



Mick Gentleman MLA

Manager of Government Business
Minister for Business
Minister for Fire and Emergency Services
Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety
Minister for Multicultural Affairs
Minister for Police and Crime Prevention

Member for Brindabella

Mr Hamish Finlay
Acting Clerk
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Our ref: PRO24/2050

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for your letter of 14 May 2024, regarding the petition E-PET-029-23 and PET-018-24. The petition requests the Assembly to call on the Government to increase foot patrol frequencies in the Woden Town Centre to protect small businesses and the public from crime.

Pursuant to Standing Order 100, this letter constitutes my response.

Community engagement

The ACT Government has been listening to the concerns of small business owners in the Woden Town Centre about both criminal and anti-social behaviour. Such behaviour is always concerning, and efforts are being made by Government and ACT Policing to address these issues.

Education and public messaging are important components of crime prevention, community safety and enhancing confidence in police. ACT Policing is committed to raising awareness of community safety through active engagement with the entire community and the delivery of effective safety messaging.

A large component of ACT Policing's crime reduction work is engagement with the community and Community Interest Groups which it has steadily been increasing. Over the past year, police officers

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have attended and hosted numerous events in local Canberra shopping centres and cafes, engaging face-to-face and re-establishing ACT Policing's strong relationships with the Canberra community.

As part of ACT Policing's commitment to community consultation, Officers in Charge of all ACT Policing Stations engage with business owners and operators as opportunities arise, to raise awareness about burglaries and other criminal conduct, and when requested, provide education on how to protect and secure businesses from criminality.

ACT Policing has been highly vigilant with engagement with the inner south community and continues to build relationships with business owners and residents of Phillip and surrounding suburbs. Senior police members attend community forum sessions upon request, including Woden community meetings, to address questions from and work with business owners on strategies to help reduce anti-social behaviour incidents and limit the opportunity for crime to occur.

ACT Policing routinely conducts proactive patrols across the ACT, paying particular attention to crowded places, including transport hubs and shopping centres. ACT Policing Woden Patrols are spending time at Westfield Woden and the Woden Bus Interchange daily and meet monthly with the management of Westfield Woden. In addition to these monthly meetings, ACT Policing will host an upcoming event at Hoyts Westfield Woden for retailers to talk to police about their concerns.

In September 2023, Woden Police Station members hosted Coffee with a Cop, which is an opportunity for members of the community and business owners to meet their local officers. As Coffee with a Cop events are planned across the ACT each year, it is anticipated the next event held for Woden will be in September 2024.

Alongside these initiatives, ACT Policing received more than 117 requests in 2023 to attend community events in a public engagement capacity. ACT Policing continues to facilitate officer attendance at these events as operational priorities allow, further demonstrating its commitment to strengthening relationships with the community.

Crime Statistics

There are multiple factors that can prompt a rise in crime and the complexity of new crimes is also an issue that police are encountering more than ever. ACT Policing is working with Government and partner agencies to identify strategies on how best to address the social issues that often underpin anti-social behaviour before it becomes a recurring issue.

As at June 2024, the majority of reported offences committed in the suburb of Phillip (which comprises Woden Town Centre) are either on par with or decreasing to those made to ACT Policing in 2023. There is, however, a projected yearly increase relating to the offence of theft (excluding motor vehicles) with 205 reports (to June 2024), compared to 369 reports for the 2023 year.

Offences reported to ACT Policing in Phillip

Offence	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*
Homicide	0	0	1	0	0	0
Assault	87	67	77	114	122	50
Sexual offences	9	13	20	30	22	6
Robbery	9	3	6	15	12	5
Burglary	48	38	50	80	65	21
Stolen Motor vehicle	38	22	45	36	33	25
Theft (excl motor vehicle theft)	304	224	340	394	369	205
Property damage	131	104	95	113	104	46
Other offences against property	52	62	68	73	75	14
Other offences against good order	28	20	24	19	31	16
Justice procedures	64	50	64	47	53	29
Firearms and weapons	4	6	10	11	18	4
Drug offences	6	11	14	6	8	3
Traffic Offences	111	122	87	90	71	28
Breach Health Order	0	21	5	0	0	0
Other offences n.e.c.	3	3	7	7	2	1
Total	897	775	916	1047	1001	458

*1 January 2024 - 20 June 2024

Source: PROMIS as at 20 June 2024

For the Woden Plaza (as at June 2024), the majority of reports of offences are either on par with or decreasing to those made in 2023. Reports for traffic offences, burglaries, stolen motor vehicles and theft (excluding motor vehicles) have projected yearly increases to the 2023 calendar year.

Offences reported to ACT Policing in Woden Plaza

Offence	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*
Assault	17	13	21	21	38	12
Sexual offences	1	2	3	1	1	1
Other offences against the person	1	2	1	1	1	2
Robbery	3	2	2	9	6	3
Burglary	6	2	6	5	3	5
Stolen Motor vehicle	2	3	6	1	4	7
Theft (excl motor vehicle theft)	120	67	106	112	162	109
Property damage	20	19	8	9	15	8
Other offences against property	13	8	34	9	16	7
Other offences against good order	6	7	6	5	16	6
Justice procedures	4	5	12	7	5	7
Firearms and weapons	2	4	4	9	10	1
Drug offences	0	4	4	1	6	0
Traffic Offences	8	12	4	5	1	6
Breach Health Order	0	11	1	0	0	0
Other offences n.e.c.	0	0	0	1	1	1
Total	203	161	218	196	285	175

*1 January 2024 - 20 June 2024

Source: PROMIS as at 20 June 2024

Youth crime

Anecdotally, Police have observed an increase in emboldened youth anti-social behaviour, and while proactive patrols with an overt police presence provide a degree of comfort to the public, they are less effective at preventing crime and antisocial behaviour than they have been historically. These issues are not localised in Woden, or the Phillip business district. Anti-social behaviour and youth crime occur across the ACT, impacting on all sectors of the community.

As at June 2024, ACT Policing had arrested 23 young people (17 years or younger) in the suburb of Phillip in 2024. This is a projected doubling of the 2023 calendar year number of 21 and 13 in 2022.

	2022	2023	2024*
Arrests	13	21	23

*1 January 2024 - 24 June 2024

Source: PROMIS as at 25 June 2024

Early intervention, education and diversion strategies are key to disrupting the life cycle of criminal offending and ACT Policing works with partner agencies to identify youth at risk and suitable candidates for diversion programs to divert youth from harmful behaviours. ACT Policing works closely with Canberra's Police Community Youth Club (PCYC) to promote programs aimed at creating healthier and safer pathways for young people. It also works in collaboration with the ACT Education Directorate to provide safety-themed education programs and resources and employs Youth Liaison Officers to engage with young people and schools on a referral basis, in relation to anti-social behaviour and other significant issues in their lives.

SupportLink established a referral pathway called the Safer Youth Response Service (SYRS), a diversionary program for young people 10-14 years displaying anti-social behaviours and beginning to engage with police. The program includes intensive outreach case management for both the young person and their family. The aim of the service is to provide a safe and responsive service to young people, diverting them from the youth justice system and further behaviours that lead to interactions with ACT Policing or justice systems.

Woden Patrols, along with all ACT Policing sworn members have been utilising the SupportLink referral service since its launch, when required, within their daily duties. It is important to note however, that while ACT Policing has access to this support referral pathway for youths, acceptance of, and participation in the program is entirely voluntary.

Resources and police response

ACT Policing's Intelligence Team analyses a variety of information sources to identify patterns, convergences, and prioritisation to maximise crime reduction opportunities and increase community safety. Target areas for patrolling are based on intelligence, which draws on sources including

community involvement such as reporting via Crime Stoppers and engagement directly with ACT Policing.

While police stations will always be a part of the police ecosystem, it is important to recognise that ACT Policing officers have more communication tools and technology than ever before, which allows them to do more of their work on the road and respond faster to crimes when they are occurring. Police response time and resourcing is based on operational priorities occurring at the time with life threatening emergencies being prioritised first, followed by incidents where there is an immediate threat to a person or property. Canberra's condensed geographical nature does, however, mean that officers can move across the territory in a timely manner, with police regularly undertaking duties in different patrol zones as required.

In June 2023, the ACT Government made the commitment to enhance community safety by investing more than \$107 million to boost ACT Policing personnel by 126 over five years. This is the largest single staffing and funding boost ever received by ACT Policing. 106 police recruits have commenced with ACT Policing to 1 July 2024.

Reporting

The community is encouraged to utilise the various reporting avenues available when requiring police assistance.

The public is encouraged to call 131 444 to report any illegal or anti-social activity as the incident is occurring to allow police the opportunity to direct the best and most appropriate resource to respond.

Another option is to submit a report via Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or via the website on www.crimestoppersact.com.au. Reports can be provided anonymously via Crime Stoppers. This avenue is best used to build intelligence on a person/s of interest, or safety concern for a community so police can proactively provide a presence in the area and target the problematic behaviour. CCTV and dash cam footage can also be submitted via this Crime Stoppers.

ACT Policing has implemented an online reporting to supplement current reporting methods. On 30 June 2023, an online reporting portal was launched to the public and is now available to the ACT community for the reporting of minor, non-urgent property damage and vandalism incidents and dangerous driving incidents. This option will provide convenience for the community and allow police to better respond to incidents where immediate police assistance is required. The Online Reporting portal's aim is to complement, not replace, ACT Policing's engagement and physical presence at crime scenes.

I trust this information provides the petitioners with assurance that their concerns are understood, have been acknowledged by the ACT Government and efforts are being made by Government and ACT Policing to address these issues.

Yours sincerely



Mick Gentleman MLA
Minister for Police and Crime Prevention

13/8/2024