



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Motions

15 March 2018

WALLSEND ELECTORATE POLICING

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (13:01):

I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that a shortage of police officers has resulted in failures to arrive at 000 emergencies within the 12-minute benchmark times.
- (2) Acknowledges that while NSW Police Force does its best with limited resources, no new officers have been allocated to the Newcastle Local Area Command.
- (3) Urges the Minister for Police to listen to the Wallsend community and allocate more policing resources to Wallsend.

Wallsend is a wonderful place to live. We are lucky to have a strong community, good schools and engaged local businesses and community groups. I acknowledge that police are doing the best they can but the simple fact is that the Wallsend electorate sits on the fringe of three different local police districts and has been neglected in the allocation of policing resources. I have lost count of the number of times I have stood in this place and urged the Government to allocate more resources to Wallsend. I can see that the Government is really paying a lot of attention to what I am saying right now! It is a pity. A petition that garnered more than 10,000 signatures calling for the reinstatement of a Wallsend police station fell on deaf government ears.

Indeed, then shadow police Minister Mike Gallacher told the ABC in 2011—and I remember this well—that one of the Coalition's Hunter priorities would be Glendale police station, a promise those opposite promptly forgot after the election. Funding for Glendale police station was withdrawn by the Coalition Government. Over the last Christmas period a number of

Wallsend businesses suffered break-ins. The level of graffiti in the area skyrocketed and just prior to Christmas there was a major fire at the old squash courts building on Council Street. Is it any wonder that Wallsend residents and business owners are fed up? The Newcastle Herald stated that a number of Wallsend business owners have chalked up problems with policing in the area to slow response times. One stated to me:

Even if we call the police, a lot of the offenders realise that it'll take too long for them to arrive so they feel like they can get away with it anyway—and there's going to be no consequences—

It's very frustrating and we just don't know what to do. We've had to resort to asking the community for help with identifying alleged thieves.

The issue is not confined to Wallsend. In August last year it was reported that "a shortage of NSW police officers has resulted in authorities failing to respond to emergency calls within 12 minutes in almost a quarter of instances". Over the 2015-16 financial year officers in New South Wales met the 12-minute response time in 77.7 per cent of cases, below the 80 per cent target. This benchmark was not met in the three years leading up to the 2015-16 financial year, indicating a continuing problem. Police Association of NSW President Scott Weber told the media:

This is a prime example of police numbers not keeping up with population growth and demands in policing ... we have repeatedly told the government that an extra 247 officers are needed each year just to keep pace with growth in this state.

New South Wales has the lowest ratio of police officers to population of any Australian State, with 215 officers for every 100,000 people in this State, compared to 222 per 100,000 in Victoria and 275 per 100,000 in South Australia. The Government needs to step up its game. Our police officers and the people they protect deserve better. They certainly do in Wallsend. I am pleased to say that local police are responding to the concerns of Wallsend residents and business owners. In the Newcastle Herald on 5 February Superintendent Brett Greentree stated:

He acknowledged that crime had increased in the western Newcastle suburb, particularly property crime and steal from vehicle offences ... and said police in recent weeks had made a number of "significant" arrests and were increasing patrols ...

And that is good. Indeed, last month Superintendent Greentree joined me in attending a meeting hosted by the Wallsend Town Business Association, bringing Wallsend business owners together with high-ranking local police officers to discuss these issues. The outcomes were good. The superintendent acknowledged that he would like to see better visibility of police in the Wallsend area. We hope to see that in future. He acknowledged that women who work in small businesses are concerned that when walking back to their cars they are being hassled and intimidated by groups of youths. We acknowledge—and businesses are worried—that these groups of youth are getting away with this behaviour because police are stationed too far away. We need to deal with that matter. I reiterate that on a regular basis I bring policing issues in the Wallsend electorate to the floor of the Parliament because they are of concern to my community. I ask the Minister to pay attention and to look seriously at the allocation of resources in Wallsend. I thank those police who work very hard—and they all do. They have a trying job and I do not envy them. I urge all members to support the motion.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (13:21):

In reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Myall Lakes, Fairfield and Seven Hills for their considered contributions to this debate. It is an important debate and one that we need to have. I thank the member for Myall Lakes, but unfortunately in his generic response

he ignored the problems of the people and businesses of Wallsend. A major meeting between Wallsend businesses, the town association and the police occurred because of a huge spike in crime in the main street of Wallsend over Christmas, where people were being intimidated and their offices graffitied.

I will ignore the rudeness from the Government members and continue with my speech. The member for Myall Lakes argues that there is a record number of police in the Wallsend area. I ask the Government: Why are the response times so slow in Wallsend? It is a real problem. The first thing that people ask me at street stalls is, "Where were the police when we had a problem?" or "Why did it take them so long?" The reason it took them so long is that they were working very hard responding to a crime in Stockton in the one police car on beat at night, and then they had to get to Minmi, which is quite some distance away. Why are women in our businesses being intimidated by a gang of youths? The reason that occurred in Wallsend in January was that the police were too busy responding to other crimes. We do not deny that the police work hard. We acknowledge the hard work of the police. That has never been in question on this side. Please do not ever argue that is the case; it is not.

The member for Fairfield spoke very well and I appreciate that he has come to Wallsend a number of times to talk to the community about how we can police the area better. Like all of us, he acknowledges the hard work of our local police. I particularly acknowledge the hard work of the police in Wallsend. The member for Fairfield made a very good point when he said that the New South Wales Government spends less on fighting crime than any other Australian State. That is a real concern. The response times have blown out in Wallsend. There is no denying that—just ask the community. There has been a lot of buck-passing from this Government about who is in control of police numbers. I ask the Government to acknowledge that we need more police resources in Wallsend. The fears of our local community and businesses are real. That is important.

Please stop talking about these new and fancy names. I say to the member for Myall Lakes that the new names are important, but I am not quite sure whether somebody in Wallsend would really understand or care what re-engineering is; they are more worried about having police respond to crimes. This is an important motion. All I ask is that the Minister for Police listen to the Wallsend community and allocate the appropriate resources that we need so we do not have the kind of spike in crime that we had in January. It is a worry. Talk to the businesses of Wallsend and say to them, "We are going to employ more police in the area because we acknowledge that you had a spike in crime in Wallsend and it needs to be dealt with." The only way we can deal with that adequately is with more resources. We on this side acknowledge and thank our police for their hard work because they do a very hard job. I support the motion.