

7.3 TACKLING COMMUNITY SAFETY

Submitting Councillors: Councillors Paterson and Lake

MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Supports the establishment of the Monash Community Safety Innovation Board to develop options for improving community safety in Monash;*
- 2. Appoints Cr Paterson and Cr Lake to the Board; and*
- 3. Authorises officers to commence the foundation work required to establish and support the Board.*

INTRODUCTION

Community consultation together with recent local media articles have highlighted the issue of community perceptions of personal safety including 'fear of crime'. Fear of crime can seriously reduce the quality of an individual's life and may also lead to a range of other social problems.

This notice of motion follows discussions which have occurred between Victoria Police and Council and recommends that Council now move to establish a high level, strategically focused, Monash Community Safety Innovation Board in partnership with Victoria Police. The Board will work on a fixed term project of around six months to develop an innovative and transformative approach to improve community safety and tackle the underlying causes that influence the community's perception of community safety. It is important that the approach developed will communicate, engage and connect with our community in a meaningful way.

BACKGROUND

The City of Monash is generally a safe place to live and has traditionally experienced relatively low levels of crime however, there has been an increase in some (particularly older) residents reporting that they feel unsafe or feel threatened by crime or victimisation.

As an example, when compared with the Melbourne metropolitan area, Monash is ranked (on a comparable rate per 100,000 population):

- 68th out of the 79 local government areas for reported violent offences;
- 67th out of the 79 local government areas for reported drug offences; and
- 25th out of the 79 local government areas for reported property offences.

This motion has the support of Victoria Police and seeks to establish a joint Council/Police Monash Community Safety Innovation Board to explore the specific issue of community perceptions of personal safety which includes ‘fear of crime’ and to specifically develop an innovation program of best practice projects that improves community safety, perceptions of safety and awareness of crime. Critical to this will be a cutting edge communication strategy that will engage with all Monash residents.

DISCUSSION

In recent years, Monash has undertaken many innovative community safety projects such as the Monash Milk Bar Network Exchange, the Clayton Laneways Projects and the Community Graffiti Solutions Projects. Furthermore, Monash has gained recognition as a leader in preventing violence against women in both private and public spaces. We are committed to preventing violence against women before it occurs through long-term initiatives such as our Generating Equality and Respect program and via the work of our Gender Equity Officer. This focus will help to create a greater feeling of safety and security in our community.

As Grabosky suggests, fear of crime has become an important issue of public concern: a problem which detracts from quality of life, and which adversely affects social and economic well-being (1995, ‘Fear of crime and fear reduction strategies’, Australian Institute of Criminology. No. 44 Trends and issues’). When considering community safety issues we need to remind ourselves that a number of factors have been associated with fear of crime. One of the factors most consistently and strongly associated with fear of crime is gender. However, it is recognised that community members will also have different perceptions of safety, depending on their age, gender, ethnicity, experiences, health and abilities.

This motion seeks to pioneer a new, innovative approach to community safety and will focus on tackling unrealistic perceptions of crime which are causing unfounded fear and anxiousness in our community. The establishment of a short term and strategically focused Monash Community Safety Innovation Board (the Board), in partnership with Victoria Police, will involve up to five other representatives to develop recommendations for an innovative approach which can be further considered by Council and Victoria Police.

It is proposed that the Board will comprise:

- a) Victoria Police – two senior representatives;
- b) City of Monash – two councillor representatives and the Chief Executive Officer
- c) An independent chair – a prominent Victorian;

- d) Monash University – one senior representative; and
- e) Department of Justice – one senior representative

It is intended that Monash Council and Victoria Police will appoint their respective representatives to the Board and then the Board will make the further appointments.

With the support of officers, it is envisaged that the Board will meet together on approximately six occasions over the next six months. Other key stakeholders will be invited to participate on the reference group as appropriate.

To ensure that the Board is informed by a foundation of knowledge, it is proposed that officers commence a detailed review of current literature, develop an understanding of data and trends and conduct qualitative primary research with partners, stakeholders and the community. It is proposed that Council build on this understanding through an innovative and adaptable 'co-design' process to engage with new and existing partners and stakeholders to develop responses to the identified issues.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The establishment and support to the Monash Community Innovation Board will be delivered within current budget resources.

CONSULTATION

Inspector Mick McGinn, Local Area Commander Monash Police Service Area has contributed to the development of this initiative and is fully supportive of partnering with Council to identify innovative approaches to address the issue of community safety and perceptions of personal safety and crime.

CONCLUSION

Council has played a central role in the design, management and delivery of crime prevention programs and policies over a number of years. The increased concern around crime within our community deserves a concerted effort and an innovative approach to address both real and perceived problems.