

BALLAJURA — COMMUNITY SAFETY

Grievance

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [9.14 am]: My grievance is about community safety in Ballajura and particularly about what has occurred since the closure of the Ballajura Police Station. This is a very important issue. Community safety is the number one issue in Ballajura today. It is the number one issue that is raised with me at every community meeting I attend and when people visit me in my office. Over the past number of years, people have constantly spoken to me and given me information about the lack of police presence in the area and slow police response times. Over the parliamentary winter break, there was a significant crime spree in Ballajura over one weekend, to which there was a lack of police response. People felt very vulnerable and unsafe in their own homes. That crime spree was just one example that has been presented to me in all of the forums and meetings I have attended.

People are very angry about what is happening and about the lack of government action on increasing police presence in Ballajura. As I have stated many times, I do not blame the police. This is happening purely because of a lack of resources. When the police station was closed in 2009, Kiara Police Station was asked to patrol Ballajura. Kiara Police Station already covers the suburbs of Ashfield, Bassendean, Beechboro, Eden Hill, Kiara and Lockridge. Ballajura and Malaga were also given to it to patrol. Kiara was not built as a dedicated hub for Ballajura. It is located a number of kilometres away from homes in Ballajura. The distance from the north of Ballajura to Kiara is around 10 kilometres. Public transport is not an option. There is an issue with the distance police have to travel and also with the number of incidents that police are asked to look after, particularly on weekends and weeknights. As I said, I cannot and do not blame the police. They are doing what they can. But when they receive emergency calls from people throughout the suburbs I have mentioned, and even into Mirrabooka, Ballajura is left without the dedicated police presence that had been committed.

I will go through the history of this matter once again. In 2009 we heard rumours that the government was considering closing this police station. In June 2009 it was announced that the station was going to be closed. There was no community consultation and no plan of action was presented to the people of Ballajura. It came out of the blue. In August and through September 2009 the police station was closed. Some officers were transferred to Kiara and some to Ellenbrook. As I understand from information obtained under a freedom of information application, \$100 000 a year was saved through the closure of the police station. A number of commitments were given to the people of Ballajura at that time, such as that the response time would improve, incidents of crime would go down, and people would see more police on the streets. That is not the case. Official statistics provided on this government's own website show that crime has increased.

Law and order is the number one issue of everyone I speak to. In a community meeting I held in a park a number of weeks ago, 95 per cent of the issues raised related to law and order. It is a significant issue and it is a real issue. People are very unhappy. They do not want to feel unsafe in their own homes and in their suburbs.

I believe that the biggest deterrent to crime is police presence. I truly believe that. I believe local knowledge also helps in clearing up crime. I think a local police presence is needed to act as a deterrent and to ensure that the police know which gangs and which people are committing crimes. Police officers say that when they have been in a suburb or a country town for a number of years, they soon know who has committed a crime just by the way a window is smashed or a door has been opened. Local knowledge is needed for that. The government's own website shows that crime has increased in key areas such as assault, dwelling burglary, robbery and motor vehicle theft. The government's own statistics show that crime has increased in a number of key areas, comparing 2010–11 with 2008–09. As I said, people are very unhappy with response times. There are simply not enough police to patrol the suburbs I have outlined. We need a greater police presence at the weekends and at night.

I am asking the Minister for Police to take this issue very seriously. I am not asking him to grandstand or to make personal attacks on people, as he normally does; I am asking him to take this issue seriously. He has held a number of press conferences to talk about how tough he is, but when it comes to the real issue of actually ensuring community safety, he has an obligation to respond. I am asking him to review his decision to close Ballajura Police Station. I am asking him to honour his commitment to review the crime statistics in Ballajura since the closure of the police station. I am also asking him to commit to a greater police presence for the people of Ballajura; they deserve it. As I said, they do not feel safe, they do not believe that there are enough police, and they need the security of knowing that there are police present when they call.

I have undertaken another petition and already, over the past couple of weeks, we have received more than 1 000 signatures. More than 600 people on a Facebook site have called for the reinstatement of Ballajura Police Station. This is a serious issue, and people raise it with me constantly. We need some action and we need the

government to take this issue seriously. The people of Ballajura deserve better. The government closed their police station and it has not improved police presence, and people want a better police presence in Ballajura.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Minister for Police) [9.22 am]: In responding to the grievance by the member for West Swan, I say: let us not let the truth get in the way of a good story. She kept stating that the government closed Ballajura Police Station; she knows that is not the truth. She knows that I personally cannot close a police station, and that the government cannot. The Commissioner of Police closes police stations.

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Commissioner of Police is the person who closes police stations; that is within his authority. But let us look at Ballajura Police Station, if the member for West Swan can bear it. Under her government, it deteriorated —

Ms R. Saffioti: It existed!

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I noticed that nobody interjected whatsoever during your entire seven minutes. I would expect the same from you and every other member in this place while the minister is on his feet.

Ms R. Saffioti: I didn't personally attack him —

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan, I formally call you to order for the first time today.

Ms R. Saffioti: Yep.

The SPEAKER: And for the second time today, as well.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: All I am trying to do is outline the truth, and the truth of the matter is that the previous Labor government allowed Ballajura Police Station to deteriorate. It was not a police station; it was a police post; it was a shopfront, basically. Obviously, it was useful for people to go there to renew their licences and various other things, although the attendance at that particular police post was extremely low. The problem was that the previous government allowed that police post to deteriorate to such an extent that it was basically almost uninhabitable; it was a disgraceful police post. I visited it, and I can tell members that when I came out, I said that I would be loath to put my dog in that place. There was one holding cell in the middle of the shop where prisoners could be held, and all around there were detectives and police officers working at their computer stations. The person in the holding cell could hear everything. There was no lockup cell as such; it was a holding cell. It was absolutely disgraceful. There were leaks everywhere, and it was a dirty, filthy, worn-out police post. I believe that it was in contravention of occupational health and safety regulations to put our police officers in there. That is why the commissioner told me, quite clearly —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That is why the commissioner told me quite clearly that, no matter what I thought, he was going to close that police station, as was his right, and I had no intention of trying to convince him otherwise, because I had visited that police post. I will not call it a police station, because it was not; it was a police post. That was the problem; that was what happened under the previous government. It allowed it to get to that stage.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am not answering the member for Girrawheen's grievance.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, I call you to order for the first time today.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I repeat that I certainly would not expect any of our police officers to work in that particular facility, if I can call it a facility. It had deteriorated over the years and there was nothing planned to renew it in any way. No money had been spent on it whatsoever under the previous government, yet the opposition cries foul because the police commissioner—not me, and not the government—closed that police station, for very good reasons. When that police post was open, there was not a 24-hour patrol in that area.

Ms M.M. Quirk: There still isn't.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can tell members, regardless of the interjections by the member for Girrawheen, that I am advised that there is now a 24/7 patrol in that area, coming out of Kiara Police Station. Kiara Police Station is a proper police station, with all the facilities that are needed for modern-day policing, and it certainly meets

occupational health and safety standards for our police officers. I am told—I have no reason to doubt it—that there is a dedicated patrol of at least one vehicle in the Ballajura area, 24 hours a day.

The member for West Swan mentioned some incidents that occurred two or three weeks ago. Yes, they were terrible incidents, in my view. There was a whole spate of incidents that happened —

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The clock was not running. I am not quite sure how long it was not running for.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Cannington.

Grievance Resumed

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can go on for hours! It does not bother me!

That was a bad weekend; no question about it. A gang of youths caused havoc. Our police are being blamed for a lack of response, in relation to response times. Let me just give members some information about that weekend. This group, or gang, of youths actually used shopping trolleys to smash through some local shop windows. They also damaged the library and the aquatic centre next door. Police got the first call on Saturday, 16 July 2011, in relation to Flamingo Trail, Ballajura. A vehicle window had been damaged and no offender was nominated. Somebody had smashed a window in a vehicle, and had obviously run off. At the same time, there was a burglary at Ballajura City Shopping Centre and an attendance job was created at 0208 hours. The Kiara night-shift vehicle was dispatched at 0211 hours—which was pretty quick—and arrived at 0212 hours. Police completed inquiries and departed at 0412 hours. No offenders were identified at that stage. These yobbos, if I can call them that, were smashing windows and doing almost similar things to what is going on in London at the moment; I accept that. The police reacted very quickly; they got there but, as with many instances, it was a very busy night and there were —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: There were priorities that the police had to put in place first of all. The police were searching for somebody who was allegedly walking around with a shotgun somewhere near that location. They had what is known as hot burglaries going on at the time—that is, people breaking into homes. That must take priority over somebody causing a lot of criminal damage. We take criminal damage very, very seriously. If we do not, I think it leads to greater problems in society. In relation to good surveillance and good CCTV coverage, those young yobbos were caught and charged.

Ms R. Saffioti: What happened to them?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: They were caught and they were charged. I am more than a little disappointed, as the Minister for Police, that a more severe penalty was not placed on them. The member for West Swan probably has a different view because she likes to mollicoddle these sorts of people. However, I believe that those people, when they behave in —

Ms R. Saffioti: You are a disgrace! Why don't you do something about Ballajura crime?

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for West Swan, you have an opportunity to present a grievance and not to continually interject on the minister's response. If you have further questions or if you want to ask a question, I will enable that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: In her interjection the member asked me what I am doing about it. I am continually doing things about it. We have more police now in the police service than we have ever had in the history of WA. We brought forward next year's recruitment to this year, albeit predominantly for CHOGM—the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting—but that means we have more police out on the streets now. And Ballajura will get its fair share. There will not be a Ballajura police station, but there will be a Kiara and other local stations. It is my intention to try to do as much as I can to convince the Commissioner of Police, who I do not think needs much convincing, that we need more patrols. And there will be more patrols out in those areas in the fairly near future.