

POLICE — PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Grievance

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [9.36 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Police. As the minister and you, Mr Speaker, would know, in my inaugural speech I spent some considerable time talking about disability issues. I am told that the Minister for Police has great empathy with and concern about, and even experience of, the issue of disability rights and discrimination. My grievance will address this issue in terms of Western Australia Police and is about the inadequate number of police in the Armadale–Kelmscott area and the south east corridor. The scenario I am about to present will bring that into acute focus.

I acknowledge that over the years both sides of politics have been very positive in attempts to allow people with disabilities to live a full and meaningful life with independence. The trend of the past 30 or so years has been to allow people with disabilities to live independently of their parents when they become adults. However, for that to take place there must be a corresponding rise in the attention given to disability support from both agencies and community groups, including the police force. In the scenario I will present, that does not appear to have been the case. I am not blaming the police force; it can do only so much. I believe the problem is the number of police on the beat and the number of police available to attend to constituent concerns.

I move on to Clint's story. Clint is aged 34. He has an intellectual disability. His disability is obvious, but not profound. Through the Department of Housing access home loan scheme, Clint was able to purchase a unit in an apartment complex in Kelmscott. A few days before the Melbourne Cup, held on Tuesday, 2 November 2010, a female neighbour approached Clint because she was concerned about an unidentified person hanging around the apartment complex. She felt very nervous. Clint asked the male what he was doing at the complex and the male threatened to "punch his head in". Clint, of course, became very nervous and frightened, and walked away. Just after the Melbourne Cup, and while Clint was away from his unit, it was broken into and a digital camera was taken. Clint reported this to the Gosnells Police Station; he was unaware of the police station in Armadale. The female officer at Gosnells took his details and said that in future, if he had any problems, he should attend the Armadale Police Station because it was nearer to his place of residence. The next day a forensic officer came to Clint's unit to investigate, but nothing further has happened.

On the evening of Saturday, 6 November 2010, on arriving back at his unit after visiting his mother, Robyn, who lives in Cannington, there was a cardboard note on the floor between the security screen and the front door, which read "From 9390 — watch your back." Clint was very frightened, so he telephoned his mother. His mother told him to go to her house in Cannington. Clint arrived at his mother's house that night and they decided that it was not a case that one would ring 000 about and that he should wait until the morning. Clint stayed at his mother's house all that evening. The next morning, which was Sunday morning, his mother telephoned the Armadale Police Station; but that is not a 24/7 police station, so the answering system advised Robyn to ring the police communications centre. Robyn did so and spoke to a female. Robyn actually thought this female was a police officer, but as members would know that would not be the case as the communications centre is staffed generally by civil servants, not police officers. She informed the female that she lived in Cannington and that her son lived in Kelmscott. She also went through the various incidents that had frightened her son. She was informed by the police communications centre that she could take the note and make the complaint at the Mirrabooka Police Station. She lived in Cannington but was told to go to the Mirrabooka Police Station—even though there is a 24/7 police station in Cannington. Robyn was unaware that the Cannington Police Station was open on Sunday. When Robyn said that was a long way to go, and asked whether it could wait until the morning so that her son could go to the Armadale Police Station, she was told that, yes, he could go to the Armadale Police Station. The next morning Clint went to the Armadale Police Station and was told he should have made a complaint straightaway and that it was too late now to respond to his complaint.

A few days later, on Wednesday night, 10 November, while Clint was having a shower, his front window was jemmied opened and mulch was poured onto the carpet in the lounge. Clint could hear someone trying to force the front door open, knocking on the kitchen window and the back door and menacing words being directed to him. He called his mother, and his mother and his sister arrived about 9.00 pm. His mother contacted the police communications centre. The police communications centre said a police car would arrive in the next 20 to 30 minutes; then after 30 minutes they received another phone call from the communications centre saying that they did not have a car available tonight, so Clint should go to the Armadale Police Station in the morning to report the incidents. Of course, Clint was very, very scared and his mum also was very unhappy with the situation. They went back to Robyn's house that evening. The next morning, Clint went to the Armadale Police Station. He told the police officer at the station what had happened. The police officer said that because there was no witness to the incident, there was nothing further they could do. This scenario is a classic example of the lack of policing numbers to cater for these types of concerns of my constituents. Clint's experience, of course, is a stark, sad

story. It is a very sad scenario in which we have a person with an intellectual disability contacting the police and receiving inadequate assistance.

I have also received other complaints from constituents about the lack of policing numbers in the Armadale–Kelmescott region, and basically the south east corridor. I ask the minister to not just look at his tough law and order legislative agenda, but also look at providing an adequate police force in my area, in the south east corridor and, I presume, in most areas of Perth. Many of my residents are feeling nervous and scared because they cannot see police on the beat.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Minister for Police) [9.43 am]: I thank the member for Armadale for his grievance. I suggest that if the member had given some notice of this incident concerning the individual involved—I have every sympathy for Clint and his family; of course I have—and provided some information on that incident, I could have given the member a far more detailed response than I can, hearing it for the first time today. Notwithstanding that, it is not acceptable for anybody to behave in such a way towards Clint or to any other human being in our society. That behaviour should not be tolerated.

I will go onto the substantive part of the member's grievance, which is police numbers and facilities within Armadale and surrounding districts. I am happy to give the member some information on that. The government has committed to providing an extra 500 police officers, as did the previous government.

Mr E.S. Ripper: You are only delivering 350.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, we are delivering 500.

Mr E.S. Ripper: But 150 of those are auxiliary officers, not police officers.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We are delivering 500 police officers, 350 of whom will be fully sworn, fully trained and fully armed police officers and 150 of whom will be police auxiliary officers, who will be taking over the tasks of fully sworn, fully trained, fully armed police officers who are not currently on front-line service.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Policing on the cheap!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, it is not policing on the cheap at all. That is a silly comment for the Leader of the Opposition to make. Fully trained officers are doing jobs that they do not need to be doing. It is far better to have auxiliary police officers do those tasks so that we can release 150 experienced officers back on to front-line duty. It is a very sensible thing to do. It is unique way of doing it, and it is a way that the police commissioner particularly wanted. He did not want a lot of his fully trained, fully sworn and fully armed police officers doing some of those jobs; he wanted them back on front-line duties, as do I as the police minister. I am more than happy for police auxiliary officers, who will have adequate training, to do the jobs that these other fully trained officers are doing at the moment. There will be 500 extra police officers on our streets. I hope that the government will be able to bring that forward to some extent. That is the simple answer on the number of police officers.

If we have 500 extra police officers doing front-line duties, they will be spread throughout the state. The greater number will be in the metropolitan area, because that is where the majority of the population lives and where the majority of crimes are committed. The metropolitan area will get the lion's share, if I can put it that way, of those extra police numbers. However, there are areas within regional WA that need extra police officers, and officers will be allocated there. Regional areas will also receive some auxiliary police officers, so that their fully trained officers can undertake front-line duties rather than doing jobs that can be done easily by somebody who is not a fully trained, fully armed officer.

I refer now to information provided by the Commissioner of Police on police numbers in the metropolitan area. Of course, how police officers are deployed in each district is under the authority of the Commissioner of Police, not mine. I cannot direct the police commissioner to send an extra 10 coppers to a police station. That would be totally inappropriate. The Commissioner of Police has the sole authority for placing his officers wherever it is appropriate, and if there is a sudden spike in crime in a certain area, he will send extra officers to that area to deal with that. That has been very successful, and has occurred under not just this government but also the previous government. That is what the commissioner does. I will give the member for Armadale some of the detail that I have been given. Each district has one 24-hour police station. In the case of the south east metropolitan district, as the member said, it is the Cannington Police Station. Members of the public do not always need to attend a police station. Police assistance and attendance can be facilitated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by telephoning the police assistance centre on 131 444, which is the number for non-life threatening situations; and on 000 for emergencies or when a crime is being committed; and district Crime Stoppers is available on 1800 333 000 to report information about any crime activities or information that may help prevent a crime. As I have said, the 000 number is available for an emergency or life-threatening situation, and we encourage the public to call that number in such situations. If there is a life-threatening situation, do not hesitate to dial 000 to get the

police officers there. They respond very quickly to 000 calls. Obviously people call that number when urgent police assistance is required or, as I said, someone has witnessed a serious crime in progress or just committed or there is a situation in which life or serious injury is threatened. From what the member for Armadale has said, I do not know whether Clint's circumstances would fall within the 000 regime; I do not think it would. I think 131 444 is the number they should have dialled. If the suspects are still in the vicinity, I am pretty certain the police would send somebody as quickly as they can. Sometimes if the suspects have left the scene, and there are no other witnesses and the offenders cannot be identified, even by the victim, it makes it very difficult for the police to pursue that, but they obviously still do whatever they can. They certainly send a forensic team to gather any forensic evidence that they might be able to obtain. That forensic evidence is put on a database. I have every sympathy for the member's constituent because of his disability. Obviously these are vulnerable people in our society, and we need to do everything we can to assist them. If the person who committed this offence against the member's constituent were to commit another offence and that person's DNA was found at the scene of that offence, that would also be put on the database, and if the offender could then be matched against both offences, the offender would be charged also for the earlier offence, once the police have the reports. It is important that the police make a report of the incident. Therefore, the member's constituents need to give the police as much information as possible, because that information will be held by the police, and, as I have said, if the offender then commits another offence, even if it is six months later, the offender will be charged, and justice will be done. I think all of us in this place are interested in ensuring that justice is done.