to operate out of. I understand they do not operate out of there now.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Are you saying that, as far as you understand, the closed-circuit television system on George Street, Sydney is totally paid for by the New South Wales Government?

MARIA HEGGIE: Yes, and it is being monitored by police, who obviously will benefit most from that tool. The council has written to the State Government asking it to take over the running of the CCTV and alleviate the \$400,000 cost to council of monitoring the system 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. It would be the perfect opportunity now that the police station will be built in Cabramatta to relocate the CCTV and allow the police to run it.

KEN CHAPMAN: I am here on behalf of my Neighbourhood Watch group, CM8, from Cabramatta. I am Vice-President of the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce. Part of the payment for the closed-circuit television cameras is taken from the town improvement rate raised through all businesses within the area. The business community also puts in money towards the operation of those cameras. That is for the benefit of Councillor Heggie.

Neighbourhood Watch has been operating for a fair while. I have been the co-ordinator for Cabramatta for just under two years. Before this inquiry commenced we hardly got any press or police officers to attend the meetings. Since the establishment of this Committee I am glad to say we now have police or someone from the police station coming to our meetings, either from ECO or one of the police officers themselves. In relation to communication with the Neighbourhood Watch group, we are getting that level of involvement.

I would like to point out that we also get the figures on crime from the police. We are grateful for that, because that gives us an idea what to talk about and what to tell people in the *Neighbourhood Newsletter* that we put out every month. Part of that newsletter material is derived from information given to us from the police, and warning people about break and enters or whatever. Unfortunately, we do not get any funding from anywhere else. We have to raise this through raffles or street stalls.

In our April 2001 newsletter we put forward the actual figures on crime in the Cabramatta area. I am pleased to say that in March last year break and enters numbered 135 and April this year there were only 98—up to 28 April, not the close of April. We still have very high statistics for the area. Assaults in March numbered 49, break and enters in April 98, stealings numbered 83 in March and 76 in April this year, stealing from motor vehicles was steady at 34, and actually stealing a motor vehicle was 35, while the number of street offences was 248.

We would just like to point out that even though these figures are on a downward trend, they are still extremely high. We as a community are paying for these high figures through our insurance rates. It cost me \$300 more to insure my car here than if I lived in Campbelltown, and that is ridiculous. We also have the problem of one of our post office boxes being removed by Australia Post. I would like to thank Julia Irwin for making representations on behalf of our Neighbourhood Watch. In April 2002 we received this letter from Julia:

Unfortunately, the Post Office box was withdrawn from service due to occupational health and safety reasons—needles.

They were finding a lot of needles in and around the post office box on the corner of John Street and High Street. At the bottom of the letter is an indication to us that the post office box will not be reinstalled in that area. We have a high proportion of elderly people in the area. The Post Office says to go to another 800 metres to the other post office box at the corner of Cabramatta Road. That is a little bit too far for some people. The Post Office has pointed to the option of giving mail to the mailman, but I can assure you that he doesn't want it. I just wanted to leave those figures with you and refer to some of our Neighbourhood Watch newsletters. To give you an idea of what Neighbourhood Watch does in the area, we try to get the police message out to the community. We are trying to warn the community what goes on—all with no funding from anyone.

PETER STARR: I am here as a person who lives in the community. I have lived here for some seven to eight years. I am a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and I have a business in the area. Firstly, I have been asked to tender a letter to the Committee. That is on behalf of the Secretary of the Rotary Club of Cabramatta. I will read the letter than formally tender it to the Committee:

The Hon. Helen Sham-Ho MLC
NSW Parliament Legislative Council

Re: Cabramatta City Watch

Dear Helen,

I welcomed the invitation last year to attend the City Watch Community Workshop held on Wednesday 5th December 2001.

The letterhead gave me the impression that Cabramatta City Watch was an initiative to bring together the community and police in order to solve the very serious issues in our community.

The event was well attended and I believe well organised.

The discussion groups were a great idea. However in my opinion special interest groups such as youth workers railroaded them. My group concentrated on schooling/parenting issues as if they were the root cause of Cabramatta's drug problems. I got the feeling that many participants believed more agencies plus more funding would equal success. Most groups concentrated on media/publicity issues which may have been prompted by the comments of Reba Meagher. Ms Meagher was extremely critical of the media and in particular the recent Ray Martin Show.

There was only one group which discussed policing in Cabramatta. This was disappointing in light of my perception that policing was the main reason for the workshop.

We received minutes of the workshop, which outlined the following outcomes:

1. Media Coverage and Representations of Cabramatta
2. Community Relations and Communications
3. Youth
4. Police Relations
5. Drug Related Outcomes
6. Other Issues – prostitution and youth homelessness

I have received no further communication since December. Therefore I don't know if any of the outcomes have been activated.

A great deal of credence was given to Link Groups. As I was representing the Rotary Club of Cabramatta, it was suggested that a service club link group would be appropriate. To date I have not been contacted regarding this proposition.

The only matter that I'm aware of that has eventuated is the creation and distribution of the "Drugsmart" information pocket folder. Reba Meagher informed my club about this initiative.

To summarise – a great idea poorly executed!

Yours truly,

Bill Little
Secretary – Rotary Club of Cabramatta

Thursday, May 23, 2002

CHAIR: The Committee will receive this as a submission from the Rotary Club.

Document tabled.

Mr STARR: That is how they would like it. They apologise that they could not be here. I gave evidence before your Committee on two occasions. Once was at an in-camera hearing. I thank you and the members of the committee very much. Without the effort put in by you and your excellent report we would certainly not have got the pressing issues in Cabramatta addressed. There is no doubt that there has been a major cleanup of drugs but there is still an underlying problem here, and that is the drug problem. It is advertised that 75 drug houses have been closed down. I read in last week's paper that they have all been eliminated. They are words attributed to the local area commander, Frank Hansen. I find that disturbing, because there are still drug houses operating even as I address you today.

Secondly, it is true that prostitution here is a problem. You have heard already about those things. The problem is twofold here. The Committee recommended that a group be set up to liaise between the businesspeople and the community so the community could have input. City Watch does not achieve that at all. That is very sad. I was the outgoing president of the police trust at council meetings, and they were very good things. Ken Chapman and a number of other people in this room used to attend those meetings that were held every six to eight weeks. They were chaired by an ordinary person in the community. Police were present and we had direct liaison with police. No such thing in City Watch, unfortunately. We do not have that.

Certainly since the former assistant commissioner, Chris Ovens, has left us there has been a remarkable improvement under Clive Small's leadership but sadly to say when the new police station is built—we were promised by the local member 90 officers and the local strength is 72—we have no guarantee that the target action group will be committed to drug fighting here in Cabramatta.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It has been abolished.

Mr STARR: That is right. That is the concern. The other concern is that we have heard bandied about in the local media that we are going to get 200 police and in the pamphlet here we have 124. It is my understanding that station strength is 108. Again, I would just like to say there are still problems here. They are fixable and workable but we need to have direct access to talk to the police. We do not have that in City Watch I would like to see that as an outcome. If anybody would like to ask me anything?

CHAIR: Thank you. Obviously there are problems but you can eradicate problems. Can you give the Committee some idea what action should be taken from now on, into the future?

Mr STARR: What I believe needs to happen here is, one, the police need to have an establishment between the businesspeople and the community where we have direct access. That is something Ken Chapman touched on earlier with the neighbourhood groups. Secondly, we need to have a dedicated strike force targeting drugs. If this does not happen, we will have the problem come back. You can see it walking around here. When the Committee was here last time I said there were people here and I can walk up the road and score whatever you want. That is disappointing. I am not saying there has not been an improvement, because there has. But unless you are going to have a dedicated strike force of detectives—and I mean detectives—that are trained to do it and have the covert powers to do it then we are not going to keep the area as it is. Some people here today have said that their fear is that it will slip back. Once the Committee folds and the election is finished, it will slip back. We saw that happen before. Who wants to go back to a situation where we had 250 people dealing drugs at the railway station? These things are definitely winnable, and the credit goes to you and the Committee, but we want to see the community work.

CHAIR: Thank you. The Committee has heard very clearly today that there is a fear that the good record up to now might be slipping.

Mr John ARGLE: I have lived in the Fairfield area since 1970 when my parents arrived here from overseas. What the Committee has done over the past year is as much as it can within the powers it has in the political system that operates in the Government. What a lot of people here seem to miss is that this is not just a policing problem, it is a community problem. People will have to accept that harm minimisation programs have to come into the area, such as needle exchanges, shooting galleries, et cetera. If you want to lower your interest payments you have to let the drugs be available to these people, because heroin addiction or many types of drug addictions are similar to what you see out here with people spending all their money on the poker machines. People who lived here remember this club as being a small building that had a few drinks for returned servicemen, et cetera. They look at it and think where did all the money come from? It has come from people pumping money into the machines. People selling drugs on the street are not making big money. They are just making a bit of money and thinking I am making a lot of money, I can buy a flash car, I do not have to work, all these idiots are buying drugs off me because they love it. It is not an addiction that is psychological; it is a physical need that these people have.

When people say police are not doing anything, they can walk around Cabramatta and people come up and offer them drugs but they are missing the point. Those people are just small fry in an ocean full of really big fish. The people making all the money are not the people being targeted. People say the police will not do anything about my daughter or they will not look at the closed-circuit television videos and pick up people selling drugs. It is not just about the police doing things. It is about the community saying they do not like people prostituting themselves outside my houses, I do not like the kids going to school with people who will sell them drugs. If you do not want these things to happen you have to allow certain other things to happen which perhaps you do not like the thought of such as allowing people who are addicted to heroin to get their heroin and shoot it up wherever they might need to do that.

But it will stop them breaking into your house and stealing your video or DVD, to hock on the street for \$50 and score three deals and they are happy for a day. If you allow these people to go to a shooting gallery, get some advice about how to try to quit their addiction as opposed to just getting the drugs, in that way the community becomes involved by being a little more tolerant of these people who are not doing it because they love it. They do not love it. If you speak to people who are truly addicted and are living a pathetic life—they will admit to it themselves—they do not want to be addicted to drugs, but physically they need them. They are beyond the point where they can say they do not need them. It is not as though they can whack on a Nicorette patch and give up cigarettes or eat a little less and lose weight. It is not that type of problem. It is an addiction that is beyond their psychological ability to give it up.

I understand what the Committee has done. It is trying to improve the policing in the area and satisfy a certain need within a certain age group of the community. If you speak to younger people, I am not going to say everybody is addicted to drugs, but a high percentage of Australians under 25 have tried and used different drugs and understand what the results of using those drugs are. At some point they will say I am either addicted or I will give it up and I want to give it up. They will look for a means of doing that. If that means they can go to a shooting gallery and get their drugs and take them in peace and not be chased off by people, that will probably help a lot more than just saying there is not enough police in the area.

CHAIR: You make so many points there. Do you have any idea how to address the problem in Cabramatta?

Mr ARGLE: No. The problem is not just Cabramatta. The problem is that whatever community you go to nobody wants heroin addicts in their community but they are not willing to say let them get their drugs and take them in this little house somewhere, like they do in Kings Cross. Everybody knows that is what people go there to do, but nobody says there are no problems with needle stick injury there because the addicts know there is a bin there they can put their needle into and nobody will get hepatitis B, AIDS or whatever other addiction or problem could happen from that.

Mrs JANINA ANSTEE: In this every room, about eight years ago I think, I stood up and came out with my name. In those days nobody with any children on drugs was game enough to speak their name. That was a first step of many that I have taken since. I have had three children on drugs. All of them are off at this moment but that is not to say they cannot relapse. I have had one that has relapsed, not back into heroin but a combination of alcohol and marijuana which, I believe, is a very deadly potion. It can be a very bad mixture. Some of the most heinous crimes have been committed, I have heard, on that combination. This particular child of mine has four children now. I have just spent 5½ weeks in Queensland. Thank God he is out of this area, because Cabramatta is the place where he used to obtain his heroin. He was not on for very long, only four months, but I have another child—and I have to avoid saying son or daughter here because I do not want to identify them—who is much older now. He was on heroin to two years, spent two years getting off heroin through the methadone program, and apparently the methadone was the hardest hurdle he has ever had. His bones are very affected, and so forth. That is my history, coping on and off with the drug problem. I have another person, one of my children, who has fought bulimia and has had her go on ecstasy tablets as a result. She still does occasionally. Two of those children are leading, on the outside, very normal lives. That is my history, that is my experience.

One of the children I have been affected by the most—I had another breakdown just a year ago, and I am a bit nervous talking now because this is the first time I have said that publicly. I have had a lot of therapy too. The last barrier I broke down between who I am and who an addict is is that I still go whenever I can—it used to be every week for the past 12 months although I have not been for a couple of months—and spend a considerable number of hours airing my grievances around various addicts. My husband was a compulsive gambler and alcoholic. He took his life. That was really the start of the downturn in my life and where my children were concerned. They have had a lot to get over, and we are all in the process of healing.

I would like to ask though, because I know I am very short on time, two questions related to my experience with one son who dried out of his heroin addiction in my home because the police gave me total jurisdiction over him and gave him a curfew, which was the only way he ended up getting off heroin. He used to ring every three hours and there were no beds available for him. Even now up in Queensland where he is—which reminds me, I support Julia Irwin totally in everything she said. We need rehabilitation programs long term, not just a couple of weeks or one week. I protested with my group People Against the Persecution of Addicts [PAPA]. There is persecution still going on. Every time you go into a courtroom somebody is there on the nod. Their problem has not been looked at. They are there hanging out for heroin, or whatever their drug of choice is, and they are being forced to sit in a courtroom. I have witnessed this. I could go on and on. I am trying to be more specific, nerves allowing me. That is the experience I have had.

I have had police—and this is why I came here to day—my son has just had a relapse. He is on the mend again. He went backwards. He got onto all the stuff that he should not have. Thank God he did not get back onto heroin. He has four children. I had to mind those children and I insisted on staying up there until he took appropriate steps to get well again. I am just keeping my fingers crossed. I am back here now two weeks today. I am glad I have had the opportunity to speak today. Going back to this son, before I forget, one of the episodes I had, I had to call the police one time because he was threatening suicide. He locked himself in a room.

CHAIR: You said you were going to ask two questions.

Mrs ANSTEE: This is relevant. I am trying to be very quick. The police came, I had no further say in the matter. I was trying to get him to some sort of rehabilitation with the help of the police. I had no man in the house to help me with this strapping, young almost 18-year-old. I was fighting against time. He was almost 18. He was dragged through the house on his belly by the police with his hands in handcuffs. Yesterday he had an operation on one wrist. He is going to have an operation on the other wrist. Whether or not it was totally due to the behaviour of the police and his physical problem then after being treated that way I do not know, but it is very coincidental. This is what I want to ask in relation to that.

How can police work more effectively to steer drug addicts into rehabilitation? That was my question the day I called the police, one of many times that I turned to police to please help me. I will leave the rest of the

answers up to you, but that is my question. I feel that police have a role to play. Maybe they should play less of a role once an addict has been determined to have a problem. Then it should be out of the hands of the police. They do not have the capacity to treat health problems. The other question I have to ask is because I have just had big-time drug dealing going on right next door. Cabramatta may look nice and pleasant at the moment, but at my home, right next door—as if I really deserved it after everything I have been through, 12 years of coping with addicts in my life, my children—I end up not being able to sleep every night.

At one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, on the hour, I do not know how many cars, and I am talking big stuff. I was not going to speak about it before. Police were notified, everything. How come six months later finally that house now is up for sale and the activities have stopped? What I would like to point out is, yes, Cabramatta looks clean but it is only because the problem has just dispersed into the suburbs. Maybe it is a good thing because I have even had that experience. I almost blew up with the people next door. I could have had myself killed because I am a very outspoken person.

My next question in relation to my experience with the big-time drug dealing that has gone on next door, and I am talking about big flash cars turning up—I will not go into that because I will take too long, and I am sorry for going over time—my next question is: When will police focus entirely on apprehending big-time drug dealers instead of pursuing sick drug-dependent pushers, people who go out selling drugs only to pay for their own habit? They are sick people. They are on a mind-altering drug. It is a health issue. The sniffer dogs in the trains now, they are not going to catch great big-time pushers on the train.

CHAIR: Thank you, Janina.

Mrs Anka BEVAN: I had moved from the area three years ago to Inverell because I lost an 18-year-old son through drugs. I have just recently moved back in the area and now I am living on Mamre Road, Kemps Creek. The biggest thing that surprised me is that everybody knew my son was on drugs, including the police, and I was never notified. My son was a juvenile under the age of 18. I found charge sheets after my son had died. Coming back to Cabramatta, I did security in Cabramatta since 1994, so I had seen a lot of the drug deals, a lot of dead kids. I dealt with a lot of these kids. Whilst I was doing security a number of these kids used to come up to me and ask me, "Where do I get help to get off drugs?" These are Asian kids, not some different species of life from another planet. These are human beings, kids, asking for help. There is absolutely nowhere that these kids can go.

I have listened to these politicians this morning. The only one that spoke any sense was the first one that spoke, the young Asian bloke. The other three should have been given a roll of toilet paper before they even opened their mouths because I have never heard so much baloney come out of anyone's mouth as the next three speakers. Talk about funding, everyone is having these meetings, they all talk about it, they put their two bobs' worth in, but they are not doing nothing. The solution is simple. Pay me, I will show you. I will clean it up in 12 months. These dealers, arrest them and keep arresting them. Keep putting them through the court systems until they finally get gaoled. The funding, put it into rehabilitation. The kids OD on the street, pick them up and put them in hospital. Don't put them back on the street. Pick them up.

You see these advertisements on TV with these mission people. I used to laugh at Inverell. They used to show these adverts of these kids getting picked up. In all the years that I did patrols and security at Inverell I never seen one kid get picked up off the street and got given help. The whole thing is one bleeding farce. Security guards even get spotters fee—this is a good one—for every dead kid they find if the funeral parlour gets the job. It is one thing to get money for glasses and car accidents, but we are talking about dead kids and spotters fees being paid out. When is the funding going to be put where it is supposed to be? There is no excuse that there are still drugs in Cabramatta. It should not be less, it should not be there at all. To improve the relationship with kids and the police is not difficult. It is a simple solution. Get police officers into skate parks and basketball halls. Get kids doing activities with police participating in and out of uniform, actually speaking to these kids like human beings and not scum on the street to wipe their feet on.

Police that are racists, thugs and bullies should be taken out of the police force, not transferred. Instead they are transferred to country areas where I am witnessing this at Inverell now. Those thugs are bullying kids. My youngest boy, who has never been in trouble before, has been bullied by police and comes and complains. Now he gets on pretty well with some of the police officers in Inverell, but there are still some thugs there. They are all transferred from other areas, like down here. If you want to pay me I will do it. Show me the way, I will show you how it is cleaned up. Everybody else, every other politician seems to be here just for the publicity stunts and to line their own pockets, because they haven't got a rats-arse clue what they are doing.

CHAIR: Thank you, Anka.

Mr Terry APPS: I am a volunteer community worker and I live at Lansvale. That is part of Cabramatta. No-one seems to know where Lansvale is because it is part of Cabramatta under the police jurisdiction. I go for a walk down there every morning. This morning I found another dog baited. A woman lost her two dogs in the last fortnight being baited, killed by drug addicts. This has happened in Lansvale today. I heard you talk about getting people off drugs. I am involved with children at the museum at Fairfield. We had 120 kids yesterday, 80 on Tuesday. Why not start teaching at school? Have the project at school, a continuous project, and tell them about the drugs and what harm drugs can do. Kids do understand, even though they are only about 10 years old. This is what people must realise in high office. They have got to get down to the kids. They are the future generations that are coming up. If we can get them off drugs, then we can get the buyers. Those who buy the drugs, they are the ones that you have got to get. Then we put the dealer out of business. He will have to come and sell them himself because he will run out of sellers.

We have to think positive. With needles and everything, part of the drugs has gone from Cabramatta to Lansvale. I walk down there one evening and I see big cars down below Liverpool golf course. They are not there for a game of golf. They have not gone past the course. They are down there to deal drugs. Out of sight out of mind. It is the other side of the highway. You have got to get down there undercover. No-one goes down that way, only the people who live there. Even the member for Cabramatta, I doubt if she has ever been to Lansvale. She might have been once. Even the local members on the council don't even come there. What chance have we got? Thank You.

CHAIR: Mr Kerkyasharian, would you like to say a few words, particularly in relation to City Watch?

Mr Stepan KERKYASHARIAN: I am the Chair of the Community Relations Commission. We have an involvement with the Cabramatta project in the sense that our Commission has a responsibility to facilitate the Cabramatta City Watch program, that is, to organise the meetings not only of the City Watch council but also of the Link groups. We have a fairly detailed report on the operations of the City Watch council to date. I have attended all except one of the meetings of the council. From my perception, and my comments are limited strictly to the City Watch council at this stage, the workings of that council have been very positive in the sense that the council is chaired by the local area commander and the local member of Parliament and also a representative of the Fairfield Council at councillor level as well as at management level attend. The local police crime manager also attends.

At this stage we have community representatives, representations from the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce, the Business Association and Neighbourhood Watch, someone from the Vietnamese community and one of the school principals representing the teaching community here. We also have a member from the youth group. Essentially it is a forum where community safety issues are openly discussed. The proceedings of that council are public. Not only are the minutes on the website of the Community Relations Commission, that has direct links to the website of other relevant local and State government agencies. Of course, they are also available in hard copy if anybody wants to print from that or they can contact us, the police or the council and I am sure they will get a copy.

Those minutes represent a progress report of what is being looked at, what is being discussed and the response to those issues by police, State Government agencies and local government. At the same time, the minutes represent a fairly detailed agenda of the issues that are of concern to the people.

The activities of that council are supported by, on the one hand, the activities of Link groups. A typical Link group would represent about 10 members of the local community with a particular interest—for example, youth, business, an ethnic community interest, or the Neighbourhood Watch community, if I can call it that. Those Link groups meet, and they each have a sworn police officer attending as well. So you have here two tiers of formal structure where there is interaction between a special interest group and a police officer, and overarching that you have a more comprehensive structure of combined interests meeting with the police commander and the crime manager, the local member of Parliament and the council.

From my personal perception as chair of the Community Relations Commission, I think we have put in place a fairly broad structure which allows input, and which also allows public scrutiny because you can go to the web site and see what the issues are. If the issue which is of particular interest to you is not there, the mechanisms are there for you to put that issue on the agenda.

We have not been satisfied with that. We have complemented this with a number of special additional forums. There was reference here to a forum which was held in this club with more than 100 people participating and a fairly strong police presence as well, who sat down in working groups. From that we ended up with a fairly detailed list of the issues which represented the views of those present.

Earlier today reference was made to the fact that perhaps there was an emphasis or focus on a particular range of issues. If that was the outcome of that, that is what the 100 people of Cabramatta who were there on that day felt the issues were. I am not saying that that is the totality of it, but that is what those people felt. We continued that with an open forum in Freedom Plaza, and recently we also had another forum of the senior citizens.

Basically, the Community Relations Commission is here to facilitate that kind of interaction. There is always room for improvement, and there are always issues of which we are probably not aware. Our responsibility is to make sure that the processes are there for those issues to come forward.

CHAIR: Members of the general public who do not belong to the age group or youth group who happen to want to join City Watch, and perhaps do not even know about City Watch, may have issues they want to raise with the police but they do not want to go to the police station. How do they raise their concerns?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: I appreciate the question; I think it is a valid one. It is a question that is probably in the minds of everyone in Cabramatta. City Watch is a formal process. It is there to formalise the issues and make the agencies and the police accountable—another layer of accountability. At the same time, it is fair to complement the existing structures and channels of communication.

As I mentioned earlier, we have a number of interest groups represented on that. The Chamber of Commerce and the Business Association are represented there. So for anyone who operates a business in the Cabramatta area, it is another avenue. If they are a member of the Chamber of Commerce, they can go to the Chamber of Commerce executive and say, "I have been looking at the web site and this is my issue, but it has not come up. Why don't you bring this up at the next meeting?"

The same thing would apply with people who belong to the various Neighbourhood Watch groups, et cetera. But that does not take away the responsibilities of the police, the local member and the local councillors. The council is formally represented on the City Watch program. I would say that in any area, particular in Cabramatta, the local Councillors are extremely plugged into their constituents and their wards. I would say your local councillor is another avenue for you to get access to the City Watch program.

CHAIR: I am referring to those who are perhaps less powerful and less assertive, who perhaps do not want to go to the Councillors or the police directly. How do they get hold of someone to whom they can voice their concerns?

Mr APPS: They don't.

Mr STARR: They can't, Madam Chair.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: I am quite interested in that interjection. I am not extremely familiar with the particular police customer council that was operating at the time. But from my experience of customer councils, you have a group of people who sit on the council and they act as a conduit. Having said all that, we do run these public forums, and anyone who has an issue, we have a project officer, Sarah, and she also had another person working with her—

Mr STARR: Did she resign?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes, she resigned, because she is going overseas. Madam Chair, may I suggest that the best way to deal with this issue is to be constructive. The fact that the project officer resigned could be misinterpreted by the people around here, saying that she resigned because of the manner in which City Watch was functioning.

The fact of the matter is that she resigned because she got a job offer and she is going overseas. The position has been advertised to be filled. We have a project officer dedicated, who has an office in this area, and is available. In the past few months she has probably personally met more than 1,000 people.

I have come here personally as Chair of the Commission. I went and stood in Freedom Plaza to mix with people. We have linkages in the community. I would suggest to the people who are saying to the community that they feel disempowered or that there is someone they know who does not feel strong enough to come and speak to the City Watch council, let them approach me, let them approach our project officer, and we will facilitate that. We do not know every person who lives in Cabramatta, but we are available to every person who lives in Cabramatta.

CHAIR: I thank everyone who attended this afternoon to present their views and comments to the Committee. We will certainly digest everyone's comments. If anyone wishes to provide a supplementary submission as to what the Committee can do in the future, please write to the Committee. Hopefully, the Committee will be able to table its report in the next couple of months. The next hearing will take place in Parliament House on 7 June.

During this afternoon several people spoke about people or relatives with addiction problems. I would like the media to show sensitivity in its reporting by not identifying by name the persons involved. I think it is very important that we respect one another's privacy.

(The Committee adjourned at 4.10 p.m.)