



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

23 March 2021

NEWCASTLE CITY POLICE DISTRICT

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (21:57):

I have spoken in Parliament about this matter a number of times and my community regularly air their frustration at the lack of adequate police resources in the Wallsend electorate. Each time new officer allocations are announced, I ask the same questions: Why is the Newcastle City Police District consistently overlooked for new officers? Why does this Government continually ignore the pleas of Wallsend residents for more police?

Despite under-resourcing and understaffing, our local police officers do great work and I thank them. But, sadly, this under-resourcing does not end at my electorate boundary. Figures over the last 15 years show that across the northern boundary police resources have not kept pace with population growth.

In 2006, 1,393,110 people lived in the northern region. The 2006 population was serviced by 2,305 police officers, supported by 192 administrative staff.

By 2020 the population of the northern region had grown to 1,675,275. That is an increase of 291,355 people—a 21 per cent population growth. Over the same period, the overall police numbers in the region dropped. In 2020 there were 114 fewer officers serving the northern region than there were in 2006. That is 5 per cent fewer police officers serving a population 21 per cent larger.

If the trend continues it means higher levels of stress and danger for police officers already feeling the pressure of an increased workload; it means communities all across the northern region, from Brisbane Water to the Queensland border, feeling

less safe; it means that crime will increase and the reporting of crime will decrease as people feel that their reports are being ignored.

The need for a stronger policing presence in the Newcastle area is obvious. The Bureau of Crimes Statistics and Research publishes rankings of the State's local government areas [LGAs] in 27 categories of crime. Unfortunately, Newcastle is ranked in the top 10 of LGAs in eight different categories.

The Newcastle LGA has the distinction of being the State's leader in stealing from persons, ranking first in that category. Newcastle is ranked second for fraud, fifth for other theft, sixth in stealing from motor vehicles, seventh in offences against transport regulations, eighth for stealing from retail stores, and tenth for both theft of motor vehicles and robbery. The trend is not due to Novocastrians' criminal inclinations being stronger than their counterparts in other areas.

We can draw a clear line between the Government's lack of support for our local police and the district's current rankings.

The Government touts changes to operational police work to explain this sort of decline. Our police are making use of innovative new ways to engage with crime, but nothing replaces more boots on the ground.

One Shortland resident said to me:

"We have been having issues with petty crime and antisocial behaviour for so long, and when the cops have been able to attend, they have been great. They are just so overloaded. I can't keep calling the Police Assistance Line every time I see something."

I encourage Wallsend residents to report every instance of crime or antisocial behaviour on the Police Assistance Line.

The Government must listen to what people in Wallsend and across the northern region are saying.

We want to feel safe.

We need more police on the streets.