

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

Fourteenth Report — “Annual Report 2015–16” — Tabling

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [9.54 am]: I present for tabling the fourteenth report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee entitled “Annual Report 2015–16”.

[See paper 4530.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am tabling this report because our chair, Hon Margaret Quirk, the member for Girrawheen, is unavailable this morning. I commence by acknowledging the work of the committee: of course, the member for Girrawheen as our chair, who has shown great leadership; and also the other members—the member for Balcatta, the member for Vasse and the member for Collie–Preston. We have had some very vigorous debate but in the end we have produced substantial reports. The people whom I would personally like to thank the most—I know that the chair and my fellow committee members would also like to thank them—are our committee staff: the principal research officer, Dr Sarah Palmer; and the research officer, Ms Franchesca Walker. All members who sit on committees know very well the work that committee staff do. They do the real work of the committee. We attend the hearings and we may ask questions that have often been prepared by the committee staff but they do the brilliant drafting of the reports that we end up tabling and discussing in Parliament. The work that we have been blessed to receive from Dr Sarah Palmer and Ms Franchesca Walker has been outstanding. There are also all the logistics of organising hearings, arranging for witnesses to appear, getting back to witnesses, writing follow-up questions and correspondence and arranging committee travel, whether it is interstate or overseas. They have done truly outstanding work. I never want to lose our committee staff but if any prospective employers want to employ people of high quality, they can always look to committee staff, who work under immense pressure. They often work with four or five members of Parliament, who all have egos and are of different political persuasions.

Mr P. Abetz: Surprise, surprise!

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, surprise, surprise. I think they do fantastic work. When they observe us in action, I wonder what they are really thinking. Being professional, they keep their own counsel. They are outstanding people. I think the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee has been blessed with the quality of committee staff that we have been associated with.

Our committee is very interesting. I think it is the only committee that is dominated by the opposition; it has a three–two composition. The other thing that is very interesting about our committee is the wideranging portfolios that we have. We are responsible for 19 portfolio areas, including Aboriginal affairs, Attorney General, child protection, citizenship and multicultural interests, community services, corrective services, culture and the arts, disability services, electoral affairs, emergency services, environment, local government, police, road safety, seniors and volunteering, sport and recreation, veterans, women’s interests and youth. That is an incredibly wideranging number of portfolios. With regard to Aboriginal affairs, I was speaking to the member for Kimberley this morning. She asked whether it was possible for me to mention a report on suicide in Indigenous communities in the West Kimberley. It was not produced by our committee. She believes that some very good recommendations were made in that report but she was concerned that they have not been put into action.

In the absence of the chair of our committee, it is appropriate that I read into *Hansard* her foreword of the annual report, which states —

ONCE again, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee has had a very productive year, tabling two inquiry reports and one agency review report and completing the evidence-gathering phase of its final inquiry for the 39th Parliament.

The Committee began the financial year with hearings for the second focus area of its inquiry into how WA Police evaluates its performance. The focus was on domestic violence, and the measures WA Police has in place to evaluate whether it is providing adequate protection to victims.

The report made eight recommendations pertaining to training of officers, GPS tracking of serious domestic violence offenders, the implementation of intermediate performance indicators, collection of demographic data related to domestic violence offences, and a domestic violence strategy specific to police.

Responding to the report, WA Police indicated some willingness to implement additional performance measures, but did not agree that it needed to update its lapsed family and domestic violence strategy. It believed the Department for Child Protection and Family Support strategy, *Freedom from Fear* (released in September 2015), was sufficient. But none of the actions in that strategy identify specific actions or responsibilities for police.

The Committee wrapped up its three-part inquiry into WA Police performance evaluation with an assessment of measures to evaluate management of police personnel. This covered recruitment, training, internal investigations, and the treatment of officers considered medically unfit to continue.

While there was a suggestion that some of the practices would be reviewed in line with the report's 13 recommendations, the response to the report did not provide great encouragement that the culture of the police service would change.

For example, WA Police did not support the use of Section 51 of the Equal Opportunity Act (1984) to ensure diversity within the service, and was not prepared to find a way to provide feedback to ex-officers who apply to return to the service but are unsuccessful.

The response to findings and recommendations made in regard to officers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder is particularly disappointing.

WA Police said it was considering a proposal to recognise the service of officers dismissed on medical grounds (as per the Committee's recommendation), but stipulated that the serious injury would have to be in relation to an operational incident or attack on an employee. This would preclude sufferers of PTSD whose illness is most often induced by the accumulation of stress, rather than a single incident.

This seems to be indicative of the attitude of WA Police to PTSD in general, with officers still struggling to have their symptoms recognised, and reluctant to seek help due to the risk of stigmatisation and the potential negative impact on their careers.

I will just interrupt the foreword. It is interesting that, from recollection, the police do not collect data on police officers suffering from PTSD, which I find quite surprising. The foreword continues —

While still completing the police inquiry, the Committee followed up on an agency review with the Department for Child Protection and Family Support regarding the management of a teenager in the Department's care who had been convicted of the manslaughter of his newborn baby while in hospital.

Given some of the comments in the judge's sentencing report (which the Children's Court made available to the Committee) and some concerns from the union representing child protection workers, the Committee believed the management of the case warranted further investigation.

The report made seven findings and two recommendations. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support says it is reviewing whether it needs to strengthen its practice guidance to assist staff in assessing parental capacity to protect children from harm, and that it has recently strengthened guidelines for assessing protection of children in hospital.

This is welcome, however it is tragic that a baby had to die in these circumstances before the safety and supervision practices were reviewed.

In the final month of the financial year four members were fortunate enough to travel to Melbourne and New Zealand to see for themselves what can be achieved for at-risk youth through sports and cultural programs.

The Committee was impressed by the passion of those recreation and arts workers who were able to see the potential of young people who might otherwise be sidelined and perhaps find themselves on the wrong side of the law.

There were many examples of inspiring young men and women who had grabbed the opportunities offered to them with both hands. This gave us great hope for achieving similar outcomes in our State, pending appropriate support.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Committee Members for their ongoing support, and acknowledge the work of the Committee's staff, Dr Sarah Palmer and Ms Franchesca Walker.

That was the foreword from the chair of the committee, the member for Girrawheen. As I stated in my opening remarks, and as concluded in the foreword by the member for Girrawheen, I think as a committee we have worked well, but there have obviously been times of tension amongst the committee, which I think is a healthy, proper utilisation of the committee process to allow all points of view to be expressed. People who have not sat on committees may not realise their value. I think we need to be careful about committees being seen, often by governments, as just opportunities for oppositions trying to score cheap political points and sometimes the opposition seeing them as a process to score cheap political points. The point is that the committee system is one of the most important institutions in the parliamentary framework and it provides very valuable work that can make the role of government, and even Parliament, in Western Australia work much better. I noticed that the Education and Health Standing Committee is not dominated by the opposition, but it has produced reports that at times have been critical or questioning of government policy, and I see nothing wrong with that. I see that as the

operations and obligations of committee members. I think we need to get away from government committee members seeing themselves as a safeguard or gatekeeper to any criticism of the government.

At the beginning of my contribution I mentioned the work of our committee staff, Dr Sarah Palmer and Ms Franchesca Walker, and I want to repeat that compliment and show the appreciation and acknowledgement that all committee members have in respect of the quality of their intellect, the quality of their research and writing, their work ethic and the fact that they are just incredibly nice people. They have to be incredibly nice people to deal with the five people on the committee! It has been an honour to stand here representing the member for Girrawheen, who, as we know, for the term of this Parliament has been subjected to some unfair criticism as chair of this committee. As the final weeks of this, the thirty-ninth Parliament, come to an end, this Community Development and Justice Standing Committee can be very proud of its work. Our committee staff, Dr Palmer and Ms Walker, can be particularly proud of the very hard work and high-quality research and writing that they have produced for the committee to consider and table in this Parliament.

MR C.D. HATTON (Balcatta) [10.08 am]: It is with pleasure that I stand here to add a quick comment to the delivery of the “Annual Report 2015–16” of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. As stated in the chair’s foreword, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee has had a productive year, tabling two inquiry reports and one agency review report, and completing the evidence-gathering phase of its final inquiry into the thirty-ninth Parliament. The Community Development and Justice Standing Committee has responsibility for 19 portfolio areas, so that is quite extensive. In the past financial year the committee has focused on the portfolio areas of police, child protection, youth, culture and the arts, and sport and recreation. I am confident at this stage in the thirty-ninth Parliament that the committee, over the course of the reporting period of 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, with some ups and downs at times, worked cohesively towards executing the functions and powers of committees, in particular those functions and powers that relate to the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. Members of Parliament, and all people, must not overlook or undermine the importance of committees, the relevance and standing of which have at times been questioned in the current political climate. The functions of a committee are to review and report to the Assembly on such things as outcomes and administration of the departments within the committee’s portfolio responsibilities, annual reports of government departments laid on the table of the house, the adequacy of legislation and regulations within its jurisdiction, and any matters referred to it by the Assembly including bills, motions, petitions, votes of expenditure, other financial matters, reports or papers. That is a fairly good definition of what committees are aiming at.

In upholding committee functions and respecting their relevance and importance, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, in the period covered by this annual report, completed the inquiry into methods of evaluating Western Australian police performance, continued an agency review with the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, and commenced an inquiry into building resilience and engagement for at-risk youth through sport and culture. The committee met on 29 occasions for deliberative meetings, hearings or briefings, and undertook investigative travel to Geraldton, Melbourne and New Zealand. The committee also tabled four reports, including its annual report.

In tabling the committee’s tenth report, “A measure of trust: How WA Police evaluates the effectiveness of its response to family and domestic violence”, and in realising the complexity of the social issues surrounding domestic and family violence, the committee raised questions about Western Australia Police key performance indicators, the movement forward of the family and domestic violence strategy 2009–11, and the relevance of the Freedom from Fear action plan 2015. Although the committee resolved that more needs to be done, it was evident that Western Australia Police is showing promising signs in adopting practices aimed in the right direction in dealing with domestic and family violence.

In the committee’s eleventh report, “Red flags, white flag response? The Department for Child Protection and Family Support’s management of a troubled boy with a baby”, it was determined that complex issues like those surrounding domestic and family violence also surround the efforts of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and its management. However, the committee resolved that greater prevention measures and procedures within DCP could help prevent future tragic incidents occurring, and DCP has moved forward towards understanding and undertaking positive measures in supporting staff, and adolescent parents and parents-to-be.

The committee’s twelfth report was titled “How do they manage? An investigation of the measures WA Police has in place to evaluate management of personnel”. I am standing here confident that the findings and recommendations brought forward in that report will be beneficial to police operations in Western Australia.

In closing, I look forward to the remainder of the thirty-ninth Parliament, and the good work that this committee can do in that time. At this point I acknowledge the chair of the committee, Ms Margaret Quirk, the member for Girrawheen, and the other committee members: the deputy chair, Dr Tony Buti, the member for Armadale; Ms Libby Mettam, the member for Vasse; and Mr Mick Murray, the member for Collie–Preston. I would also

like to give very special thanks to the committee's principal research officer, Dr Sarah Palmer, and research officer, Ms Franchesca Walker, for their absolute dedication and commitment to helping us present and table our reports. I look forward to working with this committee for the rest of this Parliament.