



8 September 2008

The Hon. Judy Maddigan MP
Chair
Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee
Parliament House
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Dear Ms Maddigan

**RE: DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE - STRATEGIES
TO PREVENT HIGH VOLUME OFFENDING AND RECIDIVISM BY
YOUNG PEOPLE**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Discussion Paper* prepared by the *Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee* received 7 August 2008.

The City of Melbourne is committed to ensuring the health and wellbeing of all young people in the City. The *Strategy for a Safer City 2007-2010* and *A City of Young People: Young People's Policy 2005 – 2009* articulate Melbourne City Council's vision for addressing the needs of young people and the relationship of the broader community to young people. The two policies reflect the highly complex issues that affect young people in our capital city context.

The City of Melbourne is in the relatively unique position in Victoria of having a high resident youth population as well as regularly attracting many young people who live in other localities. Approximately 37 per cent of our residents (27,850) are young people and half of our young residents were born overseas. Many young non-residents are also attracted to the vibrant CBD entertainment precinct, to access social support services, to work and/or study, and to enjoy all that Melbourne has to offer.

Unfortunately, one of the negative impacts of large volumes of young people coming into the city is that the City of Melbourne is at the frontline of dealing with violence and intentional injury among young males - particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. Addressing these concerns together with the City's vision to improve opportunities and wellbeing for young people are commitments for Council.

Comments on the *Discussion Paper*

The City of Melbourne fully supports the Parliament of Victoria's inquiry and makes a submission on the basis that the Melbourne CBD experiences significant violence and injury (including assaults) amongst young people.

The City of Melbourne has identified alcohol misuse as a causal factor of violence and injury amongst young people in the CBD, and is currently investigating appropriate CBD entertainment precinct strategies to address the complex issues facing our municipality. Some other types of substance abuse may also be linked to violence in the CBD, but further data and research are required. This submission therefore meets the *Terms of Reference* of the inquiry but from the unique perspective of a capital city CBD context.

The scope of the inquiry is reassuring as it openly acknowledges and aims to address key issues that impede progress in preventing high volume offending by young people, particularly the obstacles to sharing data or evidence based information across governments, agencies and service providers. Shared or linked definitions and responsible access to meaningful data about young people are crucial in developing effective responses to anti-social behaviours that result in offending, recidivism and harm.

In the Melbourne CBD context, something as simple as living in another municipality can dramatically reduce the availability of data on young people affected by violence in the CBD. Accessing select information and data that specifically relates to young people residing in other municipalities is essential for effective action in the Melbourne CBD, but also necessary to enable collaborative partnership responses across the Melbourne Metropolitan Area. These recommendations are central to research underway by the City of Melbourne.

The City of Melbourne recently commissioned Communities That Care Inc. to prepare the report *Research into Violence and Intentional Injury Among Young Males in the City of Melbourne (July 2008)*. The overall objective of the project was to contribute to an evidence base to reduce violence and intentional injury among young males by investigation activities that result in these outcomes. Identifying potential suitable interventions that can be applied to this municipality was also required.

Melbourne's research report identifies the need for quality integrated data collection to ensure a comprehensive understanding of this issue, including an overview of data issues and gaps relevant to the City of Melbourne. The research maintains that effective multi-component approaches to reducing violence, suitable to the city entertainment precinct context, include data linked from various sources. For example, linking data collected by hospital emergency units with police statistics to obtain richer information regarding the context of violent offences and alcohol-intoxication that lead to injury (e.g. specific place/venue of incident, postcode of victim/perpetrator) is highly recommended. Such data can reveal the number of

non-resident young people involved in violence and intentional injury in the CBD, their residential postcodes, and venues or areas with high numbers of incidences in the CBD.

Not only should this form part of a program of data linkage designed to identify the scope and nature of the issue, but it would also provide a system that is instrumental in monitoring and evaluating the effects of any intervention trialled.

Due to the capital city character of the Melbourne CBD the report focuses on a literature review of crime prevention options that do not include developmental or 'life course' prevention approaches. Although the City of Melbourne is highly supportive of strengthening the protective factors that 'life course' prevention provides for our resident young people, evidence suggests that violence occurring in the CBD is by young people coming into the city rather than young residents. In this situation 'life-course' prevention approaches are unlikely to be the most effective.

As a result, the literature review provides an evaluation and ranking of environmental prevention approaches relevant to the unique character of the Melbourne CBD.

The potential of improved community policing, and evidence collection and advice by the young residents of Melbourne are also key recommendations of the report.

The report is relevant to a range of questions asked in the *Discussion Paper*, such as: *Should data on youth offending be publicly available for researchers, policymakers and practitioners? If so what type of data should be made available? In what way and to what extent would a properly set up statistical system assist in public policy relating to youth offending?*

In the short term, recommendations by the *Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee* focusing on processes to "free up" access to data and systems outlined in the Melbourne-specific research would be welcomed. The report provides an articulated short to medium term response framework that specifically targets violence and injury amongst young males in the unique Melbourne entertainment precinct context.

Further investigations are being considered to clarify the number of non-resident young people coming to Melbourne to access social support services. The complexity of youth issues and responses required in the Melbourne CBD are unique to Victoria but lessons from other capital cities like Sydney look promising.

In the longer term this area of investigation may warrant and enable innovations in 'life-course' prevention approaches that cater to non-resident young people in Melbourne. However, this would require extensive collaboration on a major scale

that recognises the fact that this municipality attracts and provides services to high numbers of young people from across the Melbourne Metropolitan Area.

Council would support the final report by the *Drugs and Crime Committee* which notes the capital city character of Melbourne City, and the unique circumstances it experiences in relation to young people.

Cooperating Researchers

My Community Safety and Wellbeing branch recently held a Strategic Thinking Forum for key external partners and our staff. The forum focused on “What makes a good entertainment precinct?” and we invited the following researchers to lead discussions about young people and their attitudes, and young people and the public domain:

- David Chalke, Director AustraliaSCAN, Quantum Market Research, david_chalke@optusnet.com.au;
- Professor Rob White, Professor of Sociology and Acting Head of School, University of Tasmania, R.D.White@utas.edu.au.

Can we suggest that you seek their input to this important enquiry as well.

Please find attached the *Research into Violence and Intentional Injury Among Young Males in the City of Melbourne (July 2008)*. Please note that our research report is provided to your Committee for its use in the context of this enquiry. The City of Melbourne does not wish the report to be circulated publicly, nor provided to other parties without our express permission. It can be cited in your final report as a Reference if you wish. I look forward to receiving the final report on *Strategies to Prevent High Volume Offending and Recidivism by Young People*.

I hope the findings will extend the City of Melbourne’s current work with Victoria Police, agencies, service providers and the community to address anti-social behaviour and offending by young people while preserving the exciting character of our international city and enhancing the wellbeing of people.

I can be contacted on (03) 9658 9993 if you or your staff would like to discuss any part of this submission.

Yours sincerely

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