

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2012–13

Melbourne — 7 May 2012

Members

Mr N. Angus

Mr P. Davis

Ms J. Hennessy

Mr D. Morris

Mr D. O'Brien

Mr M. Pakula

Mr R. Scott

Chair: Mr P. Davis

Deputy Chair: Mr M. Pakula

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Mr A. McIntosh, Minister for Crime Prevention,

Ms P. Armytage, Secretary,

Ms J. Brennan, Director, Community Crime Prevention, and

Ms J. Griffith, Executive Director, Corrections, Health and Crime Prevention, Department of Justice.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

The CHAIR — I welcome from the Department of Justice Ms Julianne Brennan, Director, Community Crime Prevention. I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the budget estimates for the crime prevention portfolio.

Overheads shown.

Mr McIntosh — The first slide demonstrates that the crime prevention portfolio accounts for only a very small part of the justice budget. We are delivering on our community safety and crime prevention program, which is a significant priority for the government. The key philosophy is to listen to local communities, allow them to identify local problems and help them to implement local solutions. We made a number of election commitments, including the Community Safety Fund, the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund, the Graffiti Prevention and Removal Grants, and the Graffiti Removal Program. One of the things that has occurred, of course, since last year was rephrasing to provide for the Reduction of Violence Against Women and Children grants, one of the most significant issues. Regional Reference groups from around this state raised this as a significant issue for them, and so we are providing for that.

Achievements in community crime prevention: the government's commitment to community crime prevention supports statewide efforts to combat crime in Victoria, which includes more police making public transport safer and toughening up sentencing in our courts. The community crime prevention program targets a range of initiatives at the local level to empower and support communities to take an active role in identifying and developing responses to local issues. Local people are best placed to understand the issues their communities face. The government is supporting the local communities. We are providing the funds to meet their concerns.

Achievements in the portfolio: the Community Safety Fund provides grants of up to \$10 000 for councils, communities and sporting and business groups to implement practical community safety projects. Examples of the projects include security alarms, security screens, fences and locks for community facilities, external lighting systems and crime prevention initiatives. In 2011–12 the government provided \$1 million in funding to 155 practical local community safety projects right across Victoria. I might add that there was something in the order of 350 applications received.

I move to the next one, which is the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund grants — grants of up to \$250 000 for local councils to develop public safety infrastructure. I announced the outcomes of the first round of this grant program. On April 2012, with \$2.4 million in funding allocated to 24 projects.

The Graffiti Prevention and Removal Grants: up to \$25 000 for councils to partner with community groups to tackle graffiti in their local community. In 11–12, the government has provided \$300 000 to fund 18 projects across 17 local government areas. The funded projects include the establishment of three community graffiti removal trailers, the delivery of seven graffiti education programs in schools, distribution of graffiti removal kits and vouchers for residents and retailers and the installation of public arts and murals at graffiti hot spots, including traffic signal boxes and local shopping strips. There will be a further round next year, and of course there will be \$300 000 allocated then.

Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants: as I said, this arose out of discussions we had at our eight regional reference groups, or a few more than that, but a number of regional reference groups. I have to say that probably universally all of them identified this as a key issue for them in their local communities, and they were talking about mechanisms to prevent this from happening. It is not about response; it is about preventing violence against women and children. I am certainly very pleased that we were able to provide funding of \$7.2 million over three years. Most importantly, essentially there will be \$4.8 million allocated to single grants to the eight Department of Justice regions across Victoria, so each of them will receive \$600 000 over the next three years to deal with preventative programs in relation to violence against women.

I am also very pleased that we are dedicating \$2.4 million to grants for the Koori community. Again there was a special need in relation to that community, and again we have met that particular request.

In relation to Graffiti Removal, we have removed 265 000-odd square metres of graffiti. That is equivalent to 13.08 MCG playing fields — let us just call it 13 MCG playing fields. That sort of removal would cost something in the order of \$6.6 million if someone had to pay for it at a commercial rate. The other thing of course is that offenders — perhaps I will not say all of them, but certainly many of the offenders — will now,

with the new community corrections orders, have the uptake, and of course they completed some 70 135 hours of unpaid community work.

Neighbourhood Watch: \$550 000 was allocated over four years for a state manager and accommodation for Neighbourhood Watch. I do not know whether it has been announced publicly, but I understand that Neighbourhood Watch has formally announced that they now have a new state manager, and they have headquarters located in police headquarters here in Melbourne. I am very pleased that Victoria Police and Neighbourhood Watch are developing the Eyewatch program, which is of course a very innovative way to start communicating between people using 21st century technology.

As always, Neighbourhood Watch and local community groups will still be maintained, but it just provides another mechanism for people, without having to go to a meeting, who might keep up to date with all sorts of information about preventing crime in their local area. The government is very pleased to support that.

As I said, as a key feature of the prevention program, and particularly in relation to the Reducing Violence Against Women and Children Grants, the references groups will play a key role in identifying what programs will be funded in relation to those matters. The regional references groups have been a great opportunity for local community members as diverse as the local police officer right through to church representatives, people from government, people involved in the court system, and a number of other groups, including women's groups, right through to local traders associations to come together for them to identify their concerns in relation to crime and indeed to identify what solutions could be provided and then ultimately develop those solutions, with the government supporting them financially in many of those circumstances.

Again as I said it has been a significant revelation to me just how enthusiastically our communities have come together in a variety of locations around the state to talk about their local issues, their local concerns in relation to crime, identifying possible solutions and then developing those solutions, in many cases in partnership with [inaudible].

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. In the remaining time available until 3.30 we have questions from the committee. I will try and get through this quickly. I ask: given the key growth in efficiency initiatives announced in the budget, can you please outline for the committee the likely impact of the budget on enhancing service delivery, promoting productivity and achieving efficiency gains within this portfolio? In responding, could you please indicate how you intend to monitor the portfolio's effectiveness in maximising improvements in these areas?

Mr McIntOSH — Thank you, Chairman, for the question and for the opportunity to outline how the budget will impact upon service delivery, productivity and efficiency in the crime prevention portfolio. The budget provides for the continued implementation of the government's community crime prevention program, supporting local communities to develop locally-based crime prevention projects through our Your Community, Your Say initiatives. In addition to the successful Community Safety Fund, Public Safety Infrastructure Fund and Graffiti grants, the budget provides for the introduction of a new grants program to help reduce violence against women and their children, with a focus on violence prevention and early intervention. The budget also provides for services to remove graffiti from vandalised community, state and local government property, continuing to support local councils and state agency anti-graffiti initiatives.

The Regional Crime Prevention Reference Groups in every region will continue to build partnerships between local communities, government agencies and the police to improve community safety and crime prevention. These reference groups will help empower and support communities to identify and develop responses to local community safety issues. This budget also supports the development of crime prevention information and resources and professional development to help build and maintain engagement and capability in local communities to implement effective prevention responses to local issues.

The secretary and I have already mentioned a number of measures that we are implementing in relation to prisons or otherwise, but most importantly the government is promoting productivity, and we propose to achieve efficiencies through a variety of programs. In crime prevention, given the significant number of community grants being managed under community crime prevention programs, the Department of Justice Procure to Pay project will have significant benefits in improving efficiency in invoice processing. A standard grant agreement will be introduced for use across government. I will just emphasize this: a standard grant

agreement — given that the money is really about grants — will improve efficiency in grant management for both the department and also grant recipients.

The department's community crime prevention unit will also be streamlining processes for grant application and reporting. I can also say that one of the things that has arisen in relation to our grants program in the last 12 months is the calibre of some of the applications has not been up to speed in many cases, and so the department will be quite willing to work with applicants and provide education forums or otherwise to enable them to make their applications in an appropriate way. Ultimately the department will monitor the service delivery improvements of all major projects that are evaluated and granted, and as I said, this will all be evaluated to ensure that we get appropriate service delivery.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. Could you please inform the committee what you consider the likely impact of these initiatives on stakeholders, community stakeholders in particular, in this portfolio — for example, you were just referring to the revised grant procedure. What is the direct impact of that?

Mr McINTOSH — The investment in community crime prevention will improve the capacity of local communities to identify and respond to local crime prevention and community safety issues and will improve the safety and security of Victorians. Initiatives to standardise and streamline grants management will make grant programs more accessible to a broader range of community stakeholders and will reduce the administrative burden on grant recipients, enabling them to spend more of their time focusing on delivering on their projects. As I indicated, what the department has identified is that in some cases the capacity is not commensurate with other communities, and indeed the department proposes to work with those stakeholders and provide the support they need in relation to making those grants.

Ms HENNESSY — Minister, your community crime prevention grants are obviously aimed at preventing crime. You would be aware of an evaluation report conducted for the Mildura Rural City Council in relation to their CCTV network which operates in Mildura. That found that the cameras are actively monitored for less than 10 per cent of the time, that there are technical glitches that were encountered on average every weekend, that police did not monitor the footage and that only 10 per cent of log entries had the potential to assist police in gaining footage. I note that you referred to the department conducting evaluations, but can you give us a commitment that you will evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of how your CCTV programs actually reduce crime?

Mr McINTOSH — Can I just say from the outset that I have had the opportunity of talking to a number of communities, from those that have CCTV cameras right to those that are about to get them, in some case for the first time. Almost invariably that discussion has taken place with members of Victoria Police. I certainly recall one in particular, which was in Ballarat. Ballarat has a number of established CCTV cameras, and as you know, we are funding the purchase of further CCTV cameras. These particular CCTV cameras were transportable — that is, they could be relocated. They are not in the back of a car, but they could be relocated, unlike the fixed cameras. The local mayor was there, and many other councillors. On top of that there were a number of very senior police officers and also members of the local traders association and other community members.

In that case the CCTV cameras are passively monitored at the local police station by Victoria Police. What was made perfectly clear to me there and in many other places — there seemed to be a consistent theme in relation to this matter — was that these CCTV cameras do provide a significant deterrent. That has been repeated by local communities all over Victoria. I mentioned just one in relation to Ballarat. They already have existing CCTV cameras and then they are getting these additional mobile ones, but there are many others. On top of that, it does provide the possibility of a response, but all of them were talking about the fact that the material or pictures that are captured can be used in a prosecution and can lead to positive outcomes in relation to that. But most significantly it is a deterrent factor.

In that regard, as I said, in each case it is a local community that is given these CCTV cameras. In some cases they have contributed some money; otherwise we have supported them in that regard.

Ms HENNESSY — It is state funds, Minister.

Mr McINTOSH — Hang on; I have not quite finished.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Ms Hennessy. Would you like to conclude your answer, Minister?

Mr McINTOSH — Yes. Evaluation tools are being used and based on best practice crime prevention evaluation methodology —

Ms HENNESSY — That is a mouthful.

Mr McINTOSH — developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology and Sydney University. For CCTV projects councils are required to provide a detailed evaluation plan prior to the commencement of the project and councils are provided with the *Guide to Developing CCTV for Public Safety in Victoria*, which details a CCTV evaluation framework.

Ms HENNESSY — A very quick follow-up. Minister, doesn't your crime prevention department risk being a noun in search of a verb unless you can demonstrate that these public funds and the expenditure of these public funds have actually reduced crime?

Mr McINTOSH — Obviously crime rates and crime statistics are a matter for the police minister. What this is about — —

Ms HENNESSY — They kind of go to your role as the crime prevention minister.

The CHAIR — Ms Hennessy, let the minister answer the question. Be courteous, thank you.

Mr McINTOSH — The crime prevention portfolio is concentrating on local communities — engaging with local communities and getting them to think about what are their concerns in relation to crime in those local communities, identifying possible solutions and supporting them, in many cases, to implement that solution they come up with. I mentioned Ballarat in relation to CCTV cameras. Recently I have been to Stawell, where we announced again another infrastructure fund for a mere \$12 000 to provide lighting in a public park. They were concerned that people were dissuaded from using this public park because it was dark and there were concerns about the people in that park. Again it is an opportunity for that local community to meet, come together, and discuss what are their issues and how they address those issues by providing money through government to address those issues — in this case it was lighting — through CCTV cameras, lighting or security devices.

Recently I was at Beaufort, where we again issued a grant. All it was about was that they used to be getting gas bottles pinched from the local community facility where the local band practised. There were a number of gas bottles outside this facility that were regularly being taken. The grant was to provide a metal cage that could be locked, to prevent these gas bottles being stolen. Again, in relation to this, it is about a local community coming together, identifying a problem and identifying a possible solution to that. Indeed the government has provided in those cases the funds to enable them to purchase the infrastructure.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3 at page 193, which is of course the community safety and crime prevention output, and I ask: how is the budget contributing to the implementation of crime prevention measures in Victorian communities?

Mr McINTOSH — Funding is provided in the 2012–13 budget to cover a range of grants and programs in the crime prevention area. The Community Safety Fund has grants of up to \$10 000 that can be available not only to councils but also to community groups. Examples that have been granted in this round include providing security alarms for community facilities, external lighting, security screens, fencing and locks, crime prevention information packs and community safety awareness activities. In the current year more than 350 applications were received, and 155 were funded in 75 per cent of local government areas. I mention some 75 per cent of local government areas here in Victoria received those grants.

There are also Public Safety Infrastructure Fund grants, which are open to councils for grants of up to \$250 000 to pay for the installation of infrastructure such as, as I mentioned, CCTV, lighting and such other measures. In this round there have been some 24 successful applicants, totalling \$2.4 million. As I said, it provides for the capital cost of the equipment; the ongoing cost has to be provided by the local council.

Councils are more than happy to form partnerships with the community. I will mention another one, which is the graffiti measures. Graffiti is not only illegal and unsightly but it contributes to community feelings of a lack of public safety. The community corrections Graffiti Removal Program provides teams of offenders on

community correction orders working to remove graffiti from infrastructure. In the current year work to the value, as I said, of \$6.6 million has been rolled out, and on top of that there has been over 200 000 square metres of graffiti removed.

As I said before, I am very pleased that the government has also allocated some \$7.2 million for the grants to prevent violence against women and children.

Mr PAKULA — I want to refer to your presentation and your reference to Neighbourhood Watch. I want to go to the matter of you abandoning your promise to provide Neighbourhood Watch with street-by-street crime statistics and remind you that in your pre-election material you said that denying access to street-by-street crime information was part of John Brumby's plan to hide the truth about the types of crime affecting communities. If denying Neighbourhood Watch access to street-by-street crime information was an attempt to hide the truth about the types of crime affecting communities back in 2010, how would you describe it now?

Mr McINTOSH — Mr Pakula, I will answer this way: as we know, the Ombudsman has recommended that we introduce an independent crime statistics agency in this state. Of course the government is committed to doing so. Importantly, there are a whole variety of different models that we could implement in relation to the crime statistics agency, but ultimately that is currently being developed by the government and we will be making announcements in relation to that matter. I just say that it will be the responsibility of this new crime statistics agency to provide crime statistics to the community and also in relation to Neighbourhood Watch.

One of the difficulties we have is that the LEAP database does not geotag street names with locations. For example, I have a High Street in my electorate, and I would imagine that many other electorates, if not all of them, would probably have a High Street in that electorate as well; there are many High streets around. What happens is that if a crime is committed in High Street, the LEAP database, as I understand it, is unable to provide a GeoTag, so it cannot differentiate between Kew and Malvern, for example. The critical thing is that this has to be worked through to provide an outcome in relation to street-by-street matters.

There is also a concern potentially in relation to privacy matters, and that has to be addressed as well, but rest assured that the government remains committed to providing those sorts of statistics to the whole community through an independent agency. It should not devolve into the political football that it has been over the last few years.

Mr PAKULA — So it is a deliberate attempt to hide the truth when Labor is in government but it is just bad luck now. I have heard what you have had to say, Minister. Let me ask you this: last year we asked you in terms of crime reduction what the marker of success would be. What would you see as being a figure in terms of a reduction in crime that would be viewed by the government as being a successful outcome? What is the target for crime reduction? You would not answer it last year; in fact you said it would take a term or two or 20 years but you would not give a number. Are you prepared to have a crack at a number this year?

Mr McINTOSH — Crime statistics are ultimately a matter for the police minister.

Mr PAKULA — You are the crime prevention minister.

Mr McINTOSH — In relation to crime statistics and in relation to the principal question in relation to Neighbourhood Watch, as I said, the government is committed to having an independent agency to develop crime statistics, just like they have in many other jurisdictions around Australia — an independent agency to promulgate these crime statistics, which means that it will be removed from the political process.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Minister, would you like to complete your answer?

Mr McINTOSH — I have.

Mr ANGUS — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 192, and the section headed 'Community operations'. You have touched on various aspects of that in your comments to date, but can you please advise the committee: how is the budget supporting local community engagement on crime prevention initiatives?

Mr McIntOSH — As I said, the principal factor in relation to the crime prevention initiatives is about engaging local communities. In relation to crime, you can take a whole range of solutions that might be provided by government — additional police and tougher sentencing right through to appropriate programs for offenders and indeed prisoners.

I have to say that the crime prevention program is about working with local communities and those local communities coming up with solutions. As I said, one of the most memorable experiences I had — perhaps memorable is not the right word but devastating experiences — was going around my communities here in Victoria, talking to those communities through regional reference groups that involved, as I have said, not only members of Victoria Police but local councils, local community members, school principals and people involved in the court justice system. All of these types of people have come together. In many cases some are small, some are a bit larger.

These communities have identified issues such as substance abuse and housing, right through to a whole variety of other matters, but one thing that kept coming through time and time again was the issue of violence against women and children. While I was very pleased to see a variety of announcements from particularly the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, in relation to vulnerable children recently, that being said, there was an opportunity to do something in my portfolio responsibility, which was to respond to the community, which was to re-phase my grants program to take account of violence against women and children, and indeed again that was in response to the local communities around this state. There just happened to be almost total unanimity amongst these communities who are identifying this as a significant issue for them.

What we are doing with our grants program and rephasing is giving them the opportunity of identifying that yes, there is a problem but identifying what the solution may be, and we are providing those funds to develop an outcome. I use that as a very good and cogent example of how this portfolio is working with local communities to identify problems and then ultimately provide the funding for their solutions. I emphasise it is their solutions.

Mr SCOTT — In your presentation you made reference to Neighbourhood Watch. Why has it taken you over 10 months to recruit a new state manager for Neighbourhood Watch?

Mr McIntOSH — Mr Scott, we are not in the job of recruiting or providing or imposing a state manager on Neighbourhood Watch. That was a decision that they had. All that was happening was that we were providing funds that would enable them to engage a state manager and indeed take some premises. I must admit I have had a number of meetings with Neighbourhood Watch and the former president, Andrew Brideson, and now currently Brian Samuel. It was they who went through the process of identifying the particular candidate; I and my office had no role in that process. They have selected — I think her name is Gillian Metz. I have not met Ms Metz, but I am very satisfied with that outcome, so that is the reason. It was not a decision by government; it was a matter for Neighbourhood Watch.

Mr SCOTT — In the previous budget there was an announced boost of funding to Neighbourhood Watch I think of \$300 000 in the 2011–12 financial year, and then there was funding of \$100 000 over the subsequent years over that estimates period, so this year and the next two years. How much of that \$300 000 budget from the previous financial year or the current one we are in now has been spent?

Mr McIntOSH — I understand \$150 000 has been paid and another \$100 000 will be paid before the end of the financial year.

Mr O'BRIEN — I would just like to take you to budget paper 3, chapter 2, on community safety and crime prevention. I think you have answered a number of questions in relation to this. Specifically it is in relation to whether you could provide any examples to the committee of how your portfolio is contributing to the implementation of crime prevention initiatives in Victorian communities and specifically any responses from some of those sectors — say, people working with domestic violence — about those new grants.

Mr McIntOSH — One very good example was of course the Community Safety Fund, with grants of up to \$10 000. I was very pleased to be joined by yourself and the member for Barwon South, Mr Katos, to effectively announce the grant of funds to the local Bellarine railway. In fact I still have the Bellarine railway cap and wear it regularly. But that was a great opportunity to provide the security mechanisms for their shed and those matters.

Mr PAKULA — Minister for caps, gas bottles — —

Mr McINTOSH — You may mock, Mr Pakula, but the reality is to the people of Beaufort — —

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, colleagues. We are getting to the end of this session and the minister, I am sure, would like to complete the answer to this question.

Mr McINTOSH — Again, Mr Chairman, you have a community — and Mr Pakula may want to mock — but to towns like Beaufort and in relation to their gas bottles it was a significant concern. Likewise security devices that we provide and other forms of infrastructure, whether it is lighting or CCTV cameras — local communities take these very, very seriously.

Mr PAKULA — Like street-by-street crime statistics.

Mr McINTOSH — And the most important thing about this is that the government is providing opportunity to local communities who have identified these issues in relation to crime and provided a solution. In relation to Bellarine of course, as I said, we were down there. I have been to Ballarat; I have given an indication in relation to that. Beaufort is another one in relation to gas bottles. As I said, Mr Pakula may very well want to mock local communities, identifying something that might come out of petty cash in his pocket — —

Mr PAKULA — I would like a target for crime reduction from the minister for crime reduction.

The CHAIR — Mr Pakula, I think Mr O'Brien has the call and the minister is responding.

Mr PAKULA — The minister was provoking me.

The CHAIR — I think you have the discipline to control yourself at this time of the day, and in fact at this time of the day if the minister has nothing further to add — —

Mr O'BRIEN — I would like to hear the minister's response.

Mr McINTOSH — One other thing, Mr Chairman. I just also again reiterate our grants in relation to preventing violence against women and children. Again I just emphasise that this was local communities around this whole state raising this as a matter of profound concern, and, again, rephrasing these grants has provided the opportunity to deliver on those matters.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for completing your answer, Minister. We have come to the end of this session, and I would like to thank Ms Griffith and Ms Brennan for their attendance this afternoon, and we will take a short adjournment before commencing with the anticorruption commission portfolio. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.