

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 3

INQUIRY INTO POLICE RESOURCES IN CABRAMATTA

At Cabramatta on Tuesday 12 December 2000

The Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. Helen Sham-Ho (Chair)

The Hon. R. D. Dyer
The Hon. G. S. Pearce
Ms Lee Rhiannon
The Hon. H. S. Tsang
The Hon. I. W. West

CHAIR: It is a pleasure to welcome you to the second public hearing of the inquiry into police resources in Cabramatta. This is a formal Committee hearing in which previously arranged witnesses have received summonses and will give sworn evidence. Witnesses will be given the opportunity to make a brief opening statement. They will then be asked questions by members of the Committee. As the schedule is very tight I would emphasise that the opening statements of witnesses must be brief. I request Committee members to ask questions in turn as I give them the call. Because this is a formal hearing there is no opportunity for members of the public to participate directly either in addressing the Committee or asking questions. Of course, anyone is welcome to write to the Committee expressing any views they might have in relation to the inquiry. I acknowledge and welcome the local member for Cabramatta, Ms Reba Meagher.

ROBERT WATKINS, Mayor, Fairfield City Council, Avoca Road, Fairfield, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr WATKINS: I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr WATKINS: I am.

CHAIR: Could you briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr WATKINS: As the Mayor of Fairfield city I am conversant with the issues that your inquiry is investigating. I have also been a councillor on Fairfield City Council since 1995 and my area of responsibility takes in Cabramatta, so I believe I have as much knowledge as anyone to speak on these issues.

CHAIR: The Committee has received a recent submission from the council. If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request; in other words, you can ask for a private hearing. Do you wish to briefly elaborate on your submission or make a short opening statement?

Mr WATKINS: I do. On behalf of the council and citizens of Fairfield I welcome the Committee to the city of Fairfield. It is good that the Committee has provided an opportunity for those wanting to address the Committee to be able to do so locally. Council was pleased to have a chance to make a submission to the inquiry. I do not think that I need to go over the material, however, I am happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have about council's submission.

While policing plays a vital role in dealing with the drug and crime issues facing Cabramatta, other matters impact heavily on Cabramatta and my council is working closely with the State Government on several of these through the Cabramatta project. Some of the important issues include not only making Cabramatta a safe place but changing the image of Cabramatta, ensuring adequate infrastructure is available to support business development, making sure education and training opportunities are available and providing appropriate recreation facilities, especially for young people.

Council and the State Government are working on these matters through the Cabramatta tourism action team, the training and employment action team and the Fairfield drug action team. Council also has a commitment to the provision of a senior officer as the place manager of Cabramatta. Obviously, a well-resourced Police Service is essential and council will continue to work with the police in Cabramatta. In addition to adequate police resources I believe that a significant investment in the social capital of our city is essential. Business needs to grow and to provide employment opportunities that keep young people away from drugs.

Cabramatta has many positive features and we need to ensure that the image of Cabramatta changes. To do this Cabramatta must become a place where people feel safe, gain employment and are proud of where they live. Council is concerned about the low-level investment in social capital of our city and has been looking at ways to provide adequate facilities and services. Education and training opportunities, together with improved infrastructure, are key areas and council is developing a major investment and development package for Cabramatta that will involve a major car park and commercial development, incorporating a quality urban open space in the heart of Cabramatta.

Cabramatta is also developing plans for a major youth recreation centre and the redevelopment of Cabravale Park, which is the only significant space in Cabramatta for the residents living in over 130 three-storey residential flats. Funding for these initiatives has yet to be identified and this is a great challenge for council. On a positive note, the hard work of the local member, Reba Meagher, led to recent announcements by the Premier that additional funds are being allocated to keep students at risk at school and the provision of 150 transport traineeships is very welcome news. The renewed commitment of the Police Service to the policing community training program is also very important as a wonderful mix of cultures in Fairfield makes it essential that the Police Service be able to deal effectively with our diverse cultures. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Council would welcome a copy of the final report of your Committee. I am happy now to take questions from the Committee.

CHAIR: We will certainly send council a copy of the report when it is ready to be released. What is your perception of changes that have taken place in the relationship between the police and the Cabramatta community in recent years? What problems or difficulties and what positive developments have you observed?

Mr WATKINS: It would be true to say that in 1995 Cabramatta was going through a crisis but through the hard work of the local member for Cabramatta, the State Government and council I believe that that situation, whilst still acknowledging a problem, has significantly improved. Crime in Cabramatta is significantly lower than it was in 1995. I am very heartened to see that the State Government has provided significant resources to policing in Cabramatta. In 1995 the policing resources numbered in the vicinity of 80. Today the authorised strength of the Cabramatta patrolled is around the 140 mark.

CHAIR: The Fairfield City Council submission calls for legislation to prevent loitering and begging in Cabramatta streets. The submission also talks about the growing problem of homelessness in Cabramatta. Does council have a policy to address this issue in partnership with other agencies? Is there anything specific that you would like to see State government agencies, in addition to the police, doing about these problems because you referred to youth problems in your opening statement?

Mr WATKINS: Council is concerned about the level of youth homelessness, especially those that are identified as intravenous drug users. Whilst there are some resources for homelessness, for those that are identified as intravenous drug users there are no adequate or current resources available in Cabramatta. That is an issue that my council, in conjunction with the Cabramatta project, is actively dealing with. We are about to sign off on a research project to be conducted by Lisa Meagher to deal with this issue. I believe the first step is to establish what is the level of homelessness in Cabramatta. That is why we are dealing with that issue as a

research project. Once that has been identified I will be seeking a co-operative approach between council and the State Government through the Cabramatta project to adequately address homelessness in Cabramatta particularly.

CHAIR: Ideally, what would you like to see come of this inquiry? Does the Fairfield City Council have a wish list in relation to police resources or police strategies in Cabramatta?

Mr WATKINS: I do not believe I am in a position to say what the level of police resources should be. As mayor I certainly would not be knocking back additional police resources but I do not believe I am in a position to say what the police resources should be. All I can say is that police resources have been significantly increased since 1995. I believe that the Government is fully committed to policing resources in Cabramatta. I know that the State Member for Parliament, Reba Meagher, is very committed to policing resources in Cabramatta, as I am, but I do not believe I am in a position to say what that level of resources should be.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Council's submission starts off by referring to the closed-circuit television [CCTV] system that you are very well aware has been installed in the Cabramatta central business district [CBD] with the support of council, the Government and Ms Meagher, the member for Cabramatta. What is your perception of the usefulness of that as a crime-fighting measure?

Mr WATKINS: You mentioned the commitment of the State Government and council. Ongoing resources that council provides to the CCTV are in the vicinity of \$400,000 a year and council continues to be committed to the provision of those resources. In 1995 it was identified that there was a significant crime problem in Cabramatta. Council, together with the State member for Cabramatta and the State Government, made resources available for the provision of those closed-circuit televisions. They have been significant in drug detection and other crime detection. They provide a resource for police to immediately respond to crime as it happens and I am advised by the police that CCTV has been significant in getting police back out on the streets.

When an accused sees the evidence on tape, he or she is more likely than not to plead guilty to the alleged crime, thus putting police back out on the streets instead of spending significant amounts of time in court. For the reason of drug detection, getting police back out on the beat away from court means that it has been a significant investment and an investment that is well-made.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Council's submission also refers to Operation Puccini and street policing. I take it council is very supportive of beat policing. How effective is that at the moment? Are you satisfied with the resources being devoted to it?

Mr WATKINS: I would certainly welcome additional resources. As I said earlier, I do not believe that I am qualified to say what is an adequate level of resources. I believe that is a question for the Commissioner of Police and the Government in general. I certainly would not knock back additional resources. There is still a problem in Cabramatta but as to saying what the resources should be, I do not believe I am in a position to answer that question.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Do you think that police may to some extent have a problem in regard to the language aspect and that arguably there is room for more resources in that area?

Mr WATKINS: Language is always a problem, and that is why I welcomed the announcement that the Premier made in Cabramatta only last week or the week before to continue the program of police training in that area. I believe that that is very important.

To get back to your previous question, council enjoys a very close liaison with the police. We believe that, whilst covert operations are very important for drug detection and

investigation of crime, adequate resources for beat police on the streets of Cabramatta goes a long way towards the community feeling safer.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: As you would be aware, the Police Service has appointed a new local area commander to replace the incumbent. Do you think that there should be some sort of pause to assess the position while the new local area commander settles in, that there ought to be some opportunity for him to become familiar with the situation and to announce what he intends to do?

Mr WATKINS: Sure. I believe that the community will have a huge expectation of any new commander in Cabramatta and that it needs to give that person adequate time to find his place in Cabramatta. Obviously, any new police commander in Cabramatta will be fully briefed about the problems that face Cabramatta. Once the new LAC is in place, I will certainly be seeking a meeting with the State member for Cabramatta, Reba Meagher, to talk about the issues from our perspective. But certainly I believe that the community needs to give that person adequate time to find his feet and to get established. We also need to recognise that there are no quick fixes to this issue. It is not just a policing resource issue; it is an investment in the capital infrastructure and social infrastructure of Cabramatta. It needs to be recognised that it is not just a policing issue.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Cabramatta has a wonderful mix of cultures and a very vibrant shopping area. Before attending the inquiry this morning I spent about 15 minutes driving around the Cabramatta area with my assistant. In that 15-minute period I did not see any police on the beat. Would that be typical, or was I simply unlucky not to see any?

Mr WATKINS: Obviously, I cannot comment on your experience; I can only comment on my own. Every time I go to Cabramatta I see police on the beat. So, whilst I cannot comment on your experience, I am probably in Cabramatta a lot more often than you are, and I do see police out on the beat in Cabramatta.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: We then stopped and took a walk for about six or seven minutes. In that time we saw two events which we suspect were drug deals. We saw money being exchanged for small packages. Would it be typical to see two drug deals within the space of six or seven minutes?

Mr WATKINS: Again, I cannot comment on your personal experience. But drug activity is occurring in Cabramatta. I am certainly not here to say to you that it does not occur. If you look for it, you will see it. It still remains a significant problem in Cabramatta. However, it must be said that it is not as bad as it was in 1995.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: You have obviously read and agree with the submission made by your predecessor. At page 5 the submission states:

The number of drug affected persons on the streets has increased dramatically over the last six months.

Would you agree with that statement?

Mr WATKINS: I believe that there has been an increase in the last six months, but that needs to be put in context. It is still much lower than it was in 1995.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Do you have any idea why it has increased over the last six months?

Mr WATKINS: No, I do not.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: The submission also states:

Many of the drug affected persons participate in the sale of stolen goods in shops and restaurants. Whilst much has been done to attempt to control this issue over the past three years, it has not been adequately addressed.

That is the opinion of the council. Do you agree with that opinion?

Mr WATKINS: As I said, there is still a problem there. I think the Government recognises, as does the council, that there is a problem there, and that is why significant programs are being put in place to address not only education but employment opportunities, social issues and youth recreational issues, apart from the police resourcing issue. It needs to be acknowledged that there is still a problem, yes.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: With regard to the sale of stolen goods and so on, the council's submission is that over the past three years that matter has not been adequately addressed.

Mr WATKINS: There is still some work to be done on that issue, yes.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: The submission gives an example of one major business in Cabramatta in which 55 persons stole from a shop in one three-week period.

Mr WATKINS: Yes.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: The submission contains the following statement:

The long-term impact of a continued negative image of Cabramatta is a loss of self-esteem for the youth of Cabramatta, loss of business and the resulting increase in unemployment.

They are the sorts of issues that you are now talking about addressing, are you not?

Mr WATKINS: That is right.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: At page 7 the council's submission expresses concern about ongoing reports of major crime, particularly shootings and stabbings. You did not address that in your opening statement. Perhaps you could elaborate on that now.

Mr WATKINS: My predecessor's submission refers to the fact that those reports in the media are of concern. Obviously, there are major crimes that happen in Cabramatta, as there are major crimes that happen elsewhere. Cabramatta does not enjoy the best of reputations in the media. It tends to be that if the murder happens in Cabramatta it is front-page news, whereas if it happens elsewhere it is less newsworthy. So, obviously, that reporting does have a negative impact on the community. I speak to a number of people who have never even visited Cabramatta, but because of the reputation that Cabramatta enjoys in the mainstream media those people would not go to Cabramatta. I do not personally feel, and have never personally felt, threatened in Cabramatta, but I know that others would not go to Cabramatta.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Do you think that some of that media attention might flow from concerns such as the following which council expressed at page 9 of its submission dated August 2000:

Council remains greatly concerned that despite the provision of additional resources the public does not see any obvious signs of a reduction in the amount of heroin on the

streets or within surrounding areas of Cabramatta. Dealing and using seems to continue at unacceptably high levels within the town centre and surrounding residential areas.

Do you think that that sort of concern by the council might contribute to the media's concern about the problems in Cabramatta?

Mr WATKINS: Obviously, the council's concern only reflects the community's concern. As I said, there is still a problem in Cabramatta, and my submission acknowledges that, but it needs to be put in perspective. As I said, it is nowhere near the level of crime that was prevalent in 1995.

CHAIR: Will this be your last question?

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I have a couple more, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: I think it is time you asked your last question.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Madam Chair, if you had consulted with the Committee you would have known that the time allocated to the witnesses was not sufficient. I will try to finish with two further questions.

We have heard about the cost of the CCTV operation. Why is the council, instead of the State Government and other services, providing that sort of facility?

Mr WATKINS: The State Government assisted council in the provision of that facility. It was a partnership between council and the State Government.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: What is the basis on which a council would do that? What authority do you have to do that? How is that in the normal course of a council's activities?

Mr WATKINS: It is a funny question to ask, but obviously—

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: As a council you have duties to use the assets that you have under the Local Government Act and various other statutes. I am asking you, on what basis do you choose to allocate \$400,000 a year?

Mr WATKINS: The council resolved that there was a problem in Cabramatta. Together with the State Government, resources were established to put in place the CCTV system. Council continues to resolve, through its budgetary process, to maintain that presence and manning of that CCTV system. Council has a budget in excess of \$100 million. We allocate resources according to the council's priorities. Cabramatta continues to be one of those priorities.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I will ask one more question, but I reserve the right to ask further questions. Under the heading "Crimes Index" the council's submission states:

The crimes index does not reflect the majority of crimes that are of concern to the local community.

Council also says that Operation Puccini has recently entered its fourteenth stage, however the number of police participating has been reduced to 25 police. How does that fit in with the statement you made earlier about the increasing police numbers?

Mr WATKINS: My earlier statement was that police numbers have gone from an authorised strength of 80 in 1995 to an authorised strength of 140. So it is totally consistent with my earlier statements. Resourcing of policing in Cabramatta remains the responsibility of the

commissioner and the Government. As I said earlier, I would not, and my council would not, say no to additional resources. But in regard to what is an adequate level of resourcing, I do not believe I am in a position to say.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: At page 4 of the submission the council says:

The effect of the reduced number of police supporting the CCTV system is that drug dealing and other street based criminal activity is not being maintained at the levels achieved by earlier Operation Puccini patrols.

Mr WATKINS: There was an issue some time ago where police had a presence in the control room of the CCTV system, and that was a senior officer. A while ago the officer who was in that control room was of a lesser rank. That has since been addressed. That is what that deals with.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You spoke about the impact of the use of cameras on crime and whether cameras had resulted in a real reduction in crime or simply a relocation of crime. It is often said that people get to know where the cameras are and that they simply relocate to another place. Could you elaborate further on that?

Mr WATKINS: The objective of the CCTV project was to reduce the level of crime in the CBD of Cabramatta, and I believe the installation of the CCTV system has met that objective. The reasons for that objective being put in place was to make Cabramatta a safer place to visit and for business to prosper. From that perspective I believe the CCTV system has been a success. I think you will find that where the CCTV systems have been put in George Street, that will obviously have an impact of reducing crime in George Street. But whether it reduces crime somewhere else is another question.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: My question was: Do you think the system results in the people moving to another area to carry on drug dealing, where they are out of sight of the cameras? Do you have any evidence that that has been happening in Cabramatta?

Mr WATKINS: I believe that the cameras have led to a much higher level of drug detection and arrests. Therefore, they are people who were on the streets dealing who are no longer on the streets dealing in Cabramatta, whether they are in the Cabramatta CBD or the surrounding flat areas.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: One of the matters raised with me informally is the issue of the presence of police at the shopfront and that it does not actually provide what some people thought it would, that is, a visual shopfront presence. Could you comment on how successful you think the presence of police at the shopfront has been?

Mr WATKINS: I believe that it has been successful. It is not only a visual deterrent that police are in the CBD, but it also provides a command post where the police are immediately alerted to crime as it happens. Those cameras are monitored 24 hours today, seven days a week, they have very wide scope, and it is a very technically advanced camera system. Having the officer there at the time means that there is an immediate police response to issues as they arise.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: This issue of drug taking obviously has a lot to do with why crimes are committed and why we are here. Whatever our individual attitude might be to that issue, I believe everyone is concerned about the tragedy of people losing their lives from overdosing. I wonder if you have given thought to, or if council has discussed, how we might get broad community support for an appropriately placed needles-syringe project, and a safe injecting room? Has that issue been discussed? What is your attitude to it?

Mr WATKINS: Council resolved some time ago to support the establishment of the needle exchange program in Cabramatta and that continues to operate today. We took the view that that was a health issue. We took the view that Australia enjoys, if not the lowest, one of the lowest instances of HIV-Aids infection in the world. We took a responsible view that the implementation of a needle exchange program was a health issue. On the issue of so-called safe injecting rooms, council resolved, and continues to resolve, to oppose any form of drug injecting room in Cabramatta.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Getting back to the situation with the police, considering the large number of people from a non-English speaking background in your municipality, are you satisfied that there are sufficient translators and that police are in a position to adequately assist people whose first language is not English?

Mr WATKINS: No, I am not, but I am heartened by the recent announcement by the Premier that that issue is being addressed.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Do you consider that it is being adequately addressed now?

Mr WATKINS: I believe the Government is committed to addressing it.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: In the submission by the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce you make a very strong point that not enough is done to address the core issue, that is, the supply of heroin. You mentioned that one enterprising drug gang set up business in the Tran Duong Restaurant and the Son of Saigon Restaurant, on either side of the street. In its submission the Chamber of Commerce paid compliments to Fairfield Council for its attempt to close these premises under both the Health Act and the Local Government Act. However, it was found that legislation did not support such action. While noting that the Police Service is the only organisation with the power to deal with drug issues, do you think, perhaps, that council would wish changes to be made to the Local Government Act and the Health Act to give council additional powers so that your rangers could, in those circumstances, use the provisions of the Health Act to get those people out of restaurants?

Mr WATKINS: Council would welcome any legislation that would assist in doing whatever we can to rid Cabramatta of those businesses that are fronts for drug dealing houses. We would welcome any sort of legislation that would assist us in that pursuit.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Would you consider a protocol with police that council officers could investigate, and provide evidence for the police to enable further action and subsequent prosecution perhaps?

Mr WATKINS: It is not council's role, nor should it be council's role, to gather evidence regarding drug dealing. I certainly would not encourage council officers to be seeking to gather drug-related evidence. That is the responsibility of the police. Council believes, together with the State Government, that we have made provision for gathering that evidence through the closed circuit television [CCTV] system. Council liaises closely with Cabramatta police through its place manager, who is a senior officer employed by council in Cabramatta. We liaise closely and exchange information on a daily basis.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: The submission by the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce also mentioned the disadvantage of the language problem experienced by the Vietnamese-Chinese community living in the area and, therefore, their reluctance to fill in detailed reporting of crimes and so on. Hence, the statistics are not accurate. Perhaps council could work with the police to agree on the protocol of a simplified form of reporting—perhaps even in the Vietnamese or Chinese language. Do you consider such a protocol would be workable and would council consider it worthwhile co-operating in such a way?

Mr WATKINS: Certainly, it is. Council, together with the police, has established a Cabramatta Business Watch, where we encourage businesses in Cabramatta to report crime and to closely liaise with police. But, as I said earlier, there certainly is a language difficulty and I am heartened by the Premier's recent announcement in that regard.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I not referring to a full report. I am asking whether it is a good idea that, instead of a detailed interview by police there would be a reporting of incidents. For instance, someone could say that on such and such a date they witnessed certain incidents happening in a certain street and ask the police to look into it. That would enable them to collect statistics without that person being interviewed. If someone's premises were broken into, even if the police were unable to turn up to investigate, the person could say that on such and such a date the premises were broken into. It would be a very simple statement for statistical purposes.

Mr WATKINS: The language and cultural issues remain a significant problem. We have discussed, through Cabramatta Business Watch, the issue of representatives who may report crime to the police—not necessarily the victim if the victim does not feel confident enough or is frightened to report the crime. The police have talked about that and council has talked about that issue with police and with the business community, that whilst I may be frightened to report a crime, you may not be, and you might report it on my behalf. That is certainly in place at the moment.

CHAIR: Mr Watkins, I realise we have gone over time but would you be able to stay for a few minutes to enable another Committee member to ask a question?

Mr WATKINS: All right.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Chair, I have a couple of questions that I skipped over before. They will take less than five minutes. I was looking at the results of the last State election and I note that the local member, Reba Meagher, had a primary vote, according to this piece of paper, of 69.45 per cent—which I thought was a fantastic result, and one we would all like to be able to emulate. You obviously work closely with Reba Meagher. Did you—

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I object to this line of questioning. It has nothing to do with this inquiry.

CHAIR: I allow it. He has not asked the question.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Did you work with Reba on her campaign?

Mr WATKINS: Madam Chair, I do not see the relevance of the question.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: It is not a matter for you to see the relevance. The Chair has ruled. You have been asked a question and the Chair has ruled that you should answer it. Would you mind answering the question.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I object to this line of questioning

CHAIR: What is the question?

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: The Chair has already ruled that you should answer it. I want to hear the answer to that question, Chair. You have ruled that he should answer it.

CHAIR: I thought you had not finished your question. So, your question is two questions.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I have two further questions, but I would like to hear the answer to that question first.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I object to this line of questioning. It has nothing to do with this inquiry whether Councillor Watkins worked or did not work with the local member.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: It has everything to do with it.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: I ask for a ruling on whether it is appropriate.

CHAIR: You asked a question and then you asked a second question. My understanding was that your question was in two parts. I did not realise you had already asked that one question. I rule it irrelevant.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: You have already ruled that it was relevant Chair, but if I am not allowed to ask the question—

CHAIR: I ruled that you ask your question because I understood that the question had a link to it.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: All right. I will move on. I am not allowed to ask what role the mayor had in Reba Meagher's election campaign. I accept that. I want to go back to page 10 of the council's submission.

Mr WATKINS: I need to put on record that I object to the implication that the Committee member is seeking to draw from the question.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: What is the implication?

CHAIR: You do not have to answer the question. Ask your second question

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: The second question is quite specific and relates to something that the Chair raised at the beginning of the hearing. On page 10 of its submission the council states that in its view the current bail provisions are totally inadequate to stop regular drug offenders from treating the law and the community of Cabramatta with contempt; offenders, when arrested, simply obtain bail and return to the streets of Cabramatta within hours of being taken into custody; the field court attendance notices have become ineffective and require improvement; and, as the Chair pointed out earlier, legislation regarding loitering and begging is urgently required to protect law abiding citizens. Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr WATKINS: No, I do not. I think the submission is self-explanatory.

CHAIR: You have been very kind to extend the time. I have two questions and I would ask you to take them on notice, because of the time constraints. I will arrange for them to be sent to you. First, does the council have a strategy for delivering services to the diverse multicultural groups within its area? Is there anything in this strategy that would be helpful for the police to use in their dealings with ethnic communities in Cabramatta?

Second, the submission from Fairfield Council refers to council developing a crime prevention strategy. What progress has been made in developing this strategy? Can the Committee see a copy of this strategy? Have the police been involved in the development of the strategy? Do you wish to make a brief comment or take the questions on notice?

Mr WATKINS: I am happy to answer those questions. Council does have a draft crime prevention program and I would be happy to furnish the Committee with a copy of that. The

program deals with many of the issues facing our ethnic community, and has involved the police at all levels of Fairfield city in its development. As I said, I will be more than happy to furnish the Committee with a copy of that draft plan.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Before the next witness is sworn, Madam Chair, I would state that on 7 November you issued a media release in which you stated, amongst other things, "I implore Fairfield Councillor Ngo not to undermine the inquiry," meaning this inquiry; that you reproached Councillor Ngo for deliberately misleading the public about the Committee's site visit; and, further, that you accused the councillor of using the inquiry to raise his profile and to generate publicity for himself. In my view those comments by you give an apprehension of bias and prejudice on your account in relation to this witness. I therefore ask that you vacate the chair for the purpose of this part of the Committee's inquiry and let another Committee member take the chair.

CHAIR: I will not vacate the chair. This is an internal matter. I do not want to have a deliberative meeting in public, because this does not relate to the issue at hand. I do not believe there is any bias involved. I rule there is no point of order.

THANG NGO, Marketing Consultant, Councillor of Fairfield City Council and parliamentary staffer, Fairfield City Council, PO Box 21, Fairfield, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr NGO: I am appearing in one capacity as a community representative. I had intended to appear solely as a community representative and not as a representative of Fairfield City Council, however, having sat through the evidence of the mayor, who I believe has given his best submission as far as his written submission is concerned, I would like to make a few comments. I wear two hats.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr NGO: Yes.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr NGO: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has received a written submission from you. If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request; in other words, you can have a private hearing. Do you wish now to briefly elaborate upon your submission or make a short statement?

Mr NGO: Yes, I would. Firstly, I thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I have not met all of you but I trust and I pray on behalf of my community and the community of Cabramatta that you will do your best in a non-political way to really help Cabramatta and that is what we are looking for today. I am the only Vietnamese-speaking councillor in Fairfield and I would like to clarify that today I am representing predominantly that and not necessarily the views of Fairfield City Council—and this is where I depart from my little speech. Having heard what the mayor has said in his verbal evidence there are a few things I would like to mention. All the councillors agreed on the submission that we put in writing. Although I do not necessarily disagree with the mayor's verbal submission today, I would like to flag that sometimes I might pop over into my councillor hat just to flesh through that document because that is not just a document by the mayor or the city manager; it has been agreed to by all councillors.

Today predominantly I am representing the ordinary residents and shopkeepers of Cabramatta who have come to me for help. At the end of the day, when this inquiry is heard and everything is finished, I am sure you are going to have to ask yourselves eventually: Is it as bad as all that? Eventually you are going to have to come to terms with that and already we have been hearing that go backwards and forwards. If I know anything about the other residents who will be giving a formal submission to you today, you will hear some bad stories. Let us hear some of mine.

We have heard that the media has labelled Cabramatta the drug dealing capital, rightly or wrongly, I am not here to say. What I can say is what I see with my own eyes and what the community has told me. It would be remiss of me not to tell you that, having been a resident and the local councillor. Point No 1: drugs are sold in broad daylight, day and night in Cabramatta in the CBD with or without the cameras. Point No 2: I cannot get off the train without being offered drugs in Cabramatta. Point No 3: in October the local library toilets and Whitlam Library had to be closed temporarily to students sitting for the HSC because of drug abuse and the dangers associated with it. Point No 4: primary school kids cannot use their local parks because of littered needles and the fear of addicts. Point No 5: in April a local street

reported 85 break-ins in just six months—and it is not the Hume Highway; it is not such a long street. There are approximately 40 houses in that quiet cul-de-sac. For the last three weekends my only time to relax and see my constituents has meant I have been eating at different restaurants in Cabramatta. We get people offering what I would guess, although I have no evidence of it, stolen batteries. One can buy a pack of 10 batteries for \$3 in any of the shops. It is a bargain and I have been tempted but at the end of the day I do not want to be seen to be supporting criminal activities. Since it is Christmastime you can buy a Braun electric toothbrush for \$30, not that I went to price it in the shops but as it happened I bought one as a present and it was \$110 in the shops.

Only last Tuesday a fellow councillor spoke to me. She was getting her hair done in Cabramatta. Someone came in, opened up their shirt and offered a whole line of drugs. It was a mercy that she did not understand what the drugs were but she said it was white stuff. She said the sad thing is that the residents and shopkeepers did not know where to look. They could not say no, they did not want to suffer the consequences, so everyone just looked down until they left and when they left, they left a few expletives in their wake. That is what happened basically most of this week in Cabramatta.

I am not saying that this is something I would raise every day but because I knew I was appearing before you I thought of what my short memory could conjure up in the last week or so and that is what it conjured up. I would argue that the level of drug activity here is much more intense and blatant than anywhere else in Australia and that is why the residents are crying for help, that is why they have come to me and that is why I have come to you. I am sure you have heard many times of the wonderful drug arrests statistics and how that is making a change and having a very positive impact on Cabramatta. The police personal relations unit, God bless them, regularly comes out with stories proclaiming the war against drugs in Cabramatta has been won. I will leave the Committee with a copy of my submission but I will hang onto it for now because I have these articles as well.

CHAIR: Do you wish to table them at a later stage?

Mr NGO: Yes. One headline states, "Police win war in drugs capital"—and there is no guessing what capital that is—and that was in April 1998. It goes on to say, "Puccini success" and you know what that is because you have spoken about it already. About 1,500 arrests have been made, mainly for heroin offences. Another headline this year was "Suburb's crime in hand", said Police Commissioner Ryan. He is further quoted as saying, "Cabramatta at the moment is 51 on the crime index" and that is quite remarkable; there are 50 places that are worse. If my emotions are fuelling up a little it is because I am feeling some things that the community are feeding me and it is not registering with what I read. Another month before that Commissioner Ryan said, "Cabramatta streets safe". He goes on to say, "What we've done is have such a success at Cabramatta it is no longer regarded as dangerous or as difficult as it used to be". God forbid if it was any worse than what it is right now!

The successes you all know because you have heard from the police in their submission, and a lot of that success has been put down to Operation Puccini because in trying to assess whether something is successful statistics are the best way to do that. They have quoted thousands and thousands of drug arrests. I am no expert in crime statistics so I would have to rely on the crime experts. The Committee has heard from Dr Don Weatherburn, arguably the most expert of all experts on crime statistics. What did he say to the Committee on 8 November, and I quote from page 29 of the transcript:

Recorded drug offences do not tell us anything about the scale of our drug problem or the scale of the harm caused by that drug.

Whatever statistics are thrown the Committee's way is one thing; how you evaluate it is another thing and the only way you can evaluate that is with an expert. I have tried to give you the scale

of harm with the examples I have given this morning. You cannot measure that in statistics; you measure that by people's experiences and those experiences are being fed to me and that is what we are sick of. The frontline police work hard—I am the first to say that—and under very difficult conditions. I can see why police want to keep up morale by regularly coming up with success stories but my question is: Are they really success stories or are they masking the pain we are going through right now?

The Committee has heard twice from the police already and I am sure you will hear more as they give more submissions. Today I intend to give the residents' point of view because at the end of the day when all is said and done, when people have done their shifts and when everyone has packed up and gone, we have to stay and live here. I pray that you will listen to what I have to say. I intend to tackle the three terms of reference one by one from the community's perspective and wherever possible demonstrate that with examples because, as I said, that is my measurement of the scale of harm in Cabramatta.

CHAIR: Do you realise that the Committee would like to ask you questions?

Mr NGO: Yes.

Mr NGO: It would be better if you tabled your submission so that Committee members can read it and we can recall you at a later date if necessary.

Mr NGO: Given that, I will briefly run over the key points, table the documents and hopefully there will be plenty of time for questions after that.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Madam Chair, I would like to hear his speech.

Mr NGO: I would just like to go over the demographics in Cabramatta very quickly. We are part of Fairfield City Council, which is the most multicultural local government area in all of Australia. In fact, 53.5 per cent were born overseas. The three top languages are English, spoken by 33 per cent; Vietnamese, spoken by 13 per cent; and Chinese, spoken by 11 per cent and the next are very low. In Cabramatta 7 in 10 over five year olds speak a language other than English at home. This puts into quantitative context the multicultural and cultural diversity we are talking about and what police have to struggle with every day. Two in five Vietnamese and Chinese speakers claimed in the last census to speak English poorly or not at all. It is not because they were born overseas; they cannot speak English as well.

The first term of reference refers to adequacy of police resources in Cabramatta, especially in relation to drug crime. The best example I can give is Avonlea Street, where the residents called me to say that one Vietnamese-speaking resident had been burgled four times in the last three months. I went out to see that person and lo and behold the rest of the street came out to see me and told me the problem. I proceeded to report that to the police. We added up how many break-ins there had been in that street and it came to 80 in six months. I left and a week later there were another five break-ins, which takes the figure up to 85 in the space of six months.

I believe that this example will demonstrate the adequacy of police in dealing with these issues. On the Thursday, after I had seen the residents, I was called by residents at 10.15 p.m. after they saw a man running out of one of the houses in Avonlea Street and run down the street with a VCR and electrical tools. I immediately called Cabramatta police—as you do. At 10.30 p.m. about a dozen residents—they all run into the middle of the street now—saw a police car drive in and drive out. So what did they do? They rang me. I rang the police. The police said, "Oh look, it doesn't mean we won't come back, but we might have to attend to a more urgent call." Fine. At 10.45 to 10.50 p.m. the police returned, had a chat with the residents, and without explanation drove off again. At 11.00 p.m. they came back to take the statements.

The residents are saying to me that this is just an inefficient use of police resources. Why would you keep going backwards and forwards, wasting time each time? Not to mention the frustration involved for the residents. When I discussed this with the regional area commander, Mr Chris Evans, he confirmed that there was a resource problem. He advised me that every area command would want more police, but he is not getting any more so it will just have to do. This is coming from a police person. What is particularly disappointing in this case is the lack of communication. At no time in that six months did police actually come out and take fingerprints of any of those 85 crimes. At no time did they actually ring them up to tell them the progress of the investigation.

That leads me to the next term of reference, which is the impact of the crimes index. There were 85 that we counted. The police had eight, and later on they found another one, to make it nine. So I am seeing nine on the one hand and 85 on the other. Even if we meet in the middle, we can see, obviously for culture reasons and communication reasons, there is a gulf of difference and an underreporting in the crimes index.

Of course, there are many other reasons why people do not report crime, and I will table the documents so that you will have that information. But you will recall an interview which Commander Ryan gave to the *Daily Telegraph* on 2 March, which I will table. At the moment Cabramatta is 51 on the crimes index, as I referred to before. That is really quite remarkable. That means that 50 places are worse. I know that Deputy Jarratt has mentioned that the crimes index does not affect the resources. But if the police commissioner, the man who is allocating these resources, somehow has it in his mind that 50 places are a lot worse off than Cabramatta, I would argue that there is some indirect effect there.

The final term of reference—the one that is the most important as far as I am concerned—is the effectiveness of the Police Service in addressing the needs and problems of Cabramatta residents, in particular people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. We know the statistics; we know how many people from other cultures are in Cabramatta. So how well do police understand the needs of the local community? In the latest police annual report, of almost 13,500 uniformed police officers in New South Wales, 280, or 1.5 per cent, come from non-English-speaking backgrounds. This compares with a figure of 15.7 per cent for the general population of New South Wales. So the representation is about 10 times lower. In fact, there are more police with a disability, at 360, than police from an ethnic background.

At a local level, how does that translate? Not one police officer speaks Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao, or any South-East Asian language. I am not saying that ethnic police officers are the answer to everything, but I am saying that understanding and trust is built upon communication. If you do not have communication, you do not have any of the other things.

That brings me to my next question: Why do we not recruit more police from an ethnic background? I would have thought that one leads to the other. I have been told that the police have tried, but I cannot find any evidence of that. I work in multicultural marketing as a consultant and I scan all the ethnic newspapers. While I was scanning the papers in March this year I found that Victorian police had put in an ad to try to attract Vietnamese police officers. At that time I rang the New South Wales police, the police media unit, and said, "Are you conducting it? Can you let me know?" I had no response. Last week I rang the police ethnic affairs unit and asked the same question. I still have not got an answer. I have been reliably informed that in the past few years police have participated in the Mardi Gras and have put in a recruitment campaign for gay police—

CHAIR: Would you please confine yourself to your submission?

Mr NGO: Yes, I will. But they have not done that for ethnic police. That is not to say that there is not someone at the Cabramatta police station who can speak, say, Vietnamese; there is. But if a person is called an ethnic community liaison officer [ECLLO], that person is not

actually a police officer but more or less a public service person, and that officer works between nine and five. God help us if we happen to have a crime happen out of those hours, because we know that police work irregular hours. When they are on leave, they are not replaced. If they need to go to court to translate for crimes and other problems, there is just no help.

The position is not widely publicised. I telephoned 30 different people on the weekend to say, "Do you know whether there are any police officers?" They said, "No, no. We know there is no police officer." I said, "Do you know whether there is anyone else who can speak Vietnamese there?" Out of the 30, 23 said that they did not. I cannot work out the percentages, but I am sure you can work that out. In the case of Avonlea Street, you will recall that the residents rang me to ask me if I would try to help them. They did not ring the ethnic liaison officer. This is no reflection on them.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: That is because you were campaigning for—

CHAIR: Please do not interrupt the statement. We are not here to answer questions.

Mr NGO: I guess the answer was that they rang this person and the person was unavailable; it is the usual thing. In relation to the police assistance line—this wonderful number that you ring to report minor crimes such as house break-ins and motor vehicle theft—the police put ads in the ethnic media. I am sure the Hon. Henry Tsang would see ads for the Chinese version of it; I certainly saw it in the Vietnamese version. It was in perfect language; I understood it perfectly well. I called that number on behalf of a constituent, and said, "She doesn't speak English very well. It is a sensitive matter. She doesn't want to tell me, but she wants to see whether you can take the call in her language." I was advised that it is better to go to the police station. So we are back to square one.

I was alarmed to see that police have placed in-language advertising in ethnic papers to promote the police assistance line but they cannot speak that language. I have here an ad which was run in a Fairfield local paper on 8 August: "Call 1800 333 000 help us get the people who deal in illicit drugs before they destroy more families." That is perfect; I would be quite happy with that. Underneath they have a TTY number for the hearing-impaired. I would have liked to see a number for the Translation Interpreting Service. Then we get this spin that comes out and says that the community does not want to help, that it does not want to report. We cannot report if we cannot speak English. Other forms of communication—

CHAIR: I am afraid you will now have to make a short statement of 25 minutes.

Mr NGO: This is my final statement. Police attitude is perhaps the most obvious indicator of how police are struggling to come to terms with the ethnicity of Cabramatta. On 8 November Mr Jarratt said:

If I can read from the...census. There are a total of 67,197 people [in Cabramatta]...and of those, 20,643 speak English only. The other languages are Cantonese, Mandarin, Croatian...

Mr Jarratt listed 21 languages in total, which included Netherlandic. I believe he meant Dutch. I read this to be a rather defeatist attitude which says it is all too hard to police these ethnics. You will remember the statistics I referred to earlier. If you cover English, Chinese and Vietnamese, the top three, you would reach over 60 per cent of the population. It is the old 80-20 rule. All you are looking for is some strategic thinking here. I remember the Hon. Lee Rhiannon saying that it may not be intended but it did seem to sound like it was too hard. The response to that from Mr Jarratt was:

I put it to the committee that it is a two-way street. We cannot recruit people of any particular ethnic origin if that community does not put forward its young people to become police officers.

I cannot find evidence of an ad being placed to welcome people. I cannot find evidence of police wanting to take evidence from the community. There is not even a half-way street, let alone a one-way street. To me, the final and obvious point that shows that they do not understand cultural diversity is Mr Jarratt's comments before you on 8 November, when he signalled that perhaps Cabramatta and Fairfield police stations may be merged. The community is saying to me, "We can't speak English. We can't ring on the phone. No-one speaks our language at the station. But at least if we go to the station we might gesticulate, we might make a noise, we might even play charades to try to get the point through to them."

CHAIR: Could you please be more precise in your submission?

Mr NGO: The point is, if they move the station away, it is going to make it harder for people to access. Face to face is the best way. Residents came to me to sign a petition within a few hours. I have a petition with 50 signatures which I would like to table before the committee. The petition says simply:

To: Police Commissioner Peter Ryan and NSW Parliament

We are sick of drug deals being made in broad daylight in Cabramatta.

We want police to do more to catch drug dealers in Cabramatta.

Finally, I have a petition of sorts, and the Hon. Chair would know about this. It is a letter sent to me by a group of year 6 students from Cabramatta West Public School on 26 June. I also take the opportunity to table the letter. I have taken out the students names to protect their identity and security. I will read a few words from the letter:

We want to express our concern about the Hughes Street Playground, which is near some of our homes. It is not a safe place because of the number of syringes lying around the playground. Also we have been approached by addicts and have seen them in the yards of our units. Some of us have also seen addicts with knives and we are scared. We have come across people lying on the ground with their lips turning purple and stuff coming out of their mouths.

Madam Chair, this is the same playground which you and I toured earlier this year, the same playground that you reported to the police and I reported to the police and other members of the community have reported to the police. I was late this morning because I stopped by there to see whether there have been any changes. Madam Chair, there have been no changes.

CHAIR: Thank you for your extensive submission. It was a very emotional one. We very much appreciate the work you have done. You have raised a whole range of issues that I think a lot of people understand and appreciate your putting forward.

(Short adjournment)

CHAIR: Before we recommence, would Committee members refrain from quoting from the submissions in the course of asking their questions. It will save time and we are on a very tight schedule. Councillor Ngo, I thank you for your statement in which you raised a range of issues. What do you consider to be the most important issue that the Police Service or to the Committee might implement?

Mr NGO: The most obvious thing, as far as I can see, is in relation to the third term of reference, that is, how police and the community can work together better. I have no doubt that we can work together a lot better. From that point of view, of course, the most obvious thing is an immediate recruitment drive; and a community forum, that does not necessarily meet only with community leaders. The Vietnamese community may have one peak body but in Cabramatta it represents 25,000 different residents—so, an open forum, possibly in different sessions, one in English, one in Chinese, one in Vietnamese or whatever is considered to be appropriate, would be a good start.

I think it is a case of getting together with the community and going through some of the issues I raised, for example: the fact that people cannot report crimes and why they have this cultural problem with reporting crimes and giving their names and addresses. There may be a way to protect their anonymity, I do not know. That will need to be worked through with the police. What I have tried to do is show that there are these problems, and I have outlined them. Now it is just a matter of breaking them off one by one with something strategic about it. I have to stress that it may not be more police per se. It may be more relevant police or a better way of using the resources we have. We have 140 officers. It may be that we can better deployment between the two.

CHAIR: You referred to the under reporting of crime and the importance of ethnic community liaison officers.

Mr NGO: Yes.

CHAIR: You also criticised them in your earlier submission. Can you tell the Committee how you see the role of the police liaison officer. Perhaps you can help the Police Service to redefine that role and the best use of the liaison officers.

Mr NGO: Yes. I agree that it is a matter of not just the role, but also of selecting people in the right language groups. For example, 11 per cent of the people in Fairfield speak Chinese but we actually do not have an ethnic liaison officer who speaks Chinese so there is no language resource at all. The three that we have in Cabramatta are Vietnamese, Khmer and Laotian. There are very easy ways through that. As far as their role is concerned, that has always been a problem for me. I do not know the exact number of ethnic community liaison officers [ECLOs], but there are a lot more than three. They are based in Fairfield, Campsie and other areas.

The problem we have had is that they have no central controlling body. The ECLOs have been put out into the field and sometimes the local area commander does not feel there is a need for it, so they are fighting for that area to be accepted and they are not getting the back up from anyone in head office because there is no central controlling body. They are in some ways defining their own roles out in the field. What an ECLO is doing in Cabramatta may not be what the ECLO is doing in Campsie. There is definitely no consistency. We need to have a central controlling body and, that needs to go through with the community to flesh out what the community needs so far as ECLOs are concerned.

Flexible working hours and access are very important, because nine to five is certainly not the best time. For example, I might work and come home after five o'clock to find my house has been broken into. A lot of people have small businesses in Cabramatta. They do not close the shop until six and are not home until after dinner, seven or eight o'clock. Those issues are very difficult. Once again I stress that it has to be worked through in conjunction with the community. Since coming to council I have found that a lot of the problems are that people really sincerely try to help by holding forums with people of different backgrounds, but whether they know it or not, culturally their response is culturally they do not understand. Sometimes their responses to what people say may appear to be insensitive and that puts people back into

their shells. They do not speak anymore. Those little cultural nuances are very important, to try to flesh out the issue.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Do you think that perhaps those forums could be better organised by the council with police participation, rather than conducted by the police?

Mr NGO: I would prefer to see the initiative from the police, simply because the police, in our opinion, need to put out the olive branch because evidently they were taught communication. If it looks as though someone else is going to do it, it looks as though the police do not know what to do. But if they mean it, they will do it. I cannot speak for council on this matter, but I am sure council would do anything it can to help, but the initiative has to come from the police.

CHAIR: That brings us to the relationship between the community and the police. You have explained about the forum. I would like you to confine your answer to how the police and the community can develop a trusting relationship.

Mr NGO: That trusting relationship comes from every aspect. I know there is cultural awareness training that police in Cabramatta undergo. It is about an hour, I think. At the moment it is run by someone who has experience in policing, but not necessarily someone who is expert in cultural differences. That is a little bit different. For example, a community member approached me recently and said, "We want to work with the police, but only the other day police chased a young drug dealer down the main street and, right in front of everyone, strip searched him in front of the whole community." I am not saying that that person is a good person; I am not saying anything about that person, but the community is looking at the police in uniform strip searching one of their people. In their view that is how the police respect their community. If they do that then, of course, the community will think that they really do not care about them. The police are not just shaming the person they strip searched, they are shaming the community.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Your comment is very impressive, but this is a two-way street, working with the police who have a difficult job. You want the police to have extra powers to apprehend people and throw them out of Cabramatta but, at the same time, you want them to be discreet. Do you think the police should have more power, or less?

Mr NGO: I think it is more a matter of how the police use their existing powers. They can do it well within their range, as long as they understand the community. At the end of the day if they work properly with the community, the community will open up. How do you explain the fact that the community is approaching me all the time and giving me all the information they should be giving to police? That is all that is needed; just a more culturally sensitive way of dealing with the community. It is very rudimentary but if you start speaking the same language you can get through any misunderstanding.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: I believe I would be justified in saying that your written submission, and also your oral remarks this morning, place a great deal of emphasis on the language problem. I note that your submission referred to what in your view is the alarmingly low awareness of ECLOs among the local community. Upon what do you base that comment? Do you have any objective indication or evidence that there is such a low awareness?

Mr NGO: I cannot say that it is scientific in fact, but I say that at the moment I receive between 20 and 30 calls a week, not only about police matters but other matters. Unfortunately, I am the only one in council that can speak Vietnamese so I get a lot more calls than normal. If it is something to do with the police I always ask if they have called on such and such a person, "He is not a police officer but at least he can help you and translate for you." That is why I was quite surprised on the weekend when I rang around to find that it was only 23 out of 30 who

did not know that. I thought the figure would be higher, to be honest, because the majority of people out there do not know that there is such a thing.

The reason for that is that even the ECLOs try very hard to go around the community network, it is not only community groups that are involved. They need to be out there a lot more within the community and they need to be promoted within the ethnic media. At the end of the day people read the ethnic media and that is the best way to get that message through, rather than through community groups. You and I know that community groups are run by very hardworking, well meaning people but they may not be able to pass on the information quickly.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You were very critical in your remarks this morning of police recruiting efforts, so far as ethnic community recruits to the Police Service are concerned. Do you think, to be fair to the other side, that the police might well encounter difficulties in inducing people from those communities to join the Police Service, on cultural or similar grounds?

Mr NGO: Of course there would be a problem, but I guess it comes back to police wanting to look as though they are actively encouraging people by placing ads in ethnic newspapers. I have spoken to Victorian police since they ran their campaign and they have had a tremendously good success rate by doing that. It shows that it can be done. The police are always saying that it is difficult to be an ethnic police officer because they are in the middle—the community do not trust and the police do not trust them and they are neither here nor there. I relate to that as the only Vietnamese-speaking councillor. People might say that is very difficult as well, because I have to listen to the community and be a councillor at the same time. There is a lot of pressure but if you find the right person, it will work.

We had a Chinese-speaking officer in Cabramatta a few years ago, who actually asked to be transferred because of that pressure. He rang me and I asked, "Why did you ask to be transferred? Was it the pressure?" He said, "Yes, it was." What made him want to leave was that he was not receiving any counselling support from the Police Service. At the end of the day he was coming home exhausted and not getting any back-up from the Police Service as his employer. In the end it became too hard for him, not through any fault of his own but because there was no-one he could talk to. There was no mentor program and counselling was not available. In fact, he said to me that those police officers have to work a lot harder just to prove themselves. I suppose it is the same with any other minority, such as women, in any workforce. The pressure is there but the support is not there.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Finally, for my part, on cultural matters you mentioned that residents are quite often fearful of police—scared to speak up for fear of reprisal—and you advocate a more sensitive approach by the police. What do you mean by that? In what respect do you believe police can be more sensitive, with a view to eliciting co-operation from local residents?

I think the most obvious one and the one that keeps coming up all the time is that residents are fearful to give their name and address for the record. It would be better to somehow gain their trust by saying that if they give their name and address it will not go anywhere and that they can report in full confidence. I am not saying that there should be just an open number where anyone can ring up without a way to trace them, like dobbing people in, but if we were able to show the community that we can protect them if they report incidents, it would help a lot in the reporting. That is why a lot of people in the community were worried because it seemed that when they were putting stuff into this Committee it was escaping and if we were able to assure the community that that was not the case, it would help a lot. That is quite a good question.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I appreciate that it is difficult for you to give some of this evidence. I take it from what you said earlier and from council's submission that you see the problem as having become much worse over the past 12 to 18 months?

Mr NGO: I can only speak for the last 12 months since I was only elected in September last year. Suddenly I became a councillor and because I am the only one who speaks Vietnamese, everyone rings me with their problems. I started to see things that I probably would not have bothered to look at before. Nevertheless, shopkeepers know about it because it happens in front of their shops every day.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: This is probably a little blunt but there is an undercurrent in some of the reporting of some sort of criticism of some of the communities here, mafias, crime gangs and so on. I personally have a wonderful time whenever I am in a community like this and I do not see those sorts of problems. Is that an issue as far as you are concerned?

Mr NGO: It is an issue in that it is always easy to say it is gangs or groups because that always just makes it all okay because obviously there are some nasty people there. The experiences I have had, certainly with the community here, is that of course there is crime but it is not as organised as everybody thinks. The first thing people say is, "Aren't you scared talking against drugs? They will shoot you." That is partially true but if you live in this community you will see that the Mr Bigs will never get touched. The ones being hassled at this stage are the ones who are just selling the drugs and doing the deals and there is plenty more where that comes from. Unfortunately, from that point of view it is easy to throw out the red herring and say that it is gangs just to make it all okay and make it a lot more sinister than what it is.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: You personally seem to get on very well with the police and have a good rapport with them. It is not the police on the beat or what that sort of issue you are raising, is it?

Mr NGO: I have had three calls yesterday from police I know based at Cabramatta to say, "Good on you". They are frontline police and one of them is a detective.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: We are really in Labor heartland. We have a council that is prepared to commit \$400,000 of ratepayers' money every year for closed-circuit television but you tell me the problem is getting much, much worse. Surely the resources should be thrown at the problem but it is not getting better, it is getting worse. What really is the core problem?

Mr NGO: I am really going to try to stay away from the politics of it because I said right at the outset that I am here about community issues. I know the point you are making. All I can comment is that CCTV cameras, in my experience, have driven drug use to outside the CBD, at the start of it, into nearby residential areas. As the Hon. Helen Sham-Ho knows when we were driving through, all the blocks of units around the Cabramatta CBD have high fences but only since cameras were put up. They were not dealing in the CBD; they were just going out to where the kids play in the playground. Hughes Street Park is one perfect example of that. We understand why council did that but one must balance whether it is done in the CBD or where people live.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Why do they have to do it in Cabramatta at all?

Mr NGO: The problem is we do not seem to be able to get rid of it. All we do is shift it from one Cabramatta address to another and that is that the crux of the problem.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You spoke earlier about what has been found at Hughes Street. It is obviously disturbing to find syringes in a playground where there are children. Do you have any knowledge of how long the material has been there? Were such materials there before Operation Hammer and Operation Puccini?

Mr NGO: My only knowledge of the Hughes Street Park was when it was reported to me back in June or a bit earlier than that, maybe in May. To be honest, from the front you would never know and I never really thought of it but when the residents called me, I went around the back and that is when I noticed it. Before that I had no idea but speaking to other people and certainly Ross Treyvaud from the Chamber of Commerce has known about that problem for a long time and he will be able to fill you in on that. The history with Hughes Street Park is that we know the exact address of the dealer, who has been there since June. and that person is still dealing. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot seem to make the horse drink.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Considering the tragedy that often results from drug use and people losing their lives, overdosing and the terrible consequences, you would be aware in different communities of the talk and hints of safe injecting rooms. Do you think there is a place for a safe injecting room in this area and how would you go about getting broad community support and an appropriate place for a safe injecting room? Also, what are your comments on the needle exchange program?

Mr NGO: Everybody knows that the community would not accept a safe injecting room at the moment. That is not to say that the community has the full education or understanding of an injection room but I believe that a lot of the decisions and ideas are made without full knowledge of what it really is. I sit back and look at every toilet in Cabramatta and there is drug shootings everywhere, including what I call a de facto injection room, the Cabramatta toilet in the car park. I call it that because we have two attendants who clean the toilets. They clean the toilets and get paid for that but the addicts go there simply because they think that if they overdose there is someone who will get help for them. Tragically, it attracts people but it is the worst case of any injection room because all it is doing is facilitating people shooting up but there is no awareness, education or anything to help them kick the habit. It just helps them to shoot up.

Unfortunately on Tuesday last week someone overdosed and died in those toilets. Going back further, the whole issue was looked at during the drug forum but in Cabramatta we are very different from anywhere else in Sydney. The answer is not just more police but that there have to be smarter ways of operating and of being more culturally sensitive. That may or may not be an injection room but certainly it is creating job opportunities and a whole range of things such as recreational facilities. At the moment all I hear is lip-service about most things. We have Corella Lodge, which is a detoxification unit that started off with 10 beds but which now has 20 beds. How far will 20 beds go in a council area of 200,000 people? I have to apologise to the Hon. G. S. Pearce because I said I would not get into politics but people made promises and quantified how much the expenditure would be. It might sound great but that expenditure equated to 10 to 20 beds.

CHAIR: Because of time constraints I thank you for coming and if necessary we will recall you.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: I move a motion to receive the documents of Councillor Ngo.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I move a motion that the documents be tabled.

Documents tabled.

(The witness withdrew)

Ross Martin Treyvaud, Licensed Hotelier and President of the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce Inc., 90 Railway Parade, Cabramatta, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr TREYVAUD: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr TREYVAUD: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Would you briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference of the inquiry?

Mr TREYVAUD: Most of my qualifications are direct personal experience or through my involvement with the Chamber of Commerce and a number of community organisations. I am also President of the Cabramatta Lions Club and President of the Cabramatta-Fairfield Police and Community Youth Club.

CHAIR: The Committee has received a recent submission from you. If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request. Do you wish to briefly elaborate upon your submission or make a short opening statement?

Mr TREYVAUD: Yes, I do. In relation to the previous statement as regards withholding some information from the public at this stage, I would certainly wish that information regarding certain individuals, certain individuals or in some cases certain police officers as it reflects on current investigations by the Police Integrity Commission or other statutory bodies be held in confidence by the Committee until such time as they can be released in an appropriate way. I made the statement available as supplementary information, which I provide to the Committee today, and the statement I will read will commence from page 1. First, I would like to thank the Chair and members of the Committee for deciding to investigate these important issues involving Cabramatta policing. I would also thank you for inviting me to lodge a written submission to this Committee and subsequently providing an opportunity to appear before you.

The point I have been trying to get across in my submission to this inquiry is that the New South Wales Police Service has, for whatever reason, failed to address the problem of unchecked heroin supply in Cabramatta. The reasons for this failure could be simple, or they could be complex to the extreme. The reasons matter little to the residents, shopkeepers and others forced to live with the obvious resultant problems. Regardless of any other fact or series of facts, it must be understood that this serious problem continues to this very moment, and, regardless of any recommendations made by this parliamentary interior, will continue for some considerable time to come. I do not believe that there is any such thing as a quick fix.

I also understand that this drug problem we have been experiencing will never be effectively treated if we simply approach it from a law and order perspective. Even we who are calling for active police intervention fully understand this. There needs to be a careful balance between the different roles performed by all the various service providers, such as the agencies involved in law and order, health, education, employment, welfare, and other intervention and support services. However, for the purposes of this inquiry I have limited myself to discussing issues relating to the effectiveness of police in Cabramatta. For the purpose of putting the

chamber's actions into context, I have also provided a quantity of correspondence, newspaper articles, meeting minutes and the like.

The recommendations I made in my submission were as follows: first, to drastically review the current system of command performance assessment; second, to broaden the key crime areas for performance assessment; third, to introduce the standard Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research methodology, which is the rate of offences per 100,000 people, not the raw reported incidents by local area; fourth, to introduce additional performance criteria such as quality of service ratings by the community, and assessment of strategic partnerships with the community; fifth, to introduce a mandatory community element into local area command performance assessment; and sixth, to introduce a quarterly requirement for local area commands to report to the community and advise on performance progress.

As you can see, these recommendations are broad and refer to the Police Service as a whole, rather than dealing with Cabramatta as a specific case. The reasons for these are twofold. First, I believe that the problems in Cabramatta stem from an overall lack of accountability by police to the general community. Second, it would be very difficult to isolate one area and service that area by a different set of rules to other areas.

Much of my submission is based on my personal experience, and therefore could be interpreted as being purely subjective. I am not a qualified university researcher or other type of hired expert; my opinions come from living and working in Cabramatta. I have a substantial involvement in the local community through various roles and therefore interact with a broad cross-section of Cabramatta. The general comment I constantly hear from everyone I come into contact with, other than those involved in illegal drugs, is that the police do not seem to be doing enough. The majority of people I deal with do not want the drug trade to continue in Cabramatta. They are tired of the way it impacts on their daily lives. They are tired of being afraid, and being afraid for their families, because of the high level of drug dealing and drug-related activity.

The time allocated today does not permit any lengthy consideration of the information I have put before you in written form. I ask that you be patient and take the time to read all the information in my submission and the information I have given to you today. I would then challenge you to individually walk around the streets of Cabramatta, both around the town centre and through the residential areas, and then come back and honestly report that the community of Cabramatta, to date, has been served adequately and effectively by the New South Wales Police Service. That completes my written statement. I would be happy to take any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Treyvaud. Your recommendations are most constructive. For your information, about six months ago I walked around a couple of housing areas in Cabramatta and observed the difficulties and problems you have just raised, which led to this inquiry.

Do local businesses and police work co-operatively together? How can trust between the two groups be built up? What role can local business play in assisting crime prevention in Cabramatta?

Mr TREYVAUD: As the mayor indicated earlier, one initiative that we had in mind to put in place was Cabramatta Business Watch. This is a standard way of improving relations between police and business in the local community and assisting the free flow of information. For two years the chamber lobbied the council and the police. I must say that I am very thankful that Fairfield City Council accepted our idea for a business watch for Cabramatta.

Over the two years we lobbied for the idea of setting up Business Watch, the former local area commander agreed to it in principle and said that he would assist, but he would not

assign any police officers to help us get the system running. The mayor's crime prevention reference group is certainly included in the draft crime prevention plan. They have adopted the idea of it even being assisted in funding to get the system up and running. But again, whilst in the early stages the current local area commander gave us two officers to begin the rollout, he then withdrew those officers and has not assigned any others to assist us in getting the information out to the public and start collecting a database, which would be necessary to set up the program. So to this day, as I have said in my submission, a broad range of community-driven initiatives have not been adopted by the police in Cabramatta, even though they are a standard form of interacting with communities all over New South Wales.

CHAIR: Do you think that Business Watch has been successful?

Mr TREYVAUD: Unfortunately, it never started.

CHAIR: I thought you said it had started?

Mr TREYVAUD: Unfortunately, as far as it got was that council funded the information to be put out into the street, and it funded council's crime prevention person to stand in Freedom Plaza and hand out information packs. As I said, the police assisted with two officers to start handing out the information, but they only went as far as the first stage, handing out the information packs and the surveys, but they were never collected. There was no attempt to collect them; there was no attempt to have any way of retrieving the questionnaires that were originally put out.

CHAIR: Do you think that the program should proceed?

Mr TREYVAUD: I would certainly see it as a very valuable tool. Nothing by itself will cure any ill, but certainly the idea of a business watch, in the vein of trying to improve communications between the police in Cabramatta and the local traders, may be a tool that would lead to a significant improvement in the relationship.

CHAIR: Your submission criticises the management of the local area command for being indifferent to community policing measures such as victim support programs, public safety audits and lack of resources for community safety initiatives. What should be the priorities in these areas?

Mr TREYVAUD: Certainly we have heard a number of criticisms from the commissioner and other high-ranking police that the information in their opinion has not been forthcoming from the community. What I would allege now is that whilst the community is willing to give the information to the police, it is not being assisted in doing so. The standard procedures and programs that are in place throughout New South Wales are not in place in Cabramatta—such as victims support, target hardening, which is basically surveying a place that has previously been robbed or bed on a number of occasions and then given them clues as to how to prevent the recurrence of crime. Those sorts of things are not done. A local householder could be broken into three or four times. Even if they report the incidents to police each time—which is not always the case, as I have outlined in my submission—there is no proactivity from the police in assisting that person from being broken into for the fourth, fifth or sixth time. These programs are standard in policing throughout New South Wales in many other areas, but specifically not here.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: I am not local to this area and have no direct, personal knowledge of the area. I would like to get to grips with what constituency you directly represent. As I understand it, you are the President of the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce, is that right?

Mr TREYVAUD: That is correct.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: How many members does that body have?

Mr TREYVAUD: Currently we have 120 paid-up members.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: As I understand it, there is a separate Asian Chamber of Commerce, is that correct?

Mr TREYVAUD: There is the Cabramatta Business Association, which, for whatever reason, is a separate organisation.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: How many members does that association have?

Mr TREYVAUD: I am afraid I have no idea.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Is it larger, smaller, or of similar size?

Mr TREYVAUD: I am sorry, I do not have any information as to whether it is large or small.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Could you explain why there are two? I presume you must have some understanding as to why there are two chambers of commerce.

Mr TREYVAUD: Obviously, with any area in any aspect of life there will always be differences of opinion. When the split was made, the people who set up the Cabramatta Business Association had a very obvious difference of opinion with the then heads of the Chamber of Commerce. That split was probably exacerbated by language difficulties, cultural differences, and a whole range of issues. But I fail to see that there is any significance to this inquiry as to whether I represent the business association or the Chamber of Commerce, or the Lions Club, or the parents who bring their children to the police and community youth club, or the Philippine association I am involved with, or—

CHAIR: With respect, it is up to the Committee to determine the relevance of its own questions. It is my view that we are entitled to ask whom you directly represent and the size of your constituency. Ms Lee Rhiannon is certainly entitled to ask why there is this split. In my experience it is unusual, to say the least, in suburban shopping areas for there to be two chambers of commerce. We are simply trying to get to grips with that.

Mr TREYVAUD: Certainly.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: This morning you tabled supplementary information. Clearly none of us has absorbed it entirely because it is voluminous. However, I notice an extract from the *Fairfield Champion* of 30 August this year. You were reported as having said:

I don't believe Assistant Commissioner Evans...or Superintendent Sweeney have any intention of assisting us. I believe now they wish to contain the problem in our area, as evidenced by their inaction towards heroin and refusal to work with the local community.

I put it to you that, although people can do things well or otherwise, and there is arguably often room for improvement, that is an extreme statement that you have made.

Mr TREYVAUD: Yes, it is rather an extreme statement, but it is one I hold to, even today. We have been experiencing this drug problem in Cabramatta for many, many years now. When the police certainly had very strong community backing in dealing with that problem, we found that they were not willing to commit resources to any drug investigation work. So whilst

they would assist us in dealing with other areas of crime—for example, with Operation Puccini, dealing with bag snatches in the town centre, break, enter and steal offences, robberies, overt antisocial behaviour on the street, and so on—no honest attempt was made to deal with the rampant supply of heroin on our streets. That is documented in police correspondence and such that we have, it is documented in meeting notes from the chamber in asking questions of these gentlemen, and so on.

We have had extreme statements made to us, such as whether they even believe that drug issues are any longer policing issues. As far as we understand it, drug dealing under the Crimes Act is certainly a crime, and it is a crime that is punishable by extreme penalties. We have found it rather incredulous that in conversations with Mr Sweeney and Mr Evans they were unwilling to support us in doing something about the drug dealing in the town.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Could it have been that Mr Sweeney—if you are referring to him in the context of making a statement such as you are attributing to him or to the police generally—was perhaps arguing that the drug problem has other dimensions, that the health system, for example, has a role to play, and that there are social contributors to the problem?

Mr TREYVAUD: Certainly, that was the case to some degree but what we have evidence of is that the police in no way were holding up their end in containing the heroin supply, or doing anything other, should I say, to contain the heroin supply in Cabramatta.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: I take it though there are initiatives of the police that you would support? Presumably, you are support of the closed circuit television [CCTV] system, to give one example.

Mr TREYVAUD: Yes, certainly. I was involved in the initial community consultation in putting the CCTV in. Crime in Cabramatta was in a very different form prior to the CCTV being instituted. Back in those days it appeared that the drugs were controlled and being supplied to the town centre by one distinct group, which was known as the 5T gang or that particular gang that everyone refers to. In those days the sellers of heroin would hang around in quite large groups in the town centre, on every street corner, and be very overt in their behaviour in touting for business; occasionally arguing with people who had refused to acknowledge them in a polite way. The town was living in a climate of fear at the time. The mayor was certainly right in saying that the levels of crime in the street then were worse than they are now. We saw the CCTV as being a possible answer, to act as a deterrent to these people being able to act so openly in the town centre, but also to assist the police in catching those people and taking them out of our streets.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You would accept the bona fides of the police in agreeing to that facility being installed, presumably? You do not think that is an example of them wanting to confine the problem to this area, do you?

Mr TREYVAUD: Certainly not then, no. What we have seen of late with the CCTV is that it is not detecting the rampant drug dealing on the streets. If you go to the corner of Arthur Street and Railway Parade at any time of the day or night you will find anything from half a dozen to, in some cases, 20 people actively involved in the sale of heroin. If the cameras were being used in a way to assist the community in clearing this drug problem from these streets, surely the camera operators would be able to alert the police to come down and remove those people, or entrap them in some way, so that they could be convicted of the crimes that they are perpetrating in our community. That is not being done.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I know that you are not in any sense an expert on policing, but you make some comments about the crime index. I think it is fair to say that you do not consider it appropriate to use the crime index as a public relations tool to put forward the view that crime in Cabramatta has decreased. In particular you note that the system excluded offences

such as murder, grievous bodily harm, malicious wounding, firearms offences, goods in custody and drug possession, supply or conspiracy to supply. Is that a fair summary of your view of the crime index?

Mr TREYVAUD: My view of the crime index, as I have said in other places in my submission, is that I see the index as being a valuable tool in bringing some accountability and measurement to the New South Wales Police Service in the way that officers go about their duties. I have also said in my submission that perhaps it had passed its use-by date in dealing with communities with specific problems, such as Cabramatta. What we had when the crime index was first instituted, it was used towards the community with a visual measurement of how police thought they were going in Cabramatta at the time. Superintendent Houghton would inform us at Police-Customer Council meetings and at other times that Cabramatta was going down in the index and obviously the police were being tremendously successful. What we could see from a community perspective was that the incidence of drug dealing was starting to increase again. The index was being used solely to measure crime, rather than looking at all the side crimes and side issues that impact greatly on Cabramatta—such as the dealings; such as the 40 incidents of reported shootings back in December-January of this year.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: The thrust of a lot of what you are saying seems to be that you feel that whilst the police on the ground might be doing a reasonable job, there does not appear to be support, in terms of police activity and in particular action to reduce the supply of heroin, and various other programs that may be available in other parts of the State. Would you elaborate on that for me, please?

Mr TREYVAUD: Back a few years ago when Operation Puccini was first suggested as being a panacea for Cabramatta's ills, we had discussions with Assistant Commissioner Evans in regard to what he intended to do regarding the investigative side of policing; whether there was going to be sufficient police to investigate the supply of heroin and those involved, and sufficient police to track the dealers moving from the town centre once Operation Puccini started and into the residential areas. Basically we were told no, that the numbers were not sufficient to do that; that we could have one form of policing or the other. From Assistant Commissioner Evans' point of view, the community mostly wanted to feel safe whilst coming into the town centre and going about their shopping. As traders we certainly could not knock that because we wanted our customers and employees to feel safe coming into Cabramatta.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Councillor Ngo mentioned Careela Lodge which has 20 beds for drug rehabilitation. Is that the extent of those sorts of services in the Cabramatta area? It seems fairly small to me.

Mr TREYVAUD: They are detox beds. This was a promise of the Government prior to the launch of the Cabramatta project as such. We must be thankful for any resources we get. There was another private detox centre that opened up in Liverpool, but there were some problems there using naltrexone. I do not know whether that is continuing and I do not know of any other privately based or public based detox facility in the area. I know that detox facilities available in other parts of Sydney are advertised in the local press but those services are very expensive and have to be funded privately by the drug users or their families. The costs tend to range from \$2,500 to \$9,000, which is rather high.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: I believe the local member has left this inquiry, but do you get the level of support from the local member that you would expect, in regard to these issues?

Mr TREYVAUD: Well, to speak candidly, the local member and I had a falling out some years ago, regarding the setting up of a needle hand-out service in Cabramatta. Our relationship has not been quite what it should be since.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Was she supporting that proposal?

Mr TREYVAUD: Supporting the proposal for more detox facilities?

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Yes.

Mr TREYVAUD: Certainly Reba was very supportive of Careela Lodge being set up and she supports that initiative today. As far as supporting calls for more detox facilities and such, I would not know.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would you explain your attitude to needle exchange? You said you had had a difference of opinion with the local member.

Mr TREYVAUD: Needle exchange, of course, I am quite in agreement with. I believe the concept of harm minimisation is a valid one, but harm minimisation consists of three components: supply reduction, which is primarily the responsibility I would argue of the New South Wales Police Service; demand reduction, which can be handled through education and other diversion tactics; and harm reduction, which encompasses what most people term harm minimisation, such as needle exchanges and setting up points of contact with drug user, and also minimising harm through injecting rooms and such. My particular argument with the local member related to the fact that the needle service as it was being suggested at the time did not have other elements of support for total harm minimisation concepts. I felt that it was imbalanced, just handing out needles on the street without going to similar expense for education and diversionary tactics.

I argued this point specifically as president of the Police and Community Youth Club, because we do not receive any funding or assistance, or any networking assistance down there. We are the only youth facility in the area. I had first-hand experience with the needle service because for 10 months they parked a van by the front door of my business, being a hotel, and for 10 months I found it necessary to stand in the doorway of my hotel to prevent the clients of the needle service, once they had been given their injecting equipment, from immediately entering the hotel and using it inside the premises. I regarded that as inappropriate behaviour that would put customers and staff at risk. My argument with the local member was basically for more of a balance and for community review of any services brought into Cabramatta.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I noted your concern about police response to drug use in Cabramatta. Do you think more police are needed or that there is a need to change the way that police are operating?

Mr TREYVAUD: I would say that 140 police officers is a lot for such a small area. The Committee heard from Deputy Commissioner Jarratt that Cabramatta patrol, geographically speaking, is a small patrol and even so far as population and demographics are concerned it is still rather small on the overall scheme of things throughout New South Wales. In discussions with police I think that 140 police is enough, but they need to be deployed in such a way that is intelligent. They need to be given the support facilities to enable them to carry out their responsibility to the community. What we have found over the last three years since Operation Puccini started was that all drug investigation work inevitably rarely ceased, due to the recommendations of the police royal commission. There was controlled operations legislation set up and controlled operations have certainly been run successfully throughout New South Wales in other drug-dealing areas.

However, those controlled operations were not being run in Cabramatta and that surely should speak for itself. So far as staffing for Cabramatta police is concerned, it is my understanding that there was only one officer given responsibility for drug investigation work, and that was the field information officer, who happened to be a rather junior constable without any investigation training. Whilst not running down the job that that officer did, surely the

enormity of the problem in relation to drug supply in our area, it should have been resourced a little more effectively than just one officer.

The detectives in Cabramatta, of course, have to deal with a whole range of crimes and I believe the Committee is in possession of submissions from several officers—not wishing to steal their thunder, and I should certainly not go into what they might have to say—there certainly seems to be no intent on the part of police management to direct their resources into investigating who is supplying the heroin, who is benefiting from the supply of heroin or closing down those who supply heroin.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: The Committee heard earlier from the mayor—I am not sure if you were present during his contribution—and he talked about some of council's plans and what they would like to happen in the area. He did say that it is not clear where they will obtain the funding at this stage. Considering that you emphasised that you considered it was not merely a law and order solution that was needed, I wonder if your organisation has anything to assist, or even explore where they could go to obtain funding for these various important plans they now have in place.

Mr TREYVAUD: As far as the Fairfield City Council's work on crime prevention is concerned, I have been a member of the mayor's crime prevention reference group since its inception. I have supported any initiatives that have come from that forum, particularly so far as diversion work goes in providing, from our organisation, resources for translation work into Vietnamese, using our own staff; providing people to help distribute information through the town centre. For the last three years I have published a monthly publication called, "Cabramatta Business News" which mostly deals with crime prevention initiatives. In that I ran a Mayor's Column and the local member also contributed a column. I am involved with the set up of a training facility in Cabramatta, which now involves the Salvation Army. I was the chairman of that Committee when it was set up and I am now probably the major financial sponsor of that facility, which has been developed on conjunction with council, health and other agencies.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I was actually referring to council's plans for a youth recreation centre and what the mayor referred to as quality urban open space. Do you have any involvement in that? That seems to be so important if we are going to divert people and give them opportunities to do something else with their lives.

That is extremely important. The swimming pool site at the moment has some obvious problems because of its age and its lack of use. Several times I have been involved with that steering committees as a consulting member of the community as far as planning and the formed-up stage of that facility, particularly in my involvement with the police and community youth club. We were concerned that one would take over the other for whatever reason, whereas we wanted more facilities. Hopefully now the council agrees with the PCYC and we will continue to operate and supplement any other activities that are taken at the new facility, if ever it is built. The new facility will cost in excess of \$10 million. I do not know where the money will come from but perhaps you and your colleagues will help pressure the Government into providing the necessary funds because this is an important necessary step in the rehabilitation of Cabramatta.

CHAIR: Your supplementary submission makes constructive recommendations, some of which focus on improving the operation and crime review process. You might wish to take this question on notice because of time constraints. In your opinion, has the operation of the crime review process been effective in ensuring that local area commanders are accountable for their performance? Have recent Cabramatta local area commanders been accountable for their performance?

Mr TREYVAUD: I can only answer that in a qualified way because I am not a member of the Police Service nor have I been present at any of the OCR meetings. I have had numerous

conversations with officers who have been there at varying levels. The comments I mostly hear from them is, yes, it is a very valid process the Police Service has undertaken in organising the OCRs but the OCRs focus on the five crimes on the index, so basically the local area commands, particularly in Cabramatta, were not held accountable for what was happening as far as police interaction in drug issues. I believe the OCR process is now changing and the new terms of reference will include community perceptions of policing, drug issues and wider crime issues. However, I believe the commissioner is now addressing concerns we have regarding those issues. With any large organisation it will take time to change a culture, and although in the past senior police were not accountable for drug issues and such, hopefully in the future they will be.

CHAIR: I refer to your recommendation on page 2 of your submission. Are you aware of States or countries in which these ideas have been adopted in reviews of the performance of local area commanders?

Mr TREYVAUD: I have read a number of papers, in particular, one in Northern England in the Humberside area where they set up the model I am discussing in my submission in which they had elements of the community's perception of police success, service and such. They are having dramatic impact on reducing crime in that working-class area.

CHAIR: On behalf of the Committee I thank you for your time and your submission, which is very extensive and will take a long time to read. If necessary we will call you at a later date.

(The witness withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

(Evidence continued in camera)

(Public hearing resumed)

MARK ANTHONY STEVENS, Welfare Worker, 135 John Street, Cabramatta, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr STEVENS: I do not represent any organisation but I come here as a local resident of some 16 years.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr STEVENS: I did. I have it in my hand.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference to this inquiry?

Mr STEVENS: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Could you please briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr STEVENS: I have qualifications in law. I hold a Diploma in Law (Solicitors Admission Board) and I also hold a Bachelor of Social Science (Social Welfare Degree). I work in a field of welfare where we have extensive involvement with people who have a drug and alcohol background. I am not authorised to announce publicly the name of the organisation because I have not got the permission of my employer but it is a large Christian-based welfare organisation. Furthermore, I have been a resident living in Cabramatta since October 1984.

CHAIR: The Committee received a written submission from you. If you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee will be willing to accede to your request. Do you wish to briefly elaborate upon your submission or make a short opening statement?

Mr STEVENS: Yes. The police response to the drug problem and other crime in the Cabramatta area has been grossly inadequate. It would be my respectful submission that there are a number of factors that have contributed to this very sad, unfortunate situation. Firstly, there has been a lack of proper funding and resourcing for the local Police Service in Cabramatta over a prolonged period of time. The magnitude of the drug problem and crime in our area is such that resources and levels of staffing that may be quite adequate in other areas of the State are completely inadequate and are unable to cope with a problem of the kind that we are facing out here at Cabramatta. Cabramatta stands alone in relation to its drug problem. I doubt you will see anything of a similar nature and magnitude and I defy anybody to tell me of another place in Australia where open public drug dealing occurs on the scale we see here and have seen here for years.

The second factor that contributes to the situation out here is a lack of commitment by government, Federal, State and local but especially the State Government, which has primary responsibility for the drug laws of this State. That lack of commitment includes a lack of commitment by the Police Service, which is a department of government. One might ask why

there would be a lack of commitment to such a serious problem. My personal beliefs, based on my observations from having lived here for over 16 years and having spoken to many other residents over that period of time and many people who are not residents but who conduct business in the area, is that there is an unofficial policy—one will not see it written down anywhere—at the highest levels of government to contain the drug problem in the Cabramatta area. This is because we live in an area that suffers severe socioeconomic disadvantage; it has a very large migrant population which is not politically vocal and well organised and many of our local migrant people have come from parts of the world and homelands and where they have had experiences that give them a great distrust and fear of police and authority figures. That is part of the culture in our area.

The other factor which I believe contributes to the policy of making Cabramatta an area of drug containment is that we live in a safe seat. Politically we are in a safe Labor seat. We are not in a politically marginal seat. People in our area simply do not have the same political clout as people living on the North Shore. No-one in authority really seems to care what happens to us out here. If there was open public drug dealing of the kind we have in Cabramatta everyday, in St Ives Shopping Centre, it would not have gone on for 14 minutes let alone for 14 years.

The other point, to put it quite bluntly, is that unfortunately I believe there is corruption involved. When I use that word I need to make a few things clear. First of all, I am not suggesting that all of the police in the area are corrupt or even the majority of police in the area are corrupt. I believe that corruption is occurring. I have no direct personal knowledge of it but there is some circumstantial evidence and I can give some hearsay evidence. Also, there are certainly some highly suspicious circumstances about the history of the police response to the drug trade in our area which warrants serious further investigation.

The other point is corruption need not necessarily be confined to the police force. I believe it probably also extends to other arms of law enforcement—the courts, the prisons, the legal profession and it probably also extends to the political level where legislative, policy, funding, and resourcing decisions can be influenced in such a way as to have an impact on policing in Cabramatta. The upper echelons of the drug trade certainly have the financial resources and capacity to corrupt the law enforcement process and pervert the course of justice. Their power should not be underestimated. Given the lucrative nature of the drug trade in the Cabramatta area, it is hard to believe that the people behind the drug trade have not taken steps to protect their interests.

The other matter that I think leads to a lack of commitment, is that, it has been my observation, that the police stationed at Cabramatta over all the years that I have been here, have had a very low level of morale. Even dedicated, hardworking police officers feel helpless in the face of a problem of this magnitude. They feel completely overwhelmed. As one police officer at Cabramatta said to me many years ago, "Listen, mate, we can't protect you, your family or your property. The safest thing for you to do is to sell your house and move away from Cabramatta. I may work here everyday, mate, but there is no way that I would ever live here." They are the problems as I see it. What can and should be done to change the situation?

The history of Cabramatta and the police response to the problems out here clearly indicate that law enforcement which is directed primarily at drug users and street level drug dealing does not seem to be effective. I think the most important thing, the first thing, that needs to be done is to target those at the top of the drug pyramid—the importers of drugs, the distributors, the financiers, the people who recruit those street-level drug sellers that you see all around Cabramatta, those who launder the money that comes from the Cabramatta drug trade, and anyone in authority who has been giving those people any form of protection.

As I said in my submission at pages 8 and 9 and in the enclosures forming part of my submission, I believe that the best way of identifying the key players in the Cabramatta drug trade, the so-called Mr Bigs—or I have heard the expression Mr Big-enoughs, meaning

someone who is not really a Mr Big but a person who is in a position to wield some power—is to have a royal commission. I have been lobbying for a royal commission into the Cabramatta drug trade ever since 1997.

The other thing that needs to be done to find out who is at the top of the drug pyramids in Cabramatta is for there to be more covert police operations and more joint police operations with the Federal police, the National Crime Authority and the Customs Service. The covert operations should involve police undercover officers posing as drug users, and surveillance of commercial and residential premises which are suspected sites of drug dealing.

It would be relatively easy to identify the sites of drug dealing in the area. It would merely be a matter of following the users and the dealers after they make contact in the street. What we need to do is to follow them along the street and see which house, townhouse or flats they go into. These covert operations need to make full use of existing legal powers that the police and law enforcement authorities have, including telephone interception powers, powers under the Listening Devices Act, and also to use computer technology to follow money trails and identify drug importers, financiers and money launderers.

In terms of law enforcement directed at street-level drug dealing in Cabramatta, I think that could also be improved in two major ways. First, there should be a permanent and conspicuous police presence on the streets of Cabramatta in the residential areas outside of the CBD. At present there are no regular patrols in the residential areas. Furthermore, much greater use should be made of police drug sniffer dogs in terms of street-level enforcement.

I do not think the police would have any difficulty in obtaining permission from the local residents in the area and the bodies corporate of townhouses and flats for police on patrol to come into the grounds of their properties with sniffer dogs to try to deter the drug dealing which is rampant on private property in the area. A lot of drug dealing and drug use takes place in the grounds outside flats and townhouses, in the garage and car parking areas, and also in the side passageways and driveways of people's private homes. Police would be able to patrol the area using drug sniffer dogs after getting the permission of private residents to enter their private properties—which I do not think would be a problem; I think the police would get wholehearted support in doing that.

Drug sniffer dogs could be used effectively in policing the CBD. As I have said, the Cabramatta situation is extraordinary. At times, in extraordinary situations, extraordinary steps need to be taken. One suggestion I would make is that police could cordon off the central business district of Cabramatta randomly at different times of the day, several times a day, so that no-one could go in or out of the CBD, and they could sweep through the central business district of Cabramatta with police drug sniffer dogs. That would deter people who are trying to carry drugs through the central business district, and it would also possibly lead to the detection of drugs on commercial premises in the CBD. That might sound like an extraordinary step to take, but given the situation we are facing out here, I think the local businesspeople and the local residents would be prepared to put up with that type of inconvenience if they thought it would result in the drug trade being substantially reduced.

Everything I have said to you today, would of course, require a substantial investment of funding and resources into policing in Cabramatta. As I said, the burden of that would fall primarily on the State Government, but the Federal Government and local government also have their respective roles to play. However, at this point in time, the commitment, the funding and the resources have been sadly inadequate and lacking.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Stevens, for a very full and extensive statement. Ideally, what would you like to see come out of this inquiry?

Mr STEVENS: I suppose what I would like to see would be new and innovative suggestions for policing in Cabramatta because of the very unique problems that we have out here. Furthermore, as I said and as I have said in my submission, the drug trade is like an organism. By cutting off just the tentacles, which is the street-level dealers, the organism grows more tentacles. You have to grab the organism by the throat and break its neck at the top. I would like to see an attack on those who are at the top of the drug trade, those who are behind what we see happening on the street.

CHAIR: You are talking about the police management or performance in dealing with the drug dealers?

Mr STEVENS: That is right, and how that should be directed. With all due respect, if a person is addicted to drugs, it does not matter how often you arrest that person and what charges you bring against them; they have a serious medical problem. I do not think that having the police outside Cabramatta railway station stopping and searching people who are coming out here to buy drugs is the way to go. Those people need proper, professional help and care. What I am talking about is an attack on the drug trade directed primarily at those at the supply end of the equation and those at the upper echelons of the drug trade.

As one former police commander in Cabramatta said a few years ago, the police can arrest 10 or 20 drug dealers outside Cabramatta station at 10 o'clock in the morning, but by 11 o'clock the same morning there are another 10 or 20 drug dealers back to replace them. I think an Inspector Cavanagh who was based here about four years ago said that. That is what the police are facing. Because the people who are behind it are never touched, they take the dealers off the street and a very short time later there is somebody else in their place.

CHAIR: Do you have an idea as to how the police can deal with the problem?

Mr STEVENS: I suggested a few things in the course of my statement. As I said, I think there needs to be more co-operation with the specialist crime units, such as the National Crime Authority—which is specially designed to deal with organised crime as I understand it and which has the resources of the Police Services in other States and the Federal police and Federal funding behind it as well—and also the Federal police and the Customs Service. There needs to be more co-operation with all of those arms of law enforcement.

As I have said, there also need to be covert operations. I think it would be relatively easy for a police officer to go undercover, to present and act in a manner that would lead people to believe he was a drug user. Within no time at all upon getting off a train at Cabramatta, he would invariably be approached by the dealers who are outside the station day and night. From there, it would be a process of getting to know the dealers, where they operate from, asking questions, and so on. I would imagine the police would then be able to gather a large amount of intelligence about who is behind the drug trade in Cabramatta. Obviously, it cannot all be done overnight, but I must say I am extremely surprised that after all these years this has not been done.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: At page 2 of your written submission you say that the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act is rarely enforced in Cabramatta. Is that not a serious overstatement of your own position? For example, during your oral remarks you referred to the police arresting perhaps 20 people at Cabramatta railway station and another 20 would be back there the next morning. However incomplete or inadequate you believe the police response is, is it not very far from the truth to say that police are rarely enforcing the law in Cabramatta?

Mr STEVENS: I was quoting what was said by a particular police officer. What I witness every day is drug dealing in the street and no effort being made to interfere with that activity. I have seen police arrest people on very rare occasions. I have seen police make drug arrests at different times over the years, but the majority of the time over the last 14 years when

I have witnessed drug dealing in public places, the police have been nowhere to be seen. On one occasion, for example, during Operation Puccini I was walking along John Street, near the corner of John Street and Hill Street. Two police officers turned the corner from John Street into Hill Street and walked along the other side of Hill Street further away from where I was, the side of Hill Street that most people would classify as being within the CBD. The two uniformed officers turned the corner into Hill Street, and on the opposite side of the road, some short distance up from the roundabout, drugs were being sold out of a parked car. But because Puccini was confined to the central business district, of course the police did not cross over the road into the residential area.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Dealing with Operation Puccini, you say at page 7 of your submission that Puccini temporarily reduced the drug trade in the Cabramatta CBD but never completely removed it.

Mr STEVENS: That is correct, yes. During a period of time in 1997 that did take place.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Leaving aside the obvious thing, that police action is rarely likely to completely remove the incidence of any crime, in your view what was right about Puccini that achieved at least partial success?

Mr STEVENS: I would say that most likely the clear and obvious one is that there were uniformed officers conspicuous in public places in the CBD, and that had the effect of moving a great deal of the drug activity from the CBD into the residential areas. As I understand from what I heard anecdotally from businesspeople in the area, unfortunately it moved some of the drug dealing inside the shops so that the police could not actually see it occurring on the streets. Indeed, I heard stories about a charitable organisation in the area having its volunteer workers intimidated by drug dealers who were planting heroin inside racks of clothing and things like that. So it moved it around and it reduced the drug dealing on the streets in the CBD for a period of time. But even during Puccini I saw drug deals occurring to a lesser extent in the CBD, in John Street, Park Road, near Freedom Plaza, in the areas of Hughes Street, and near the railway station. It is still going on; it never disappeared completely.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You are saying to the Committee that the police presence and visibility is less than it once was?

Mr STEVENS: It seems to be substantially less. Even in the CBD the obvious police presence now seems to be much less than what it was in 1997.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You say in your submission:

No matter what hour of the day or night that I ring Cabramatta police station to report an incident, the response always seems to be the same: the police are flat out, very busy."

If the incidence of crime in Cabramatta is as described to the Committee, is it not at least possible that the police are flat out and busy?

Mr STEVENS: They could be. They would be flat out and busy perhaps a lot of the time. But, for example, one would find it hard to believe that they would always be flat out on a weekday, in the middle of the day, for example, when a woman was attacked and bashed outside my place, her handbag was stolen, and I brought her inside to calm her down and called the police. There were witnesses who had seen the incident, and they stood around for a considerable period of time. Over an hour later the police still had not turned up, and the witnesses said, "We are sorry, but we are not going to wait around here all day for them." At 11 o'clock in the morning one would normally think that the police would not be that busy. If you

were talking about a Friday on Saturday night, when you might have domestics, car accidents and all sorts of things, I could understand that the police might be absolutely stretched to the limit then. But you are talking about people calling the police on a large number of occasions at all hours of the day and night and the police being so busy that they could not attend. There were some other incidents that I did not mention in my submission, and I would be happy to put before you various other anecdotes to further illustrate the point. In fact, I said in my submission that I could add further to what was in the submission.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You would be aware that over the years police numbers at Cabramatta police station have been enhanced from time to time, partly as a result of the campaigning of the late Mr Newman?

Mr STEVENS: Well, I understand that the number of police down there has progressively increased. However, it seems strange to me—if I can just give you an example of what I find strange—I can recall going to the police station about an incident back in, I think it was 1986-87. I was complaining to them about their slow response and I was told: "Between sunset and sunrise we only have two police patrol cars operational in the Cabramatta precinct." That is what I was told in 1986-87, yet having rung the police on 15 July 2000, that Saturday afternoon, I was again told that there were only two police cars operational in the area, one of them dealing with a shoplifter at Woolworths and the other a break and enter at Mount Pritchard.

I am not quite sure what happens. Even though police numbers have increased in the area, I do not know whether or why that does not translate into the police being able to respond more quickly. There were only two cars operational 13 or 14 years ago and on a Saturday in July of this year there were still only two cars operational in the precinct. I read somewhere that back in 1986-87 there were something like only 30 police officers based at Cabramatta. Presently there are in excess of 100 police based here, although some are away on leave and things like that. That is a threefold increase, yet it seems to have made very little difference on the ground, to my observation—with the exception, as I have said, that I will give the police credit where credit is due, during a limited period in 1997 they temporarily reduced drug dealing on the streets of the central business district.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: You might have seen a report in the media in the last week of November when the local member was quoted as saying that she thought this Committee's activities would amount to a whitewash. Have you seen any initiatives or actions by the local member that you could tell the Committee about that may have been used to address the drug problem in the last two years?

Mr STEVENS: The very short answer to that is I must say when the present local member was first elected I approached her about drugs, crime, policing and various other issues and she gave me to believe at that time that she was certainly going to take up those matters. However, with the passage of time I have become extremely disillusioned and disappointed with our local member. Relations soured quite badly after one occasion when I went to her office and asked her to put a petition in the office calling for a royal commission. I had Mr Newman's brother with me. There was an incident where she lost her temper and ordered Mr Newman's brother out of her office and told me she was not going to take the petition in her office. Despite all the correspondence from me to the local member, and I think I enclosed copies of that as part of my submission, I have received no satisfactory response from her. I was further annoyed when she said, "I will file your petition in Parliament, because it is my duty as the local member, but do not think I will ever support it. It is not Labor Party policy and I do not intend to do anything against Labor policy."

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: On the royal commission aspect will you tell the Committee why you believe that a royal commission is the appropriate way to move forward?

Mr STEVENS: I think that a royal commission among other things, would allow people to give evidence that would not be admissible in an ordinary court of law. Sometimes hearsay evidence, if it is available, can be quite useful because even if it cannot be used to support a prosecution, it can give the law enforcement authorities various lines for further investigation, which may lead to the discovery of admissible evidence that may lead to the laying of charges. In a royal commission hearsay evidence is admissible. The ordinary rules of evidence are not restrictive of the inquiry. Further, a royal commission would allow people to give evidence with anonymity, similar to what this Committee has extended to certain people. I feel this is important, especially in an area such as Cabramatta, where a lot of people, because of their cultural backgrounds and the countries they have come from, their refugee background, have natural fear of police and authority figures.

I discovered that a few years ago when I tried to start a Neighbourhood Watch program around the area. My neighbourhood is made up of predominantly Asian people and I was surprised at the lack of interest. An Asian friend explained to me that given the background of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese people the idea of reporting incidents to police or authority figures; given the fact that police in their own countries are repressive and arms of the political regime, that is a bit off putting to many Asian people. I think anonymity before a royal commission would be good. There is also the issue that a lot of people in the area feel intimidated and believe that if they gave evidence they may be the subject to reprisals. I have to be honest with you, I am a little bit concerned for my own safety as a result of having come here today. Nevertheless I feel that people need to take a stand. It is very important issue.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: In an answer a little while ago you referred to Ms Meagher, the member for Cabramatta, and her statement, according to you, that she would not support a particular initiative given that in her view it was against Labor policy. I take it from the context of what you said that she was referring then to your campaign or your request for a royal commission into the drug problem in Cabramatta?

Mr STEVENS: Yes that is correct. That is specifically what she was referring to.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You are not saying that she is other than supportive of adequate police resources to deal with the drug problem in Cabramatta, are you?

Mr STEVENS: She said that she is, but in fact I do not think she has been agitating the way she should. I mean, compare her representation of her constituency with Mr Newman's representation. It is quite different. Mr Newman was very outspoken. Mr Newman was screaming from the rooftops about the lack of police resources in the area. I am afraid that Ms Meagher has not followed in his footsteps in that regard.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: You are not suggesting, though, that Ms Meagher would be other than supportive of an adequate police presence in Cabramatta? I just want to confirm that you are criticising her primarily on the ground that she failed to support your requested initiative for a royal commission into policing in Cabramatta.

Mr STEVENS: I do not know what is in her mind or what her intentions are. What I am saying is that her representation on this issue of crime and policing in Cabramatta, by comparison with the performance of the previous local member, is severely lacking.

(The witness withdrew)

VINCENT DOAN, Team Leader, Open Family Street Work Service sworn and examined:

CHAIR: What is your full name?

Mr DOAN: Vincent Doan.

CHAIR: What is your occupation?

Mr DOAN: I am a team leader of the Open Family Street Work Service in Cabramatta, as well as Canberra.

CHAIR: What is your address?

Mr DOAN: The service address is 2/11 View Street, Cabramatta.

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr DOAN: My capacity firstly is on behalf of Open Family, which is one of the charity services working with street kids in Cabramatta, as well as the Fairfield Youth Network and other services in the area.

CHAIR: Did you receive a summons issued under my hand, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901?

Mr DOAN: Yes, I did.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr DOAN: Yes I am.

CHAIR: Will you please briefly outline your qualifications and experience as they are relevant to the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr DOAN: I have been asked many times what qualifications I have. I am sorry, I do not have any qualifications but, in terms of working in Cabramatta, I have been working here for 10 years. I have been working on the frontline and working on the street, trying to contact the street kids and build up a relationship with them. I have been here quite a long time.

CHAIR: Your organisation did not make a submission to the Committee. But if you should consider at any stage during your evidence that in the public interest certain evidence or documents you may wish to present to the Committee should be heard or seen only by the Committee, the Committee would be willing to accede to your request.

Mr DOAN: Fine, thank you.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make a brief oral statement to the Committee?

Mr DOAN: Okay. First, I would like to say thank you to the Committee for allowing me the opportunity to raise issues within the Cabramatta area and against the police. I am working with young people and I think it is an opportunity for me to raise certain issues facing young people in the area. I will talk briefly of what Open Family are doing to help the young people in Cabramatta.

Open Family is a charity organisation. It was established about 20 years ago in Melbourne and 10 or 20 years down the track we have a number of offices in different States—Canberra, Sydney and in the region. Open Family serves as an agency of last resort, supporting youth who have fallen through the net of traditional help and services. We do that to improve the wellbeing and self worth of the excluded Australian street children, through unconditional support whenever and wherever necessary with a view to reconnecting them with the community.

In Fairfield is where our Sydney office is based, and in Cabramatta we provide a number of services for street kids—namely, we are running home detox which is helping young people to give up the heroin habit, by working with the family to provide a friendly environment for them to do detox right at home. We run training courses for street kids, in conjunction with Liverpool TAFE, to provide some kind of half way for kids when they have finished detox so at least they have something to do to enable them to move on, rebuild their lives. We are working with different high schools to help those schools deal with what is referred to as "at risk" kids because we believe it is easier to deal with the kids when they are at school rather than to kick them out onto the street. We go to the high schools and help the staff and counsellors. We also go to preschools to help the kids to stay within the structure of the school. We facilitate outdoor recreational activity for the young folk as well. We visit juvenile detention centres because we believe that when the kids are released they need to have some kind of support. If they do not have that support they might fall back and commit crimes again.

We liaise with all the different members of the community, including shopkeepers, business people and members so that they work together to do something for young people. Lastly, but not the least, we act on behalf of young people in terms of raising awareness in the community. That is what we are doing in Fairfield and Cabramatta as well. Regarding the submission to the inquiry, it was written by a number of services and I am the one who is making the speech on behalf of all the others.

In regard to the terms of reference relating to the adequacy of police resources in Cabramatta, especially in relation to drug crime, we feel that the drug problem in Cabramatta has been in the media for a long time and drug-related crime is also an issue for many residents. While some people believe that the solution to it is more police on the street, we believe that the real, long-term solution lies in a whole range of community safety projects that need to be undertaken. They need to get together and look at some way to deal with the problem.

While police are doing their job in terms of street drug dealing, the issue of illegal drug trading is too complex to be dealt with simply by targeting the street dealers. I listened to the previous witness, who said that it does not matter how many police you have, the problem is still there because the problem is too complex to deal with. On top of that, many street dealers are users themselves so they are dealing to support their habit. Therefore, the number of police officers on the street will not be able to stop that dealing. They will merely change their location and manner of dealing.

On top of that, we, as welfare people, think that the drug problem in Cabramatta is the result of social and economic issues in the area that need to be addressed by a whole-of-government approach. The other thinking is that although there are a lot of resources put into the area and police resources, the priority should be given to prevention strategies and working with the community in order to deal with the problem. The focus of policing in Cabramatta needs to move from crime reduction to working in partnership with the community in crime prevention. To start this process we recommend that the community police team undertake community consultation to look at community needs and issues in terms of drug crime, develop an action plan and begin to develop strategies from the plan. The Cabramatta community organisations are happy to support this process.

We feel that the police need to be better trained on working and communicating with young people because the majority of what happens on the street involves young people. We think it is essential for them to be trained to deal with young people and how to work and communicate with them because most of the drug dealers are dealing to support their habit, so they are victims by themselves.

There also appears to be a commitment to community policing roles. By that, I mean the policing needs to be prioritised both at policy and procedural levels within the Police Service. We suggest it is important to increase the number of informed community interface officers, such as youth liaison officers, community safety officers and ethnic community liaison officers. In particular, the position of youth liaison officer and the community safety officer should be separate, full-time positions with clear guidelines and attractive career paths because we think that is really important. In the past these positions were filled not because people within the police force wanted to do that but because they did not see any career path and were just appointed to this position. In order to fulfil this duty people need to have some kind of commitment to making them full-time positions and so that police can have a career path. This will attract people to apply for the position rather than having someone appointed to that position.

Given the high youth population in Fairfield—in the 1996 census there were 40,000 people aged between 12 and 15—it is even more important to have the youth liaison officer within the police station. From our own research up to June, the first six months of the year 2000, there were only two referrals from police into conferencing. Conferencing is where we get young people before they go to the court, away from the court to deal with them. There were only two referrals in the first six months of the year 2000.

The second term of reference refers to the effectiveness of the Police Service in addressing the needs and problems of Cabramatta residents, in particular, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds [NESB]. We think that some NESB people are reluctant to go to the police. When they do make contact with the police they find that the police do not relate to them in a way that encourages them to make contact in future. In particular, we have been made aware that NESB residents are uncomfortable with the way police question them when they call for assistance. This suggests a need for in-depth cultural awareness training for the police, given the cultural and linguistic problems, and more information should be given to the community. An officer working at the front desk is the first point of contact and that person needs to be more approachable for people from NESB who also experience cultural and language barriers.

Police need to be aware that some migrants have experienced torture and trauma, which might generate fear and mistrust of people in uniform and in positions of authority. There is also minimal information given to the community regarding police services. This information should be provided in English and in community languages to improve access to police services. Community policing does not seem to be happening in Cabramatta. Community policing involves building a relationship of trust within the community, talking to community members, shopkeepers and such. That never happens in Cabramatta. Community policing is not just about walking on the streets and arresting people but it is also about positive interaction within the community.

Community policing involves a recognition that young people and drug users are part of the community too. Certainly, in the Cabramatta station we have a number of ethnic community liaison officers who are doing a good job within their guidelines. There needs to be an evaluation of all those positions with direct input from the community. We are aware of the review of the Commissioner of Police of the ethnic liaison officer but the community input into this review is not considered adequate. The position needs to be more proactive and more involved in community development, community education and crime prevention. The ethnic community liaison officer needs to work in partnership with the community and to serve as a bridge between the community and the police. Presently, the role of the ethnic liaison officer is

not made clear to the community, with some community members perceiving that the ethnic community liaison officer is acting as a police officer.

There has been no formal action where ethnic community liaison officers have presented their role within the community and this creates a gap in understanding what they do to assist the local communities in Fairfield. We also believe there is a need for a better complaint process, particularly in relation to young people and police so that feedback can be given to the area commander. The complaint process needs to be accessible, confidential and independent of the police. Only anonymous feedback should be provided to the area commander. I appreciate this opportunity to provide input to the inquiry.

CHAIR: You have given the Committee very constructive comments and suggestions. You said earlier that there was not sufficient rehabilitation and intoxicating units in the area. You mentioned in your submission that you do quite a bit of home detoxification.

Mr DOAN: Yes, that is right.

CHAIR: Can you elaborate on home detoxification, how it is cost effective and the positive and negative aspects of it?

Mr DOAN: As I am saying, we are in the front line and the majority of people we are dealing with are drug users. They always want to quit; they want to get out of the whole thing. Unfortunately, we do not have many services to cater for their needs. We have one detoxification service in Fairfield that was built about two years ago and they were already at full capacity when 20 beds were provided a year ago. We are only 20 beds available at any one time and we need much more than that. There have been requests by them for beds because they want to give it up but we cannot refer them to an outer area because each area has their own priorities for local residents. A person living in Fairfield who tries to approach another detoxification unit outside the area will not be given priority and with only 20 beds in Fairfield, it is difficult to access the service.

We have to do something. That is why we thought that home detoxification would be the best thing because most of the kids have said that they went through the detoxification service already and have felt that they are not getting the proper support. They say, "They just put me in a room and do not support me. I know that physically I am going to go through all the pain but mentally that is what I need, but I have no support." Using the family environment, with the love and care from parents, will fill those gaps and that is why we hope to have home detoxification. The kids will be able to go home and have the love and care of their parents throughout their detoxification and it will be easier for them to do well at home because it is a more friendly environment. It is cost effective. Basically, it costs about 10 or 15 bucks to get the medication from the chemist and we have support from a doctor in Fairfield who is quite famous and has been doing this for 10 years, so he knows how to support the kids and prescribe the medication for them.

The negative part of it is that we are the only ones who do that. It takes about seven days to support the parents and the kids, to complete the whole process. We have only four workers to do that. If we have one kid in, that is seven days that one worker has to be there 24 hours today, just to be able to do that for one kid. If we take four kids, we cannot do anything else—we cannot do our job; we cannot do other things. So for us it is time-consuming. Even though we think we can do that, it is too much for us to handle everything. We have had to turn down a lot of requests from young people because firstly we do not have the resources and secondly we do not have the time.

In our survey we have seen that the success rate is quite high. Sixty to 70 per cent of the kids who go through our program are completely detoxed. So, yes, it is cost-effective. Another reason that it is quite beneficial to do that is that most of the kids, when they are using drugs, do

not want their parents to know. That is why they run away from home. They do not want the parents to know. So if we can get the family to be involved, then we can get the kids back home. So with one shot we can kill two birds: the kids will be able to stay at home and do the detox, and somehow they will be able to get back with the family and we are able to build up the relationship between the family and the kids.

CHAIR: You referred to community policing. Do you have any idea how the relationship between the police and the kids can be built up?

Mr DOAN: As I mentioned in our inquiry, certainly if we have the youth liaison officer within the police department that will help us to develop that kind of relationship between the police and the young people. We have learned that the positions have been filled about three or four weeks ago. Also, on top of that, as I mentioned in our inquiry, the position has never been an attractive career path anyway, so no-one would want to go for the position. You have to do your duty as a police officer as well as act as a youth liaison officer. Yes, if we had that position in place it would help us to build up our relationship with the young people.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: Are you saying that the position has been filled by a police officer?

Mr DOAN: Yes. Basically what happens is that the commander will appoint someone to the position. But we feel that the position should be open. Sure, it is open for everyone to apply for, but because there is no career path no-one wants to apply for it, so in the end someone has to fill the position and they will be assigned to that position by the commander.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: May I congratulate Mr Doan on his evidence; I think it is excellent.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: Firstly, I thank you for opening up your facility so that we could meet with some of the young people. I wonder whether you would be prepared for some of the young people to address the next hearing. We would then have an opportunity to listen to them to confirm that they are from an underprivileged community, and to confirm what you have said today, that is, that some of the young people are victims and they are now in control of themselves. I was reading the magazine that the young people published, and I was very impressed by the fact that they think that they do have a future. Would you ensure that those young people are able to address us themselves?

Mr DOAN: I think I can do that, but not in this public hearing in this set-up, because I think it will intimidate them. But if the Committee members are willing to come to Cabramatta again and want to have a chat with the kids informally, I do not see any problem with that at all.

CHAIR: Perhaps I should say that that must be decided by the Committee. Certainly we have spoken about the fact that we will hold another meeting in the future, perhaps next year.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Would it be a fair summary of your evidence this afternoon that although the terms of reference for this inquiry are skewed towards police resourcing to deal with the drug problem in Cabramatta, in your view police resources are but one part of a complete whole which is filled out by other initiatives of a social character, health resourcing, and so on?

Mr DOAN: Yes. We believe that there needs to be some kind of consultation within the community whenever the Government initiates some kind of funding into the community. So far, in the past couple of years I know that all that resource activity has been put into the police. We are not saying that the police do not have the resources. I think they do have the

resources to do some things for the community. But for other services in the area we need to have some kind of resources put in for ourselves so that we can help the young people.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: As to the ethnic community liaison officers, I gather it is your view that the police have perhaps insufficiently communicated the role of the ECLOs, is that right?

Mr DOAN: I guess that is my view. I think the position itself is really important, because it establishes a link between the police and the community itself. In the past couple of years we have not seen any kind of consultation between the police and the community, so that we are in the position of somehow not being used in the capacity that can fulfil the duty, which is to get the community to work together with the police.

The Hon. R. D. DYER: Is it your opinion that there should be perhaps more ECLOs locally to deal with the ethnic communities?

Mr DOAN: I think that would be a dream. In the Fairfield area we have more than 100 national background people living here. There is no way we are going to have 100 community liaison officers for each of the languages, but if the number could be increased that would be a help. I guess what I am trying to say is that the position itself should be reviewed. It has been here for 10 years and we have not seen any review or evaluation of the position, to see whether it has adequately reduced the drug problem or whether a new direction is to be taken to tackle the drug problem here.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Thank you for showing us your facility earlier this afternoon. I think it is very modest for the work you do. You said that your facility is a last resort facility. How many kids would you say you help per year?

Mr DOAN: Firstly we do street work, which means we are out there on the street trying to contact the kids. So firstly we have contact with the kids, which is like trying to build up a relationship with them. Then we define the kids that we are working with, and they are two different kinds of kids. So we go out there and talk to the kids, but there is not necessarily an outcome yet because we have not done anything with them. In that context, we can see 100 kids in a day, because we have four workers around the street.

As I mentioned earlier, if we take a case for a whole detox, it takes us seven days just for one kid, because we are working intensively with that kid. We work in the way that we think the kid needs support all the way, and when they are able to stand up by themselves then we let them go. We are not going to stop right there. During the day we see 100 kids. But then, if the kids are able to tell us honestly what their problems are and what their background is, we sit down with them and work through the casework with them. My view is that to refer them to a counsellor causes more anguish for them to see the counsellor instead of seeing us. But it takes us some time to build up a trust relationship with the kid.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Do you help all of the kids out there whom you think you could help?

Mr DOAN: Whoever turns up, whoever sees us, regardless of who they are or what their background is. We see a lot of Asian background people. But as you saw, we have different background kids who come to our office as well. Our office is open for everyone. We are actually working for young people, but during the day we have older people come in as well. Drugs are used not only by young people but by older people as well. So we open our doors for other people as well.

The Hon. G. S. PEARCE: Could you do with some more support from the State Government?

Mr DOAN: Yes. I wish I had more.

The Hon. H. S. TSANG: And the councils?

Mr DOAN: Yes. The councils are supporting us at this stage. As I mentioned at lunch, the biggest issue is not only in terms of drugs but also homelessness. A lot of young people are homeless, and on top of that they have the drug problem. The criteria for all the agencies in the area is that they will not take anyone who has a drug problem. So we end up with a bunch of kids that have nowhere to stay, and we cannot put them anywhere. We have the support of the council in looking at how to deal with the issue. So, yes, we do have the support of the council in doing that.

CHAIR: Would you prefer more resources going to the police or more resources going to the community to deal with this kind of problem?

Mr DOAN: Sure, I wish that the Government could put more resources into the community. Nevertheless, more should be put into the police. Without the police I would not say that we would have a safe community to live in. I guess my point is that we need to look at the problems widely and openly so that we can share the resources to do something for the community, instead of putting all the resources into the police.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I do not have any questions, but I would like to thank you very much. I am sure that what you have put before us will be very significant in our work.

CHAIR: You referred to the inadequacy of the complaint process. How would you like to see it improved?

Mr DOAN: The procedure of complaining to the police is that when you follow the file into the commander, it is written on the papers and the complaint would have to be given to the Ombudsman and that would be dealt with by the Ombudsman first, and then the Ombudsman will contact the internal affairs of the police department, and internal affairs will take that complaint and deal with it by itself and then send a report back to the Ombudsman. We say that the process takes too long. There is no point in making complaints to the police if they are dealt with by the police anyway. Again, the young people themselves are fairly intimidated by that, because they have to see the police, the complaint has to be filed by the police, and the police interview you. It does not make sense to them. Secondly, the Ombudsman should have what we call a youth worker to take that complaint from the young people. We know that as an adult we are able to communicate and express ourselves quite clearly, but young people do not know how to do that. In order to work with them, we have to be on their level and be able to deal with them. It is important that we are able to communicate with them so that they can express what they are feeling.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: I refer to page 5 regarding the ECLOs. Am I right in assuming that there appears to be a lack of understanding on the part of the police as to the role of the ECLOs?

Mr DOAN: As I mentioned earlier, we believe that the role of the ECLO is to link with and get the community working with the police department towards resolving the problems faced by the community. We have not seen that happening in recent years. I can make it quite clear that in the last couple of years we have not had any consultation with the police regarding the problems that we have here.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: Do you think that is not because any party is not willing, but merely a matter of the appropriate facilitation not being put in place?

Mr DOAN: That is one way to say that. The other way, I guess, is that the community liaison officer positions were established 10 years ago and, as I said, in the long run things change—the community changes, society changes. It needs to be with the position itself. For 10 years there has been no evaluation of the position—there may have been, but we do not know. We want an opportunity to have input into that position, to make it more viable for the community. We regard it as a vital position for us to be able to work with the police department, taking into consideration that most of the people who live in Fairfield, as well as in Cabramatta, are from a non-English speaking background. They do not have the linguistic skill to communicate with the police. I think it is vital and essential for a position within the Police Service to have some kind of link with the community.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: With your excellent qualifications in this area, are you able to give me an assessment as to how many referrals there should have been by the Cabramatta command during the first six months of 2000?

Mr DOAN: It was only two.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: As opposed to those two.

Mr DOAN: There were only two referrals, as far as we know.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: Could you give me an estimate based on your expert opinion as to roughly how many referrals there should have been?

Mr DOAN: I am not sure because I am not there and aware of the police doing their job of arresting and charging people. Given what we call the diversionary policy within the Government of trying to give our young people, particularly young kids, a chance to rehabilitate themselves, that instead of them going to the court to be dealt with by the magistrate certain matters could be dealt with out of court. Firstly, it would be cost-effective because we would not have to pay the court costs. In the past there has been input from the community that the victims want to be there to talk to those who have committed the crime. A conference would provide an opportunity for the victims to be there and to have an input into the process of giving any kind of punishment to the young person—taking into account that a lot of young people happen to be on the street when arrested by the police. I do not have any figures or statistics to say how many should be, but I think two is too few. If the Committee wants to have a chat with the young people in the area I will be more than happy to organise that.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.45 p.m.)
