



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Motions

9 August 2018

WALLSEND CRIME

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:28):

I move:

That this House:

Notes that Wallsend central business district business operators have experienced an increase in crime in recent years.

Notes that local police are doing their best, but the Newcastle Local Area Command [LAC] remains under-resourced.

Urges the Minister for Police to take steps to properly resource Newcastle LAC to help reduce rising crime in Wallsend.

This summer's February heat saw Wallsend businesses being slammed by a tide of petty crime. One business owner told the Newcastle Herald that the situation has never been worse. My office took countless calls from businesses in the area complaining about damage, petty theft, nuisance crimes and a general feeling that the area was unsafe. A local business owner told the newspaper, "We know who they are. They are a gang that targets shop to shop, causing trouble wherever they go, but for whatever reason they are still out there." Another said, "I don't know what else we can do", after remarking that her business had spent a great deal of money on security measures, including a new fence, alarms and surveillance—all of which had no effect. Members would agree that the owner has done the right thing.

Has it come to the point of businesses now having to pay for private security patrols because of poor police resourcing? Thankfully, the local business community was able to organise, rally and get something done. I applaud the members of the Wallsend Town Business Association, including president Tiffanie Campbell, secretary Fee Madigan and the executive, for their efforts. We held a roundtable meeting with the commander of the local area command, which resulted in increasing police patrols and the crime rate reducing temporarily.

Wallsend businesses were able to get on with serving the community and our local cops had a chance to demonstrate how hard they work, even though they remain understaffed and under-resourced. Since being elected I have repeatedly called for more policing staff and for more resources in the Wallsend area. I have presented a petition, bearing more than 10,000 signatures, asking for the reinstatement of a Wallsend police station. I have tried to hold this Government to its election commitment to build a police station at Glendale. I have called for increased operating hours and staffing levels at Beresfield Police Station. But it has all been to no avail because of government inaction. This Government has refused to act upon the voices of 10,000 locals.

The people of Wallsend are losing faith in the ability of the police to help them. When I advise those who complain to me of crime that they should contact the police assistance line, they insist that nothing will come of it. Their frustration is growing—and it should be, with the refusal of this Government to give hardworking police officers the resources they need. Wallsend is a wonderful place in which to work and live. Indeed, the ability of business owners to band together and help one another through this crime wave is proof of that. In our area we have dedicated hardworking public servants, especially our police who take their jobs very seriously. We need a more permanent solution than temporarily increased patrols. Despite our success in combating petty crime in the area, problems still persist—for instance, in July, in broad daylight, my staffer's car was broken into right behind our office. That weekend a pair of teenagers was arrested for a series of similar crimes. New graffiti throughout our town defaces our buildings. I acknowledge that the causes of petty crime and the necessary solutions are complex. One constituent said to me:

It is not that I feel unsafe in Wallsend, it is just that there is a lack of civic pride. That does not really make any sense to me. I have lived in Wallsend for a number of years and it is a great place to live. I think the lack of resources and amenities for young people means that simple boredom and stupidity leads to stuff like this.

I agree. We need a comprehensive approach to dealing with the causes of petty crime. We need diversionary programs for local youth and a plan to bolster a sense of belonging for everyone in the Wallsend community. We also need more cops on the beat and resources. I call on the Minister for Police to work with local policing districts to see that they get their fair share of staff and resources because the people of Wallsend deserve it.