Overview of municipality

The City of Greater Geelong welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the enquiry. This submission is an opportunity for the City of Greater Geelong to demonstrate its commitment to ensuring community safety through developing strong community partnerships and responding to community needs.

Geelong lies approximately 75 kms south west of Melbourne and has a population of 216,330 people in an area of 1245 km$^2$.

Geelong is the major regional centre for the western district and encompasses a thriving regional city, urban communities, small townships and farming communities. The Bellarine Peninsula to the east is a significant tourist destination with a number of coastal towns.

There are a number of police stations in the Local Government area with major stations being Geelong and Corio with three smaller stations on the Bellarine Peninsula at Drysdale, Portarlington and Ocean Grove.

The Council approach to community safety is articulated through the Geelong Community Safety Strategy 2010 – 2013 (Safety Plan). This Strategy has been adopted by the Greater Geelong Local Committee which is an alliance between the City of Greater Geelong, Victoria Police, State Government Departments and Community representatives. The Greater Geelong Safety Committee (GGSC) believes that through a holistic partnership approach we can make Geelong an even safer place to live, work and play. The Greater Geelong Safety Committee’s key priority is to create an integrated approach to community safety. As terms, crime prevention and community safety have not been defined by the City. However, it is implicit in their use that the former relates to activities, design and behavior that can prevent crime from taking place, while the later refers to a wider range of strategies that enhance people’s sense of feeling safe in a place, their connection to their environment and engagement with the people in that space.

Community Safety and Crime Prevention in Geelong

One of the key principles employed at the City of Greater Geelong is harm minimisation and this applies to our Drug Action Plan, the Graffiti Strategy and other community safety initiatives. The primary considerations are the reduction of demand, reduction of harm and reduction of supply not only to individuals but also across the broader community. Harm minimisation is underpinned by the integrated approaches of rapid response, prevention activities and policing.

Geelong has had a long history of involvement in crime prevention and the development of community safety policy and practice. Currently the Greater Geelong Safety Committee is well attended and highly regarded. The GGSC has been in operation in its current form since 2005. The Committee is a good demonstration of the integrated approach taken locally with the monthly meetings and minutes facilitated by Victoria Police and the implementation of the Safety Plan facilitated by the Council. The Committee is currently chaired by Mr John Frame a community member who has a long standing commitment to community safety.
The GGSC has around 20 regular members at a monthly meeting and often brings in other people to address specific issues such as road safety or the prevention of violence against women. The Safety Plan operates under the key objectives of:

- working together,
- safety in our community,
- safety in the home and,
- Safety on our roads.

The plan is reviewed every three years and is kept relevant by a reporting mechanism that sees each of the four objectives reported on three times per year.

The GGSC has a Neighbourhood Watch representative at most meetings with strong collaboration between the Council and Neighbourhood Watch. The local Neighbourhood Watch President has taken a strong interest in the partnership model and is committed to developing new approaches to community safety.

The City of Greater Geelong has had a number of supporting committees that operate in conjunction with the GGSC and are linked into the Safety Plan. These include the Barwon Drug Action Plan Committee, the Prevention of Violence Against Women working group, Road Safe Barwon and the Graffiti Reference Committee.

In addition to these committees there is a capacity to bring together working groups to address specific topics. The response to chroming Central Geelong is an example of a working group meeting on a specific issue of concern. By working together the group was able to undertake research and analysis of chroming incidences in Geelong, develop targeted activities to manage chroming and undertake a coordinated media response that minimised opportunities to sensationalise the topic.

A number of strategic interventions have required the use of a clearly detailed media strategy. The adoption of the media strategy ensures that the GGSC has one spokesperson who is familiar with the Safety Plan, the issue at hand and has an understanding of other factors at play at any given time. This approach provides a platform to ensure media reporting focuses on the topic rather than sensational headlines.

The strategies and actions responding to community safety and crime prevention should not be viewed in isolation of those activities that contribute to enhancing peoples sense of safety and preventing crime occurring. In the City of Greater Geelong there are a range of activities which are identified as positively contributing to this such as:

- the Geelong waterfront youth activities space which provides an open area for you people to recreate and hangout,
- the public arts projects which engage people in developing art pieces and graffiti murals,
- community engagement activities which decrease social isolation and support neighbours getting to know each other,
- the Bellarine Police Community Support Register which provides both practical information for use in emergency, but also enhances local community connections,
- transport connections project which has developed a number of transport solutions to enable people who are transport disadvantaged to access services and social activities.

Achievements in Community Safety and Crime Prevention

In 2008 the City of Greater Geelong was a category winner in the National Awards for Local Government for excellence in Alcohol Management. This award was based on the City’s approach to Community Safety and the focus on developing and maintaining strong relationships. While there is an agreed strategic approach not all the actions undertaken are
managed by Council. Identified as ‘what sets Geelong apart’ was the local level focus of integrated responses, strengthened through mutually supportive partnerships.

The conflict between young people’s use of public space, the public perception, anti social behaviour and interaction with shopping centre management is an ongoing concern within the municipality. The Corio Village shopping centre is an example of a centre that is not just a retail precinct but also the community hub for other services such as medical services, services for young people and Council’s customer service centre. Corio Village had some particular issues around anti social behavior and the centre’s response has seen a spectacular turn around in the way that space is used. The approach was to identify the young people whose behavior was a concern and then to develop a strategy of engagement with them. The centre worked closely with Police to implement banning provisions for behavior that breached the centre’s policy but they also funded a high risk camp for police, young people and centre staff. This approach clearly identified what behavior was expected by users of the centre, gave penalties for breaching that policy and also supported young people to become more connected to the community. This is an example of implementation of the integrated approach of rapid response, prevention activities and policing.

In 2001 Geelong developed a comprehensive Graffiti management program that won the 2004 Crime and Violence Prevention Award from the Federal Government. The City worked with a number of partners including Police, Neighbourhood Watch, Department of Justice, Geelong Chamber of Commerce and youth agency representatives to develop this strategy that includes Prevention, Policing and Rapid Removal.

The Geelong waterfront youth activities area has won design awards for its innovative approach to providing interactive public space for young people.

Coast

Geelong is mixture of rural, regional city and coastal communities and as such has a variety of challenges and concerns in relation to safety. Some of the issues that occur on the coast may not be of concern in central Geelong. For this reason many of the strategies adopted in the City of Greater Geelong will be place focused.

An example is the Ocean Grove New Years Eve working group. The group started meeting around six years ago in response to that community raising concerns about inappropriate behaviour. The aim was to adopt a harm minimisation approach and embedding that into the practice of managing crowds of visitors and residents congregating on the foreshore at Ocean Grove on New Years Eve. One year there was a large unruly group who interacted violently with local residents and in other years there has been concern about the number of vehicles in close proximity with people who may be intoxicated. The aim of the group is to ensure a quick response on the night, to use local knowledge to develop strategies, to evaluate each year’s actions and to improve community safety at this key time of celebration. This group meets as needed in the weeks leading up to the event and does a yearly review to refine the planning for the coming year. Represented on the committee are Local Government, Police, CFA, local traders, Barwon Coast Management and residents.

Other issues on the coast are around the number of break ins to cars parked at beach locations and the theft of valuables from cars. This has led to Police, Council and Neighbourhood Watch working together to get out a message called ‘Remove it, Lock it and Leave it’, encouraging people not to leave valuables in cars at key locations. Council and Police are now working together to get these same messages out to people not to leave valuables in unlocked cars in their driveways and to always lock their vehicles.

The Bellarine Police Community Support Register is another example of a local response to a local concern. This is a register of personal information voluntarily provided by older people and those in need of community support living on the Bellarine Peninsula. The information can be accessed by the Police and other emergency services in order to assist
approved authorities with information required during medical or other emergencies. The project is an example of a local volunteers working with Victoria Police to enhance local community safety.

Central Geelong

The central Geelong area has a density of late night entertainment venues that provide a particular challenge for Council and the police to manage. Geelong has one of the longest operating Liquor Accords in the State and is now looking at ways to make that Accord more relevant to the range of licensees in Geelong. The Accord brings the range of people involved in the central Geelong nightlife together. This provides a forum to share information, address emerging issues and increase awareness of planning expectations.

The City receives no State funding to support Liquor Accords and this may be an opportunity to explore the idea of licence fees being used to better fund local government to resource accords.

In very recent years the State Government has raised the Liquor License fees paid by venues and increased penalties for venues that do not abide by their Liquor Licenses. One strategy that has been argued for at the local level is that operators, who implement additional safety measures, are regular participants in Liquor Accords and who do not receive penalty notices could be rewarded with reductions in licence fees or other incentives. While this approach rewards the effort of licensees there is some concern that this could be an additional regulatory requirement for operators and remove the licensees’ engagement with the model. That is, they may attend but not actively participate in the Accord.

The Geelong central area has a number of collaborative strategies operating that are aimed at minimising anti social behaviour. These strategies include:

- The CitySafe Camera network operates throughout the central Geelong area. The cameras feed back to the Geelong Police station where a Council funded employee monitors the camera and provides advice regarding any escalating issues,
- The Night Watch Radio program where key people are able to keep each other abreast of developments. This strategy includes staff from City of Greater Geelong, Victoria Police, licensees and the security sector,
- Late night Cleaning crew – Council provides a crew to keep the area clean during the night hours. Operation Nightlife – Victoria Police,
- ID scanners operate at most of the licensed venues,
- There is a safe taxi rank operating at peak times.
- The Nightrider bus available to transport people from the Geelong city precinct.

In our view none of these strategies on their own has an impact on reducing violence around licensed premises, but together contribute in a positive way to improving community safety.

In 2010 the City worked closely with Police to develop the ‘So You Know’ program. This program is a public awareness program that is based on a model developed in the Surf Coast Shire for ‘Schoolies Week’. Posters were developed for ‘Schoolies week’ that identified some key offences and the relevant penalties. There has been interest from other municipalities, police stations and liquor accords about this project and it has the potential to be adopted in many communities. It is an example of a project that required cross agency communication, collaboration and resourcing.

The Little Malop St traders group which addresses issues particular to that shopping precinct is another group that has met at various times to hear concerns from traders in the central shopping precinct.
Suburbs

The suburban areas of Geelong identify a variety of issues relating to community safety and crime prevention. These can include illegal motorbike riding in public spaces, family violence, public drinking and litter from packaged liquor outlets, lack of safe and suitable facilities for young people, noise arising from private parties, graffiti and vandalism which has a broad set of responses and other issues identified by residents or Council staff. None of these concerns are particular to Geelong and all require a planned response from a range of agencies.

There are a number of place focused groups that meet, such as the Corio/Norlane Crime and Safety Sub-Committee (northern Geelong area), which focuses on issues specific to suburbs in the north, the Whittington Safety group (eastern area) and the Thomson Steering group (eastern area), which has some safety focus but is also interested in a broader agenda. Often local working groups are familiar with the particular strengths and challenges of that community thus, able to identify issues and solutions and work with Council staff and Police to implement responses. For this reason the City of Greater Geelong is committed to ensuring that members of the community are invited to participate in developing locally informed responses to place based issues.

Barwon Safe Parties was a Federal Government funded program over two years undertaken by the City in partnership with 11 stakeholders including Police and local youth services. This project was one of the National Binge Drinking Community Level projects and has just concluded. Barwon Safe Parties was developed as an action based research model and engaged parents, young people and community organisations in developing strategies to reduce harm from binge drinking at parties.

Advantages to the Geelong approach

It has also been a key feature of the work in Geelong that partnerships form the basis of the best responses. This approach is reliant on an overarching strategic approach well understood and owned by all those participating.

One of the challenges of addressing community safety in the current climate is that the divergent needs of the community requires organisations to adopt a place based response rather than a whole of community approach. In Geelong this has been addressed by supporting local groups that meet at key times and often in response to particular issues. The resourcing of these groups may be provided by a range of sources such as place based staff, local community and sporting groups or networks. Again, the success of this approach is underpinned by partnerships and an overarching agreed strategic approach.

Challenges for Local Government

One of the challenges is the need to ensure rigorous evaluation for projects in order to then have an evidence base for further work. Clearly Council needs to collect data about what interventions have an impact so resources can be better targeted. In crime prevention it is difficult to measure the crimes that ‘never happened’ as a result of good prevention. In addition much community safety and crime prevention work is focused on the immediate need rather than the scrutiny of data. One strategy adopted by the City of Greater Geelong has been to ensure that all funding applications or new projects have some level of evaluation built into them.

For example, the City of Greater Geelong employs staff to monitor the Safe City Camera network of 26 cameras. While monitoring, the camera operator is able to use the Nightwatch Radio program which links up the door staff at late night venues, Police, security staff at the safe taxi rank and the camera operator with hand held radios. If an incident occurs on the street the door staff can use the radio to contact the camera operator who can immediately
go to that camera to get real time information that also goes to the Police. This has been useful with venues able to report potential trouble and Police able to respond and break up a group or move people along before an incident occurs. It is also used to quickly identify offenders who can be issued with on the spot fines for public order offences. As a result of some prevention other incidents may have been avoided. However, this data is not easily collated or measured. It is anticipated that the City may work with Deakin University to develop a method of doing some snapshot evaluation to get a picture of how this prevention approach has impacted safety in Geelong.

Council has demonstrated approaches and strategies responding to the community’s safety concerns. However, Council can struggle to find the capacity amidst the growing demand for services.

The challenge of perception and reality regarding crime and community safety is an ongoing issue for Council and all with an interest in this area. There are a number of strategies in place attempting to balance this, such as celebrating positive community events and working with the media to look beyond the headlines.

**Conclusion**

Community safety is a key component of community wellbeing and connects to all levels of government. Local Governments are uniquely placed to undertake local projects but often rely on State and Federal agencies such as Police, Department of Justice, Department of Immigration or others to partner with them. Crime prevention has long been a task of State and Federal governments but is increasingly reliant on local governments to inform and resource projects, whether through data collection or through direct means such as council grants.

The response taken in Geelong to issues of community safety and crime prevention can be categorised into the three broad themes. Before adopting an approach to any issue the following questions need to be addressed.

**Planning** – Does an issue/intervention fit into existing plans? Can this be linked to existing plans or strategies?

**Partnerships** – What partnerships exist to support an intervention? Do new partnerships need to be developed? Who are the key partners?

**Evidence base** – Is there an existing evidence base for the work? Can this contribute to the data in some way? Does the existing evidence support a particular approach?

The City of Greater Geelong is pleased to be able to contribute to this enquiry and hopes to have an opportunity to meet with the members of the committee at some future time.

**PAUL JAMIESON**

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