

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

**At Waterloo Neighbourhood Centre on
Friday, 15 October 2004**

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. Kayee Griffin

The Hon. Robyn Parker

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BETTY BULLIVANT, HARRY HARDY, BARBERA HILLBRINK, ALICE KING, NORAH McGUIRE, MARLENE NEWTON, ROSS SMITH and DIANA WHITWORTH, Waterloo Neighbourhood Advisory Board, before the Committee:

CHAIR: Could I start by thanking you all for coming here today. It is very important to us that we hear your views, particularly because so far, although our inquiry is specifically about issues relating to both Redfern and Waterloo, a lot of what we have heard is about Redfern and a lot of the media coverage and so on has been focused on Redfern, so it is very useful to hear your views.

Could I stress, in case it is not clear, that as an upper House committee we represent the Legislative Council, in other words the Parliament, and not the Government, so we are given an inquiry to do by the Legislative Council, we do the best job we can, we make a report and we make recommendations. What we do not have is power. We can't decide what changes might happen and we don't have any money to make change happen, if that is what is needed, but we can draw attention to needs and problems and we can make strong recommendations to Government and then Government has to report back to the Parliament on what it is going to do about things.

This is a private hearing, but we are recording it and we will have a transcript. What we normally do in those circumstances is that, at the end of the hour, in this case, we will ask if you have any objection to the transcript becoming public because it is important that parliamentary inquiries like ours be open and visible. We can easily delete names, if you do not want your names or if none of you wants your name in the transcript, and we can delete certain other things and still keep the transcript, but it is important to remember that, while we want you to be honest and frank with us about the issues that you see as important, we want to keep as far as we can away from talking about individual people because on the whole obviously our job is to look at the issues which affect the community and we don't want to be in a situation where we have a permanent record of things being said about individuals because that then raises the issue that they may want to come and reply and so on. On the whole we can usually get across a fairly clear idea of what we think about things without needing to name names.

The only other thing I would like to do is thank Norah and thank all of you for having us here and giving us the opportunity to hear from you. Norah, would you like to say anything before we start?

Ms McGUIRE: What I would like to say is that we have been worried about the fact that there has been a focus on Redfern and Waterloo has been missing out, so we are very pleased to have you here, Chair, and the rest of your Committee.

CHAIR: Thank you. We are conscious of that and we have tried and will continue to try to make sure that Waterloo gets its fair share of attention. You have our terms of reference, so you know roughly what our Committee's brief is. We thought that we would jot down a few broad questions so that you know the sorts of things that we are interested in you telling us about, but we often find we hop around all over the place. We would like you to tell us what you think needs to be done to make Waterloo a better place to live. We are taking it for granted that it is not perfect, that it needs improvement, but we want to hear your views about what the problems are and what you think could be done, practically speaking, to make Waterloo a better place.

Ms WHITWORTH: It would be nice if we got some of the services back that just disappeared. Waterloo does not exist as far as people are concerned. They closed the bank, they closed the post office, they closed the schools, they closed the hospitals. We've got nothing. We just sit here. All we've got are those little shops out there that you can see, absolutely no services otherwise. Everybody here in Waterloo has to go for a walk. They even tried to close down retirement in Centrelink and, thanks to the protest of the tenants, you now get a retirement person at Redfern two days a week, yet a huge amount of the people here are actually retirees. They're on the pension. They deal with disability, they deal with single parents, they deal with all of those, but they don't want to deal with aged pensioners and there are millions of them around the place. It is ridiculous. We have no services in this place at all. We all have to march off to Redfern to get

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anything.

CHAIR: What does that involve, getting a bus?

Ms WHITWORTH: What bus?

Ms McGUIRE: It also, for some of us, involves paying for taxis if we can't use public transport. The community transport is overwhelmed and I for one don't ask community transport to take me anywhere because I think there are others that need it more, but it is very hard when you are on a pension and you have to pay a taxi fare, and they keep going up too. Just to go to Redfern it will cost probably \$12-13, there and back.

CHAIR: To get a cab?

Ms McGUIRE: Yes.

CHAIR: What is wrong with the bus service?

Ms WHITWORTH: The bus service runs along Elizabeth Street, which doesn't go to anything up at Redfern. If you want to get the 309 or the 310, which actually does run along Redfern Street, you have to go all the way down the bottom to Botany Road. The only bus that actually runs through the estate is the 355 and it actually does go through the estate, but it goes from Bondi to Marrickville via Newtown. It doesn't go anywhere near the hospital, I might add. If you want to go to hospital, two buses - it doesn't matter which one you're going to, St Vincent's, Prince of Wales, RPA - they're all two buses. And when you've got three kids, absolutely gorgeous, getting on and off buses.

Mr HARDY: Say you want to go to town on a bus, you have to walk through to Botany Road and Raglan Street. That bus eventually takes you along Redfern Street. People say, well, why don't you walk up to Redfern Street? The people are that old, if you were to stay here for a day and see them, 90 percent of them are on walking sticks or worse. They would never get up the hill to get to Redfern Street. It is all right when they are coming back from town, they can get off up at the post office and walk down the hill, it is a bit better for them, because if they come right through to Botany Road they have to walk up hill to get back.

CHAIR: So these services used to be better?

Mr HARDY: I have only been here not quite three years and in that time they have got no worse, but no better. You have a half-hour wait if you're going to Bondi Junction, but they never run on time. Some people say, what, are they late? Sometimes they are early.

Ms NEWTON: And two come together.

Mr HARDY: Yes, and it is the same when you go across to the other end of the run, across to the Metro at Marrickville, it's the same thing.

CHAIR: So is the Metro at Marrickville your nearest shopping centre?

Mr HARDY: No. I am still able to walk. I walk to the old Grace Bros building to the Bi-Lo shop over there to do my shopping.

CHAIR: In Broadway?

Mr HARDY: Yes, it takes me about 20 minutes to walk over and then, with my shopping trolley, my cart - it is full - it might take me a little over half an hour to walk back, but it saves me, I'd sit here most of the time, and when I don't do that I normally walk from here to Circular Quay and back of a morning and then walk from here to the Town Hall and back of an afternoon, just to keep fit.

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Mr SMITH: In relation to the bus problem, besides all the services being around the estate with the odd single one going through, the proposed increase in fares from \$1.10 for a concession to \$2.50 is going to have a dramatic effect because over 90 percent of the people in this area are concession card holders and that is their sole means of transport. It is a day out for them as well as their means of getting to a shopping centre, a doctor or other services. While it doesn't sound much, that \$1.40 is a loaf of bread a day, which adds up.

CHAIR: So transport is a big issue.

Mr SMITH: Ongoing affordability of transport, accessibility to it, social isolation factors and everything else.

The Rachel Foster Hospital, the old Rachel Foster site is still empty and no one will tell us what is happening with it. We are in the centre of a huge population of aged people. You have two 30-storey towers over here filled with people who are 55 and older, plus the other ones scattered through the area. There is no close medical facility, whether it was just an emergency service where they would shift them on to a local hospital or not. That site has sat empty for years now and no one will tell us what they are doing with it, we can't find out what is happening with it, and that could supply immediate access to medical services for such a large population group to use.

Ms NEWTON: I agree with Ross. I can remember us taking up petitions for Rachel Foster well before it closed. I used to go to physiotherapy up there in the pool, which was absolutely marvellous, and then the next thing it is closed and I haven't been able to go since because I can't get to Prince of Wales, I am not going to take two buses.

CHAIR: Is Prince of Wales your official local hospital?

Ms NEWTON: No, the RPA is closer and St Vincent's, it just depends where the ambulance is going to take you. You don't know where you are going to end up. When you have to go back to see the doctors that you have seen, you have to get the bus into town and get a bus out of town, and back in and back out again and then home. That was one big thing that we did fight hard for to see if we could, even if it was turned into a nursing home or something, because there is nothing near. When people go to nursing homes, we can't go and visit them because there is no transport. We haven't got a hope in hell actually because there are a few others that have cars here and they are absolutely marvellous and what we would do without the few that have a car who are so generous - we would not get anywhere.

CHAIR: So you have really come back to stress the transport issue in relation to health services as well.

Ms NEWTON: Yes, for health services.

Ms BULLIVANT: What health services?

Ms McGuire: Ross actually brought up a couple of points I was thinking about. One of them is social isolation and it is not just about older people who are isolated, if you do not have good transport, if you are a young family and you do not have a car, and let's face it, the majority of people in this area are people on low incomes, we are the most disadvantaged area in New South Wales, and also there is a large population of people with disabilities. When you are looking at transport, that is a problem as well, but it is also about services, because what you have got is people with disabilities and older people who are having to compete for services, and we are always told there is not enough money to extend the services. Things like community care, nursing, which of course comes through HACC now, but all those kinds of services, people need to stay within their own community. Then, as Marlene said, if people have to move to supported accommodation or to something like a nursing home, they have to move out of the area, so they go away from their networks, they go away from their families.

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Having worked in this area a lot right throughout Australia, I have seen a lot of disadvantaged areas, but I have never seen one as bad as this. I really haven't. Over the years since I came here, that is 13 years ago, things have gradually disappeared, sometimes not so gradually, and it is all very hard to keep some of them, I must say. My days of rallying are over, but we used to do it. It was the only way to try to get things done.

CHAIR: The people on the estate, the average age has probably grown, and disability.

Ms McGUIRE: Yes, but it is not just about age; it is the fact that the income is going down. We have got 2600 public housing units in Waterloo, and nowadays you do not get into public housing unless you are on a supporting benefit or pension. There are some people who are working, yes, and we hope we can increase those numbers, but the problem is that it probably will be the opposite. The numbers of people who are being forced onto benefits, and of course, as people get older, onto pensions, it is going to increase. There is no balance. That is going up; services are going down.

Ms BULLIVANT: There are two things I want to bring up. For years Ross, Diane myself, and Charlie Levi, have been trying to get a letter box in between Turanga and Matavai so the older people do not have to walk up the hill to post a letter, and we have been trying that long to get a letter box there. We were promised we would get one. I am still waiting for it. Another thing is too that the council is taking a lot of seats away. When the old people go and do their shopping they can sit down and rest, but they are taking those seats away and the old people have got to stand and wait there for a while, and they are just taking the seats away, even around this place. We would like some more seats on the Housing Commission's area.

CHAIR: Do you mean in the Housing Commission area or in Redfern shopping centre?

Ms BULLIVANT: Redfern shopping centre and the Housing Commission area.

Mr HARDY: Some of the streets around this area, like Phillip Street, Pitt Street, Raglan Street, Wellington Street, if we could have a few more there, and when some of the hoons in the area start destroying them - like there is one out on Phillip Street between Matavai and Turanga, they are made up of four slats that you sit on that are bolted down. There is one there now with two slats left, with one bolt in the end of one and a bolt in the end of the other one, but I would say within another week there will be no slats left on it.

CHAIR: Is that the responsibility of the Department of Housing?

Mr HARDY: No, that is on the footpath; that is the council's.

Ms HILLBRINK: Also between the buildings of Matavai and Turanga, that is Sydney City Council's responsibility, there should be a through-way to both George Street there and George Street there, but they have made a park there so people can walk, and bicycles, no cars.

CHAIR: Some of the things that you are saying you need are actually quite cheap, aren't they, like a letterbox?

Ms BULLIVANT: Yes.

Ms HILLBRINK: We have been trying to get a letterbox for more than ten years.

Mr HARDY: We are spending years trying to get it and getting nowhere. It is the same with the building I live in, 29 storeys, there are two of them. We complain no end. We get mental health patients shoved in on us because there is nowhere else to put them. They play up, so we ring up Rachael Foster Hospital where there is an agency there for them and a lot of other medical places. Who finishes up coming down to see what is going on? They don't come down. They ring the police and the police come down. They are just passing the buck to someone else.

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Ms KING: Recently a mentally ill patient was moved to my floor. I live on the fifteenth floor and I have lived there 15 years and that floor is a very good floor, all the tenants are very good, elderly. I am a single mum, I do not have a man at home, and recently they moved a quite young man up there and he makes a lot of trouble and wee along the corridor and vomit everywhere, and he wanted to jump down too. He speak to the fourteenth floor one and the balcony, and the fourteenth floor, the lady came one morning and knock on my door and say he wanted to jump down. So I rang the police and the police came with the ambulance and took him away. I think the Department of Housing is removing him to a lower floor. They came in one night and had a party until one or two o'clock and the opposite neighbour rang the police. The police do not come, do not bother to do anything. We want to have a question. For instance, the woman died, with OOO, just like that, you see. You never know if a terrorist is in the Department of Housing and bring something weird to us.

CHAIR: If we go to some of the services like police, health, the Department of Housing, what sort of comment would you make about the police for instance?

Mr SMITH: Of all the Government agencies in the area, the police maybe give us the best service of the lot. They are under-staffed.

CHAIR: When you say "the best service", are they the quickest to respond?

Mr SMITH: Quality of service for all of our concerns, good attitude in the face of mental health issues, commendable, they are more sympathetic, better value than the crisis mental health team themselves.

CHAIR: When you say police, do you mean the police from Redfern Local Area Command?

Mr SMITH: Yes, the Redfern Local Area Command. They are better than the crisis response team. The team is a crisis in itself. I have personally watched them. They have run out the door and left a patient there in a screaming heap.

CHAIR: Let's ask some of the others what you think about the police first and then we will come back to them.

Ms BULLIVANT: The Police Service, sometimes they are all right and sometimes they are not. It all depends. You might get a young person on the telephone up there. We ask for a name. They will not give it. So we will say, "What is going on?" You are still waiting there. Another thing they say is, "Is it black, white or brindle", and if we say, "It is black", forget about it.

CHAIR: Is that when you are complaining about--

Ms BULLIVANT: That is when people complain in my building, and when we have got a mental health there and we say they are unbalanced, we are still waiting for them to come down about two hours after. There was another thing I was going to bring up before. We had a meeting with mental health and we were told we have got to give them their tablets. We do not know what sort of tablets to give them. We can't look after them. We are not qualified nurses or doctors.

CHAIR: Who said you have to give people tablets?

Ms BULLIVANT: Mental health.

Ms McGuire: The suggestion was that because of the lack of resources for people with mental health problems, that perhaps the neighbours could help. We were not told we had to, but making sure they took their medication. Now, that is just not on.

Ms HILLBRINK: It is not our responsibility.

Ms McGuire: The lack of resources means that those are the type of silly things they are

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coming up with.

CHAIR: Is that a very recent suggestion at a recent meeting?

Ms BULLIVANT: Yes.

CHAIR: Last week, last month, this year, last year?

Ms BULLIVANT: Last year. Every now and again mental health goes on, not last year, it is this year too.

Ms KING: Yes, this year.

CHAIR: Do you have community nurses and other health services who visit the estate at all or do you have to go out for any service?

Mr HARDY: When these people are put in the building, especially our building, they have a carer bring them in. The carer disappears, and you see the carer come in about a week later. It could be three months later that you next see that carer. No-one is looking after them.

Ms McGUIRE: That is the lack of resources; that is the problem.

CHAIR: Are we talking about mental health?

Ms McGUIRE: There is a lack of resources all round, but the mental health one is the problem about they will make arrangements for someone to come to have somewhere live, to make sure that they know where it is, whatever, settle them in, but then they do not have the staff to come back and to keep visiting. Sometimes it is not about taking medication; sometimes it is not about doing very much more than visits and talk to them. Ross just mentioned, I don't know whether you heard about it, about the Department of Housing fact sheet?

Mr SMITH: Fact sheet number 7, social housing policy. That specifically had "We look after the mentally ill" in it.

Ms BULLIVANT: On top of that, you have got drug addicts coming into the building.

CHAIR: Is that a big problem?

Ms BULLIVANT: Yes.

Ms KING: Yes.

Ms NEWTON: Yes.

CHAIR: You mean people coming in from outside, people who do not live on the estate?

Ms BULLIVANT: That is right.

CHAIR: Where do they come from?

Ms BULLIVANT: Everywhere.

Ms KING: They deal in drugs.

CHAIR: Are there dealers living on the estate?

Ms KING: Yes.

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Mr HARDY: You may have people living in the buildings who are selling the drugs. We have one in our building, and he was there selling, only selling marijuana they say, from about two years before I even moved into the building. About 15 months ago the department decided to ask him to move. Where did they move him? To another suburb, to another housing department building? We don't know if the same thing could still be going on but in a new building.

CHAIR: Has the new policy about moving people, kicking them out all together been--

Mr HARDY: No.

Ms WHITWORTH: No.

Ms McGUIRE: It is not in place yet. You mean the amendments to the--

CHAIR: The recent amendments but there is an older one too.

Ms McGUIRE: No, they do not.

CHAIR: Did it work?

Ms McGUIRE: No, it didn't work actually.

Mr SMITH: I would suggest to you, Mrs Burnswoods, the department has always had the ability under the Residential Tenancies Act to address nuisance and annoyance issues. It has failed to do so. There are tenants who are taking the department to the CTTT to have the department ordered to comply with the Act there. These matters are then appealed to the Supreme Court. The recent one was Mr Ingram, where the Supreme Court upheld that Mr Ingram was entitled to the use and enjoyment of his premises. The department has failed in the past to utilise its powers under the Residential Tenancies Act and there is no reason to believe they will use the new bells and whistles to achieve the result that they have failed to achieve in the past.

CHAIR: Would there be many people on the estate that you think these powers should be used against? Would it be one in 100, one in 1000, lots and lots?

Ms NEWTON: Lots.

Mr SMITH: We had a very recent experience on this estate where a long-term grower was convicted. For once, after a lot of pressure went on from tenant reps and some Department of Housing staff themselves, despite the police belief in the matter who wished to milk the convicted dealer for information, the department actually utilised the laws to have the tenancy terminated. The amount of pressure it took the estate to achieve that was phenomenal and it should not have to be.

CHAIR: When was that?

Mr SMITH: That matter was finalised in the last couple of months.

Ms HILLBRINK: As far as the druggies are concerned, you can't help, in some buildings - the dealers are living in the building. They let the druggies in to get it and then they let them out again, so I don't think the department can do anything about that and we can't either because that is the Privacy Act.

Ms McGUIRE: Except that we did do something in our meeting because an inspector from Redfern was here, we had the police as part of it, and he took down the details because there are some problems. Matavai and Turanga at the moment--

Ms HILLBRINK: Yes.

Ms McGUIRE: He is going to get somebody to look at that, because that is the only we can

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do it. As tenants, we have to help the police to police the area. That is the only way we can do it because they can't be everywhere and if you need them they usually are there, it is just that it is overwhelming, the work that needs to be done in this area.

If I may continue, one of the things that happened was I think Harry was talking about seats - and I, for one, would love some seats along these streets - however, one of the reasons why young people and children do those kinds of things is because there is nothing for them here. I live at the end of George Street in what is called the three-storey walk-ups. We don't even have an area for them to play in. They play in the street; the young children have to play in the street. When we talked about that we were told there was Waterloo oval. What woman with children, and more than one quite often, has the time to take a child or two over there and stay with them for several hours so that they can play? Children have to be able to get out and play and here there is nowhere for them. There is nothing for them to do and, of course, as they get older that leads to more problems - not with all the children, there are some really good ones around the area, but it is all stacked against them.

CHAIR: What about in the tower blocks, are there many children?

Mr SMITH: If I could raise an issue in relation to the children playing, we are seeing now a longstanding one with Redfern oval where for years it was leased to the local leagues club, they were meant to look after the grounds, look after the premises, and the gates were meant to be open of an afternoon for the kids to go and play in there. The padlocks have been on the gates ever since the leagues club has been there, the stand has deteriorated, the grounds are kept locked, and that is a large open green space denied to the children of this area. Waterloo oval is at one end; that is at the other end. The kids are being denied the use of open green space seven days a week by a football club that can't abide by its original lease, which is a shame, and I would come back to DOCS in this area. DOCS should be shot. They have failed to deliver the services that they pay out for. They have failed to verify that different organisations and different groups are doing what they are being paid for. The amount of money we are seeing wasted for no result--

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What do you think it is wasted on?

Mr SMITH: Failing to supervise the services.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Which services are not being delivered and how do you know--

Mr SMITH: Children, youth - I know by watching, I know by having seen the funding agreements, I know by dealing with the local DOCS staff and it has been raised through to their director general that they are not physically going to check--

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Which organisations are not delivering the goods?

Mr SMITH: A classic one I could refer to in this area would be South Sydney Community Aid. It has been running on 50 percent staff capacity for the last year. It receives a lot of funding and it is not delivering the services it is funded for.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If it is only 50 percent staffed it would deliver less service, wouldn't it?

Mr SMITH: Well, this issue was raised with their director general. The regional director responds on behalf of the director general saying: I am happy with the service delivery. How can you deliver when you are running at 50 percent staff? It would only be a matter of looking at their wage book.

CHAIR: Betty, do you have a comment about DOCS?

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Ms BULLIVANT: I could tell you where I would put DOCS, but they are not doing anything. We even here, when they used to come to our meetings, used to tell them where they could go and find these children, running in the streets, knocking old ladies over, taking their handbags, knocking old men over, taking their money. It is not only that, but when the police pick them up they go up to Redfern police and they stay there for two hours and then the police take them home. In ten minutes they are up here again doing exactly the same thing. They spit at the people, they shoot rocks at them and things like that.

CHAIR: What sort of ages are you talking about?

Ms BULLIVANT: I am talking ages of kids up to 16 and 17.

CHAIR: And how young?

Ms HILLBRINK: Seven, eight.

Mr SMITH: Four, five.

CHAIR: Are there a few causing a lot of problems?

Ms BULLIVANT: There's a whole lot of children, they're running around, they bring their friends in. We're lucky sometimes, we get smashed windows, and that goes for the walk-ups, the high-rises - they've got nothing to do so they pick up a couple of rocks and break them, or keep running through the door and writing filthy things on the wall, all that, in the hallways and like that. It is that bad and they attack the very frail, they attack the frail people, and if you have dogs running around they attack them, but this is not right. We tell DOCS this and they just look at us like we are stupid.

CHAIR: Are you talking about children that you think DOCS should remove from their families or are you talking about children who should be charged by the police?

Ms BULLIVANT: I'm actually saying DOCS have got to do something.

CHAIR: Yes, but are they children that you think should be removed from their families?

Ms BULLIVANT: I think that DOCS should have something to say to the parents and, if they don't do it, well, take them and give them a couple of weeks without their kids. They take them around to the hotel and sit them on the corner while they are in the hotel drinking. We have told DOCS this, but they don't do anything because they've got nowhere to put the kids.

Ms NEWTON: Two nights ago at about 9 o'clock my husband walked in and one of the guards was outside - we have guards on at night at Turanga and Matavai.

CHAIR: How many?

Ms NEWTON: One.

CHAIR: One per block?

Ms HARDY: No, one for two blocks.

Ms NEWTON: There were about nine young children from five up to about 10. I had been watching them out the side window that goes over towards Solanda where there is a car park and I had been watching them there for about half an hour. They didn't get up to mischief that I could ring the police, by breaking cars or entering or anything like that, they were just running wild. When John came home he said, "I've just seen the best thing, the guard down there can't handle the kids. We can't ring DOCS because they're not on duty. Where are the parents of these children?" He had to tell the

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guard on no account are they to be let into the building. If they get into our building, the fire hoses are put on and everything goes crazy.

CHAIR: Where do these kids live?

Ms NEWTON: Around the area, you wouldn't know where they live. None live in Turanga or Matavai, but every other building has children.

CHAIR: Could I come back to something Norah mentioned? You said, Norah, that the police are actually part of the neighbourhood advisory board. I think maybe somebody suggested DOCS used to come. Are there other agencies, and what role does the Department of Housing and its officers play?

Ms McGUIRE: Well, the Department of Housing funds an HCAP worker, that is Housing Communities Assistance Programme, who resources the NAB. The NAB has got a representative for each what we call precinct - we have 11 precincts in Waterloo - and there are agencies involved in the NAB as well. They are there by invitation of the tenant reps. DOCS is one of them because we believe that DOCS should be here. The problem is that very seldom anybody turns up and we keep on getting to them and asking them to commit to be part of the process, but they are not doing it and we don't know what else we can do.

CHAIR: Is there anyone else - the police?

Ms McGUIRE: We have police, yes.

CHAIR: So the police come?

Ms McGUIRE: Yes.

CHAIR: DOCS don't come, but Housing are part of it?

Ms McGUIRE: Housing are part of it, yes. We have just recently changed a couple and we have what is called the Redfern Centre, which involves a whole lot of services including youth services, non-government, community health - community and mental health, basically one person represents both of those. I've forgotten who the others are now.

Mr SMITH: The city council, health, police and the Department of Housing are your four government agencies.

CHAIR: Does anyone else come in if you need them?

Mr SMITH: We can bring others in if we need them, which comes down to another point. This area has been a social engineering laboratory for that long - as you have seen, there are miles of reports done by every government body, every social engineer, every university mob and so on - and the area has been over-consulted, even the Attorney General's Department recognises that, and the people in this area smell a social researcher before he gets within miles of the place and they are all fed up with having promises made to them how things are going to be changed and the nine to five researcher discovers that they didn't really know what they were doing, gets on their pushbike and goes home and leaves a bowl of busted promises behind them and a lot of funding destroyed that could have been used for a constructive result.

Ms McGUIRE: And one of the very basic promises is that they often consult us and they promise that we will get the results and we never do. They can't even keep that promise.

CHAIR: What do you mean, like a copy of the reports?

Ms McGUIRE: Yes. Nothing is going to come of it. It doesn't. I saw this in another way when I was with my pensioners. Consultants are paid large amounts of money to go and do some

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research and they will come to organisations like ours, make us spend our time, our resources, asking questions, telling them what's what and they go away and that is it. This has happened to us. In the last couple of years it has been really bad, but well before that. The last couple of years it has been really bad. We have got people who want to come and talk to us. We don't mind if we have people working out how to do things with us, that is fine. There are obviously going to be agencies here.

CHAIR: Do things "with", not do things "for"?

Ms McGUIRE: No, we don't want things to be done for us. We are not stupid. We are quite capable of looking after ourselves, but we need help with that, we need resources. One of the things I have got to stress again - it is my favourite word - there are children, there are families, there are older people, people with disabilities, people with psychiatric problems, people with other health problems, and the one thing that is a big problem for all of them is the lack of resources.

Ms NEWTON: And it is alcohol as well.

Ms McGUIRE: If half of the money that was spent on researching the problems within the area was given to the area, particularly to people like us, to decide what to use them on, it would make a hell of a difference.

CHAIR: Let's say we did have this big bucket of money and we were not going to get any more consultants. If we said we will give you this big bucket of money to you, what would you spend it on? What would you do with it?

Ms NEWTON: I remember what I wanted to say in the first place while we were on transport. The 355 goes up through Surry Hills, which is another local area where you can go shopping at Coles there.

CHAIR: So we need more buses?

Ms NEWTON: Not actually. The one main thing, we have a bus shed where we get off the bus to go in shopping, where we can go to the post office and different things like that, but then when we have to go over the road and wait for the bus to come back, where the heat is, there is no seat, let alone a bus shed. So a seat up in the street next to--

Mr SMITH: What you are on about, Marlene, really is proper fitting resources for the people of this area, not what someone who comes in and says they are all going to need a new coat of paint.

CHAIR: We are asking you what you would do.

Ms NEWTON: I would put another seat in bus sheds.

Ms McGUIRE: First of all, we have to make sure that there was transport to begin with and it is not just the buses. I think that we could decide here and now. It would take some time, but what we would have to look at is the little things to begin with, the things we could do right away, the things that actually will not cost a lot of money, but then there might be some other things, like looking at the services that are outside Waterloo, but which service in some ways Waterloo, like community transport. It may be putting money into that for more transport, so you wouldn't have to ring up a week early just in case there are no spaces left on the bus to go shopping or whatever.

Some years ago the department decided that in the three storey walk-ups that are along here there were problems about security, so they put fences in, metal fences around the blocks. Fine, but they also put paling fences in the yards. Where I lived we had a quite big garden and it was being used in several ways. There were a couple of seats to sit on; people used to come out of the blocks and sit and talk; there was somebody who was growing some vegetables; there were some nice flowers around. It was a very pleasant place. So what they did was they put up this high paling fence.

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CHAIR: Dividing it up?

Ms McGuire: Yes, dividing it up, not each unit but each block, and then for each block they put three clothes hoists. So there goes most of the grassy area, and of course if you are tall, that means you do not go under there because you are going to hit your head. But there were some seats, there were some bushes, there was some shade. They took away the shade so they could build the fences. They took away the seats.

CHAIR: Does this come down to lack of consultation?

Ms McGuire: And they took away a place for the children to play and for the mothers and fathers to sit and watch them.

CHAIR: Does it come down to a lack of consultation with the people who actually live there?

Mr Smith: Yes, it does.

CHAIR: Or was it for security?

Ms McGuire: They thought it would be security, but I have got to tell you, and I have lived up there for a long time, the fact that with paling fences the palings can be knocked out means that there is no security. We complained to the department and they put the palings back up again and the next week they had gone again. So that is not secure at all and it doesn't do anything for us. It just makes it a very unfriendly backyard.

Ms Hillbrink: This is another subject about the post box. What I cannot understand is that as a matter of fact on the footpath, or the footpath and then the bit of grass there, there is a box where the post puts the mail into for our building and they go back and forwards, lady or man who delivers it. So that is there. So it is definitely possible to put a mail box for us beside it.

CHAIR: We have got that on the list.

Ms McGuire: And get rid of those rotten fences.

CHAIR: And obviously more money for the kind of health services that come close to you and service the area.

Ms McGuire: Yes.

Ms King: I just want to ask whether you will have any power to ask the Department of Housing to fix a lot of things, like regulations, like now you have no smoking in the train, in the train are all the photos on that, and in the restaurants, but in our building we are struggling with smoking in the lift and we have to ride down the lift with the smoke. We breathe the smoke when we are going down in the lift. I cannot stand that. This is very important. I have to tell somebody to help me, not just helping me, helping lots of other people who are suffering, like elderly people. I am young, I know, but I do not have to go--

CHAIR: We will add that to the list.

Mr Smith: There was something Ms Burnswoods brought up, which is genuine consultation. We have all had them come in. It is token consultation. They come to tell us what they have done, not ask us what we would like them to do. This stops them discovering what it is that we feel would work in this area, and, after all, they are coming to us because we live in the area and we know the area and they are not listening to us. Token consultation - it would be nice if we could get any consultation.

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CHAIR: Is the advisory board meant to serve that purpose?

Mr SMITH: Yes, that is one of its functions.

CHAIR: Does it not succeed?

Mr SMITH: It is very hard. The people who come to do the consulting come with a preconceived set of ideas. If what we tell them happens to fit with them, fine, it gets a tick. If it doesn't, "What would they know. They are only housing Department of Housing tenants."

Ms WHITWORTH: You were saying what would we do if we had a huge amount of money - fund the services in this area that are so seriously under-funded, under-staffed, they just cannot cope with the workload.

CHAIR: Which ones would you--

Ms WHITWORTH: Mental health, community health, community transport, home and community health, their waiting list is a hundred miles long. People need this help at home so that they can stay in their own home, but they can't get it. I work with a volunteer group, several of us are members, just doing little things that people can't do. We are not allowed to go into the areas where Government agencies are supposed to be doing it, but just little things that people cannot manage on their own. They are too old or they are too disabled or they are a young mother with two kids who has no idea how to do anything. She is flat out taking her kids. There is just so much that is under-funded and under-staffed.

CHAIR: When you talk about the volunteer group that some of you do, have you organised that yourself or is there some Government agency that pushed it off to start with?

Ms WHITWORTH: No, it was us.

CHAIR: You saw a need and you acted?

Ms WHITWORTH: Yes.

Mr HARDY: In our building we have got a bad health problem - birds.

Ms WHITWORTH: Pigeons.

Mr HARDY: No, the worst - ibises. They all roost. We have got a big pine tree there. About six weeks ago all the mums kicked 12 young ones out onto their own. Two days later there was another dozen sitting on more eggs there. They are due to be hatched now. If you come down Phillip Street and get to our back wooden fence on Phillip Street and have a look across the road, there is a big tree that runs out of our garden and there is a big tree on the other side of the road. They all sleep there of a night time. We want to get rid of them. If you walk down that street in the dark, they do their business all over you.

CHAIR: Betty, have you got something to add to the list?

Ms BULLIVANT: Yes, we have got rats. Two legged rats. I am not talking about the four legged rats. We have got rats and they have put down poison, but there is more. We have got new cleaners. It takes them a while to get them into action and that. We go and help them but we do not get any thank you or kiss me hand or things like that. Ross is running around doing things, Diane is doing things, Marlene is doing things. We are doing stuff and we get asked to do this. We do it because we like to help people out, but it would be nice to get a bit of thank you and credit.

CHAIR: Who are you talking about who should give you credit, the Department of Housing?

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Ms BULLIVANT: The Minister of Housing, and the police would be another one, and some of these other ones who sit on their backsides in their office and just write that, and when you come to the meeting, this has got to be done and that has got to be done. Why can't they get off their backsides and come and give us a hand and walk around with us and see what it is bloody like, get out of their suits.

CHAIR: Ross, you had another one.

Mr SMITH: The Department of Housing in itself, God bless them, they have got a lot of problems. One of their major problems in this area is they are perpetually under-staffed by their own very low staff levels.

CHAIR: What sort of staff do you mean?

Mr SMITH: Their community service, property managers, maintenance inspectors, their whole staff.

CHAIR: Can I tell you something that surprised me? That is the first time the word "maintenance" has been mentioned and we have been here an hour.

Mr SMITH: What I am coming back to is the Department of Housing in this office is perpetually under-staffed by its own low staff levels.

CHAIR: How many are here?

Mr SMITH: There should be nine CSOs from memory or more.

CHAIR: At any one time or on different shifts?

Mr SMITH: No, on their portfolios, full-time employees. Last week they were down to three at a staff level, and one of them was a newcomer, and the high turnover of staff, the high number of vacancies, that makes it so hard for them to do what they are meant to do.

CHAIR: Are the jobs vacant or are people on leave or have they gone off to do other things?

Mr SMITH: No, this is before we go into the extra jobs that are found by the paper and by those who want more reports on dead pigeons or whatever, which takes away from the field staff's ability to do what they are paid to do, which is to look after the properties, look after the tenancies. It is chronically under-staffed, very short, low staff levels, by their own low standards of staffing.

Ms McGUIRE: And maintenance is a major issue. We are so used to bringing that up. The other issue with maintenance is now that they have got what they call a multi-trades contractor and subcontractors, nobody checks to see if the jobs are done and you have to be very careful. Well, I am. I never sign an invoice unless I have seen exactly what it says was to be done, and the other day I actually caught one of them saying they had done a more expensive job than the one they had done for me, because they are so underpaid and the department is continually having to save money, because the funding they get never covers what they have to do, and so they cut corners. It is about staff, it is about getting good people to do the maintenance, making sure the maintenance is done properly, a whole lot of things like that, and I suppose most of us are really bringing these things up.

Mr SMITH: The other issue is that--

CHAIR: I'm sorry, I am going to have to interrupt this because we have other witnesses waiting. Anything that we have not discussed today that you would like to pass on to us, you can either contact us later or you can tell Merrin and Julie now and they can chat to you while we are bringing the other people in. We are more than happy to receive anything further in writing or over the phone, Merrin or Julie could give you a ring or whatever. I am very conscious that we come here

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and we try to cram an awful lot into an hour and I know that we could go into these things in much greater depth, but there are a number of other ways, if you think we have hurried over something, that you could pass information on to us and you can obviously do it through the NAB as well.

Ms NEWTON: There is another health matter that I came across the other day, a woman frightened and crying down in the foyer, not knowing where she was. It was just so pathetic. All of a sudden she's gone, bang, just like that.

CHAIR: Is everyone happy for us to make the transcript of today public?

Ms BULLIVANT: Yes, you can do that.

CHAIR: If any of you wished, we could take your name out, but I don't think anything has been said that would not have been said in front of others. It helps because people look at the printed transcript or at our web site and it spreads the word about the needs.

(Briefing concluded at 3.00 p.m.)