

BALLAJURA POLICE STATION

Grievance

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [9.14 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Police and it relates to the future of the Ballajura Police Station. The Ballajura Police Station is situated in leased out premises in the Ballajura City Shopping Centre. The station currently services a large geographical area and includes the suburbs of Ballajura, Malaga and Cullacabardee. The suburb of Ballajura has a population of around 20 000 people. Malaga is a growing employment hub, with thousands of workers coming to the district each day. As we have seen in the press in recent days, Cullacabardee is faced with a number of significant issues. The Ballajura Police Station is serving the local community in the best way that it can, given its cramped offices and given that it is in a building that was not purpose-built. I visited the Ballajura Police Station and was impressed with its operations. Given the poor layout and cramped conditions, its officers are doing a great job.

I was impressed by how well the local police are connected with the local community and are across local law and order issues. While the police are doing the best they can, I believe that they need a new police station. I believe that the Ballajura-Malaga district needs a new police station. The Ballajura Police Station is one of only nine police stations in leased premises in the state. The other stations in leased premises in the metropolitan area are those in Rottneest, Kalamunda and Two Rocks. I understand that the need for a new police station in Ballajura was previously put forward by the police service. I have seen a copy of the Western Australia Police strategic accommodation plan 2008-23. This plan showed that a new police station for Ballajura was a priority, with new funding being sought for a new police station in 2009-10, with construction to commence in 2010-11. That strategic accommodation plan was ready last year. It was with complete surprise that I learned through questions on notice in both this house and the upper house that under this new government a new Ballajura police station is not included in the WA Police strategic accommodation plan. On 10 March I asked the minister whether a new Ballajura police station is included in the government's long-term accommodation plan. The answer I received on 31 March was no. Obviously, this government has cut a new Ballajura police station from its priorities. To questions asked in the upper house about whether the minister would guarantee the future of the Ballajura Police Station, the answer was no. This was reinforced again yesterday by the Minister for Police when I asked during question time whether he would guarantee the future of the Ballajura Police Station. The minister said no. There is no guarantee to the Ballajura community and to the businesses that operate in the Malaga district that their local police station will continue to operate. Even worse than giving no guarantee, there was a reference that the Commissioner of Police will make that decision and that this government will have very little involvement in it. Only a few weeks ago the minister claimed in this place that he was reopening three country police stations. I will quote the minister's words in case he has forgotten what he said. He stated —

Given the great working relationship that I have with the commissioner, I have managed to convince him that we should at least open the three stations that are soon to be reopened. I am grateful to the Commissioner of Police for listening to me, because I was passing on the concerns of all country people, including country members. I am delighted to say that the stations at Cranbrook, Wickepin and Dumbleyung will be reopened.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Hear, hear.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That was a direct quote from the Minister for Police. Does the Minister for Sport and Recreation agree that the Ballajura Police Station should be closed?

Mr T.K. Waldron: You guys closed six.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: With respect to Ballajura Police Station, the Minister for Police does not want to get involved but he has directly intervened with respect to these other three towns. The Ballajura-Malaga district needs its own police station. The suburb of Ballajura, like many other suburbs, has significant law and order issues. The Malaga business district is a growing employment hub; each day it is home to thousands of workers. At night, like many other industrial areas, it is prone to break-ins and theft. By reducing any police presence throughout the area, we will increase the likelihood of theft and burglaries in these suburbs.

I have heard on the grapevine that this government believes that Ballajura can be served by neighbouring police stations. I will go through them. The Kiara Police Station is in the East Metropolitan district. It is over 10 kilometres or 15 minutes away from the Ballajura Police Station. These times are optimistic and do not take into account the significant roads of Reid Highway and Alexander Drive. Commuting to Ballajura from other police stations will involve much more time than I am indicating today. There is a police station at Morley. Again, it is a fair distance away. Ellenbrook Police Station is about 20 minutes or 18 kilometres away. Mirrabooka Police Station is also a fair distance away. I want to highlight how busy these police stations already are, particularly Mirrabooka. Mirrabooka police are already overstretched, dealing with local issues and servicing the suburbs.

After speaking to the member for Nollamara, I understand the already extreme demands on these stations. Any idea that these stations can service suburbs like Ballajura and Malaga, on top of existing demand, is ludicrous.

The other issue is the locations of Ballajura and Malaga. These suburbs are bordered by significant and often congested roads, Alexander Drive and Reid Highway. This congestion could impact significantly on the response times of police to Ballajura if the Ballajura Police Station is closed.

In summary, I am appalled at the prospect of the government closing the Ballajura Police Station. It delivers a vital service to the community. Having compared the statistics of the suburbs serviced by the Ballajura Police Station with other stations, a police presence is needed in Ballajura. I want the minister to tell me today why this government does not believe building a new police station in Ballajura is a priority. I want to understand why it believes that closing this police station is the right thing to do. I believe this demonstrates the approach this government is taking to people living in the suburbs, in particular the outer suburbs. I want to know today what the minister's plan is regarding Ballajura.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Minister for Police) [9.20 am]: What a well-read document! I remind the member that normally one does not read their speeches in toto in this place, but she has done that this morning, thereby defying the standing orders of this house.

Notwithstanding that, some of the comments she made were very interesting. Yes, I have answered questions of the member's colleagues in the upper house about the Ballajura Police Station. I will quote a question, and the answer I gave, about the strategic accommodation plan in this house —

- (2) If so, can the Minister please outline if a new Ballajura Police Station is on the most recent plan?

My answer was —

- (2) A new Ballajura Police Station is not currently included in the WA Police Strategic Accommodation Plan.

No, it is not. But I have not said anywhere that the Ballajura Police Station will be closed. That is what the member is saying, not me! She is quite right that the Ballajura Police Station was relocated to larger leased premises in the second half of 1999, and its title was changed then from "police post" to "police station". The member is quite right that the location of the police station is within a shopping centre. It is a leased premises; it is not owned by the WA Police.

If the member knows much about Ballajura—because I think the only way she found Ballajura was when she arrived by parachute!

Ms R. Saffioti: Don't get into personal insults, minister, just answer the question!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It is thanks to the former Premier that the member is in this place, and that is how she found Ballajura. She probably did not know it was on the map before then, but she does now! Now she is trying to stand up for a police station in Ballajura about which no decision has been made to close it. The police are reviewing all their police station options, and it is fair to say that the model that the police would prefer is to have some main hubs rather than hundreds of little police stations dotted around the metropolitan area.

The Liberal Party is the party that opens police stations. We are not the ones that closed them. As my very good friend and colleague the Minister for Racing and Gaming said, when the Labor Party was in government, it closed six of our country police stations, just like that! It left those people down there very, very concerned. We are the government that has managed to convince the police commissioner to reopen three of those stations. The authority for closing and opening police stations starts and ends with the Commissioner of Police; it is his authority. As the Minister for Police, I can try to encourage him—by way of good argument I hope—that we need a police station here and we do not need to close the police station there. I have regular discussions with the Commissioner of Police and the senior executive of police almost every week; sometimes a couple of times a week. We go through that system, and that is the way it should be. How hypocritical of the member.

Ms R. Saffioti: With three minutes to go, can you guarantee that the Ballajura Police Station will remain open?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I did not interject on the member at all. I do not mind interjections. As the member's colleagues of longer standing will know, I feed off them, my friend, because it gives me an opportunity to come back and have a good go. Members on this side of the house like the member for West Swan very much indeed, because she gave us the opportunity to be in government! As the special adviser to the former Premier, she gave us the opportunity to be on this side of the house! Other people in this house know that is true! The member is much less popular with some of her own colleagues on that side of the house.

Ms R. Saffioti: Point of order! You go!

Point of Order

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I rarely make a point of order, but when I do, they are usually of quality! Grievances are a serious chance for members to raise appropriate matters with the appropriate minister, and expect a response related to the question asked. The minister is deviating from that question. The member has asked for answers in the time given, and I ask the Speaker to make a ruling in that respect.

The SPEAKER: I hear what the member for Mandurah is saying, but if members on both sides of the house want to make grievances work in an appropriate manner, they should cease from interjecting upon each other. The Minister for Police has the call.

Debate Resumed

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Some people are a little bit sensitive this morning, obviously! The member made lots of statements and comments, some of which were somewhat derogatory about me, and that is why I felt I had the right to respond. All I want to say is that the member has more friends on this side of the house than she has on the other. I assure her that she is not the buttercup of the Labor Party anymore, particularly to her colleagues who lost their seats like Jaye Radisich. I do not think she would be very complimentary about the member for West Swan at all, and I think she would be justified.

To get back to the question, the member asked if I would guarantee that the Ballajura Police Station will remain open: the answer is no, I cannot guarantee that. If that gives the member a headline in her local newspaper of “Minister Refuses to Guarantee the Future of Ballajura Police Station”, do it! Send it out, by all means! But it would not be the truth, because the member will put a spin on that—as she did when she was an adviser in government—to distort the actual truth.

I cannot guarantee that. Why can I not guarantee that? Because it is not for me to guarantee the future of Ballajura Police Station or any police station; it is the Commissioner of Police’s responsibility. The commissioner and I talk regularly, and I am more than happy to raise it with him when I see justification for keeping a police station open, or even reopening some in our country areas. There were cases to reopen some of those country police stations, and we managed to get the commissioner to agree to reopen three of them.

The metropolitan area is actually serviced quite well by police. The police plan is not to have so many small police stations, as it is not the best way to function, but to have one main area which lessens duplication of service throughout a huge area, which frees up officers. In that way, there will be more patrols out on the roads, and at the end of the day people want to see police officers out on the roads. I would support that idea absolutely.

In relation to Ballajura itself, the member knows that in occupational health and safety terms it is not suitable to keep the Ballajura station open. The member would know that if she had been there—has the member been there?

Ms R. Saffioti: Yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: When?

Ms R. Saffioti: A couple of months ago.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: A couple of months ago? I will check on that!

Ms R. Saffioti: Yes, go on! Go and talk to the sergeant about it!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Did the member land there by parachute as well? No? Okay. That is interesting.

Ms R. Saffioti: You’re a disgrace; that’s what you are! Everyone knows it!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am a disgrace? I am a disgrace? I think the member’s colleagues might think she is a disgrace!

My answer is that I do not believe that particular station is probably suitable to remain open.