



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 Tom Duncan
Clerk
ACT Legislative Assembly
London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Our ref: PRO24/1565

Dear Mr Duncan 

Thank you for your letter of 9 April 2024, regarding petition E-PET-006-24 (and PET-012-24 with the same content), Crime in Watson. The petition requests the Assembly call on the Government to:

- a. Provide adequate resourcing for policing and make police presence in the community visible and regular;
- b. Ensure Housing ACT uphold its responsibilities and obligations to the community and those in community living (i.e strata) to prevent and address anti-social behaviour in accordance with relevant legislation; and
- c. Ensure repeat offenders are held to account to protect the community.

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

Crime and Community Safety issues in Watson and Downer

As with Canberra generally, rates of crime in Watson and Downer are low. Indeed, data from ACT Policing shows the number of offences in Watson and Downer reported to ACT Policing have decreased.

Incidents reported to ACT Policing from the area have increased. This increase indicates that people are willing to come forward to report matters to ACT Policing. Incidents reported to police include

ACT Legislative Assembly London Circuit, GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601

 +61 2 6205 0218  gentleman@act.gov.au

 @GENTLEMANMick

 MickGentleman

 mick.gentleman

reports from any source including police operations and cover a wide range of behaviour or issues. That is, reporting of an incident or issue may or may not be criminal.

- ACT Policing has observed that incidents reported in Watson have **increased by 17.2 per cent**, with 837 incidents reported in 2022 and 981 incidents reported in 2023. Between 1 January to 31 March 2024, there has been 257* incidents in Watson reported to ACT Policing, this compares with 261 incidents reported in the same period in 2023.
- ACT Policing has observed that incidents reported in Downer have **decreased by 3.9 per cent**, with 533 incidents reported in 2022 and 512 incidents reported in 2023. Between 1 January to 31 March 2024, there has been 159* incidents in Downer reported to ACT Policing, this compares with 149 incidents reported in the same period in 2023.

An **incident** includes reports made to police from any source (operations, front desk, online reporting etc.) recorded in PROMIS, where a criminal offence may or may not have occurred. This term also encompasses pro-active police activity recorded in PROMIS, including random breath testing, criminal targeting operations etc. where a criminal offence may or may not have occurred.

- Regarding the perception of an increased crime trend in the suburb of Watson, ACT Policing advises that offences reported for Watson have **decreased by 23.8 per cent**, with 416** offences reported in 2022 and 317** offences in 2023. Burglary and Property damage offences reported reduced significantly from 2022 to 2023.

One or more **offences** are recorded against an incident when credible criminal activity is reported to, or becomes known to ACT Police. To be classed as an offence:

- The circumstances as reported or detected amount to a crime defined by law and fall within the jurisdiction of the police agency; and
- There isn't credible evidence to the contrary.

*** the PROMIS database is a live system which is updated on a daily basis, therefore data extracted is subject to slight change dependent on the date of extraction. The data for this figure was extracted and accurate as at 19 April 2024.**

****Statistics include issued Traffic Infringement Notices and Criminal Infringement Notices.**

In June 2023, the ACT Government committed to enhance community safety by investing more than \$107 million in recruiting additional 126 ACT Policing personnel for the next five years. This is the largest single staffing and funding boost ever received by ACT Policing. All areas of ACT Policing will see an increase in numbers. The funding will allow an additional dedicated ACT Policing recruit class to be run annually for the next five years.

The first year of More ACT Policing (MAP) funding covered 28 positions, equivalent to 18.75 FTE for 2023-24. Financial year to date 2023-24, ACT Policing FTE has met the overall affordable FTE level, inclusive of the MAP increase. This FTE level is forecast to increase towards the end of this financial year in preparation for 2024-25 MAP funding, through commencement of recruits and lateral members as outlined below.

ACT Policing secured an additional recruit course for 2023-24. Three courses have already graduated throughout this FY with a total of 71 new Police Officers commencing operational duties with ACT Policing. A fourth additional course started in January 2024 with recruits to graduate and commence operational duties as Police Officers in ACT Policing in July 2024.

Additional to the above recruit courses, ACT Policing has 10 Lateral Police Officers currently undertaking AFP training, set to commence in ACT Policing in June 2024.

Pending successful completion of their training, it is estimated that a total of 106 recruits (inclusive of Lateral members) will have commenced in ACT Policing between July 2023 and July 2024.

Actions by ACT Policing and the Government to address concerns in Watson and Downer

Efforts have been made by ACT Policing and the ACT Government to engage the Watson and Downer community to address concerns. Following a meeting attended by Minister Vassarotti with the Watson Community Association, another meeting was held on 27 February 2024, where Minister Rattenbury, Minister Vassarotti, Detective Superintendent for the North District Scott Moller, and a representative from Housing ACT met with representatives from the Watson Community Association. On 7 April 2024, Housing ACT and ACT Policing also participated in the Community Cohesion Day event organised by the Watson Community Association. The engagement with the Watson Community Association continues, with a meeting held in June 2024 attended by Minister Vassarotti and representatives from ACT Policing and Housing ACT to monitor the ongoing work to support the local community.

ACT Policing is also engaging with the community in Watson by contributing content to the Watson Community newsletter, including information about how and when to contact police. Similar information is being displayed on notice boards in the area.

General Duties Officers from the City Station routinely conduct proactive policing patrols in all northern suburbs of the ACT, including Watson and Downer. They respond to reports of criminal behaviour, including drug-related incidents. To address concerns raised by the Watson community, ACT Policing are conducting a review of some recent reports made by the community.

Housing ACT has responded to complaints regarding tenants. Syringe disposal units were provided in the public housing blocks, and regular clean up and maintenance have been carried out in Windeyer Court and A'Beckett Court. Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) have engaged with the Watson community and identified an increase in the inappropriate disposal of used sharps around the Watson shops. TCCS will soon provide a sharps bin for safe disposal of sharps, which is not known to increase the use of sharps in an area and instead facilitates the safe management of sharps that are already being used.

Housing ACT is committed to working with tenants residing in Watson and Downer, ensuring they are well-supported and able to fulfill their obligations under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. Housing ACT staff has recently conducted targeted visits and issued several legal notices where breaches of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* have occurred. If these notices are not remedied or there are further reported breaches, further legal actions will occur, which may include referral to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Housing ACT and ACT Policing are committed to collaborating with the Watson Community Association, as well as other Government and Non-Government partners, to address any ongoing issues in Watson and Downer.

ACT Policing Approach in Responding to Crime and Incidents in the ACT

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. The intelligence informs target areas for police patrols. Canberra's condensed geographical nature means that officers can move across the territory in a timely manner, with police regularly undertaking duties in different patrol zones if the resources are required. In addition to those located at the City Police Station, ACT Policing's dispatch system ensures the closest and most available resources will be allocated. Police response time and resourcing are based on all other operational priorities occurring at the time. Additionally, ACT Policing prioritises its responses to life-threatening emergencies, followed by incidents where there is an immediate threat to a person or property.

Education and public messaging are important to crime prevention, community safety and confidence in police. ACT Policing has been steadily increasing its community engagement activities. Over the past year, police officers have attended and hosted numerous events in local shopping centres and cafes, engaging residents face-to-face to maintain a strong relationship with the Canberra community. ACT Policing has received more than 117 requests in 2023 to attend community events in a public engagement capacity and continues to facilitate officer attendance at these events as operational priorities allow.

ACT Policing recognises the significance of a community's willingness to partner with police in ensuring a safe city. ACT Policing encourages the community to utilise the various reporting avenues available when requiring police assistance. They have been exploring a range of technical upgrades to community reporting channels for minor incidents, particular crimes and other matters, and are implementing online reporting to complement existing methods. Additionally, ACT Policing also

works with partner agencies to address social issues that often underpin anti-social behaviour before it becomes a recurring issue.

I trust this information provides the petitioners with assurance that their concerns are understood and have been acknowledged by the ACT Government.

Yours sincerely



Mick Gentleman MLA
Minister for Police and Crime Prevention

5/7/2024