



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The Joint Emergency Services Centre (JESC) Proposal

**Report No. 7 of the
Standing Committee on Justice
and Community Safety**

December 1999

Resolution of Appointment

That—

The following general purpose standing committees be established to inquire into and report on matters referred by the Assembly or, matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community...

...a Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety to examine matters related to administration of justice, legal policy and services, registrar and regulatory services, electoral services, consumer affairs, corrective, emergency and police services and fair trading and any other matter under the responsibility of the portfolio minister.

Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings*, No.2, 28 April 1998, p 15.

Terms of reference

Inquire into and report on the Joint Emergency Services Proposal with particular reference to:

- (a) the effectiveness of the consultation process used in developing the proposal;
- (b) the implications of the proposal for ACT police, fire and ambulance personnel, facilities and services;
- (c) the likely effects on the Woden/Weston communities if Woden Police Station is replaced with a shopfront;
- (d) the viability of police relying more on upgraded information technology in police cars;
- (e) the adequacy of space allocations in the new accommodation proposals;
- (f) the cost-effectiveness of the proposal (including asset management issues);
- (g) the management of any implementation stage (including staff consultation); and
- (h) any related matter.

Committee Membership

Mr Paul Osborne MLA (Chair)

Mr John Hargreaves MLA (Deputy Chair)

Mr Harold Hird MLA

Mr Trevor Kaine MLA

Secretary: Ms Fiona Clapin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESOLUTION OF APPOINTMENT	3
TERMS OF REFERENCE	3
COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP	4
BACKGROUND	6
CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY	6
SCOPE OF REPORT	7
CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS	7
GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN INQUIRY	9
COMMUNITY VIEWS ON COL BROWN REPORT.....	9
THE COMMITTEE’S CONCLUSIONS	12
APPENDIX A: SUBMISSIONS.....	14
APPENDIX B: PUBLIC HEARING	15

Background

1.The Government released the Col Brown report on 8 May 1998 and called for public submissions on the report by 15 June 1998. On 23 June 1998, the Government announced it would overhaul existing police facilities at Belconnen and Woden and that the existing police station at Woden will be replaced with a shopfront.

2.The committee resolved to inquire into and report on the proposal for a Joint Emergency Service Centre (JESC) on 18 July 1998. The committee initiated this inquiry because of community concerns about recommendations of the Col Brown report. The issue which attracted the strongest public concern was the foreshadowed closure of Woden Police Station.

3.On 18 February 1999 the Government announced it would not go ahead with the Woden shopfront proposal but instead would build a JESC in Woden. Funds were allocated in the 1999/00 budget. The committee understands the Government is still in the process of deciding where the Woden JESC will be located.

4.The majority of the community's concerns raised in this inquiry were addressed with the Government's announcement to establish a Woden JESC. Most of those participating in this inquiry can consider their involvement to have been very successful; their arguments appear to have convinced the Government that a Woden shopfront was not a viable option. The Government in announcing this decision has overtaken this committee's report. While the committee recognises that most of the issues raised in the inquiry have been addressed by Government, it has a responsibility to report to the Legislative Assembly on the inquiry.

Conduct of the inquiry

5.The inquiry was advertised in *The Canberra Times*, *The Chronicle* and *The Valley View*. The committee also wrote to community groups and relevant organisations with an interest in the proposals and invited them to participate in the inquiry.

6.The committee held private briefings with Government officials and with the key stakeholders: the Australian Federal Police Association and the

Firefighters Association on 6 July 1998. The committee also held public hearings on 7 September 1998.

7.To familiarise itself with the buildings and facilities being discussed, the committee inspected the Woden Police Station, the Tuggeranong Police Station, the Belconnen Winchester Police Centre and the Gungahlin Joint Emergency Service Centre.

Scope of report

8.This report has been overtaken by Government announcements and decisions and therefore is necessarily brief. Its purpose is to inform the Assembly of the progress of events and the committee's role in the process.

9.During the course of the inquiry, the Government announced that it would not close Woden Police Station.¹ As the proposed closure of Woden Police Station was the major impetus for the inquiry, this left little for the committee to recommend. In effect, the Government's decision pre-empted the committee's major recommendation which would have been that Woden Police Station should not be closed.

Chronology of events

10.The Government initially established a inter-departmental committee to consider options for police accommodation in Woden and Belconnen. According to the Chief Executive Officer of the ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety, this process was 'taking a little bit long to be completed'. A consultant, Col Brown, was engaged to conduct a broader review of infrastructure needs of all the ACT emergency services. According to Mr Keady, 'his concern was to make the most efficient use of any Territory investment and to recommend an outcome which saw a distribution of infrastructure to last the ACT as long as possible and provide for the needs of our three emergency services'.²

11.The Col Brown report was released in May 1998. The Col Brown report recommended that Woden Police Station be replaced with a shopfront and that a JESC be established in Belconnen.

¹Mr Gary Humphries, Media Release, 'Woden Shopfront Proposal Withdrawn', 9 September 1999.

² Mr Tim Keady, *Transcript*, 7 September 1999.

12.The Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety held a private briefing with stakeholders and the Government in July 1998 and a public hearing on 7 September 1998.

13.The committee chair, Mr Paul Osborne MLA, wrote to the Auditor-General in July 1998 requesting assistance with the analysis of the costings contained in the Col Brown report. The Auditor-General initially agreed to provide assistance in this regard but after his staff had an initial meeting with Mr Tim Keady, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Auditor-General advised he would withdraw from the project.

14.On 9 September 1998, the Department of Justice and Community Safety announced it had withdrawn its proposal to replace Woden Police Station with a shopfront as recommended in the Col Brown report. The Minister for Justice and Community Safety stated that no agreement could be reached with Lend Lease, the owners of Woden Plaza. He also stated that 'it is clear that the advent of new in-car technology is not yet at the level which would provide tangible benefits to police in the Woden area and it is unfortunate that we will not be able to factor this new technology into the redevelopment options just yet'. He advised the Government was considering either the refurbishment of the existing Woden Police Station or the construction of a new Joint Emergency Services Centre in Woden.³

15.Totalcare Projects was then engaged by the Department of Justice and Community Safety to consider the two options for Woden-either refurbishment of the Woden Police Station or building a new JESC.

16.On 18 February 1999, the Totalcare report, *Options Study: Woden Town Centre AFP District Station* was released. On the same day the Government announced a JESC would be constructed in Woden and that the ageing Woden Police Station and Phillip Fire Station would be demolished.⁴

17.On 31 March 1999, the Minister for Justice and Community Safety wrote to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety requesting agreement to engage architects and design experts to begin planning for a JESC in Woden. The committee wrote back giving agreement to this and suggesting that a strong consultation process accompany the development of the Woden JESC.⁵ In further correspondence to the committee, the Minister advised the proposal for a Belconnen JESC has been listed in the Department's Capital Works Program for commencement in 2001/2.

³ Mr Gary Humphries, Media Release, 9 September 1998, 'Woden Shopfront Proposal Withdrawn'

⁴ Mr Gary Humphries, Media Release, 18 February 1999, 'Provision for New Joint Emergency Services Centre'

⁵ Correspondence from Mr Paul Osborne, Chair of Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety to Minister for Justice and Community Safety, 14 April 1999.

18.The most recent advice from the Government is that the Woden site selection process should be completed by early next year and the project should be completed by the end of the next financial year.⁶

Government involvement in inquiry

19.The committee was disappointed in the Government's participation in this inquiry. While the initial private briefing was useful, the Government's decision not to submit a written submission was disappointing. The committee is pleased that the Government has been making written submissions to the committee's other more recent inquiries.

20.The committee was also disappointed that once the committee had established that some of the costings in the Col Brown report were inaccurate and Government officials advised they would produce revised costings, these costings (in the Totalcare report) were not given to the committee before public release. The Government excluded the committee from the opportunity of recommending either refurbishment of Woden Police Station or the establishment of a new JESC by announcing the establishment of a new JESC at the same time as releasing the Totalcare costings.

21.This committee had been awaiting receipt of the costings before deciding whether Woden Police Station should be renovated or a new JESC established in Woden. The committee was therefore surprised to read in *The Canberra Times* on Thursday February 18 1999 that the Government would establish a JESC in Woden at a cost of \$6m. The committee received no prior notification of this decision.

Community views on Col Brown report

22.The **United Firefighters Union** submitted that they see considerable merit in the concept of jointly developed JESC's, where the savings resulting from JESC's are used to offset ongoing budgetary pressures on the service delivery arms of the emergency services. The union noted that there was no consultation process in relation to the Col Brown report and 'at no stage was this union or its members informed or involved in the process until after the

⁶ Mr Gary Humphries, Transcript for Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety Inquiry into 1998/99 Annual and Financial Reports, p44.

document had been produced'.⁷ The union was also concerned about the future of their training facility next to the Belconnen Fire Station. The union also raised concerns about the adequacy of space allocations in the new accommodation proposals. The union requested the opportunity to be involved in the implementation of JESC's at the earliest stage through an appropriate committee.⁸

23. The **Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA)** also raised concerns about the adequacy of the consultation process in the development of the JESC proposal, stating that the consultant did not speak once to the AFPA or any other relevant unions. The AFPA stated the problems included:

- increased police response times for people of Woden and Weston Creek;
- greater travelling times for police to and from incidents;
- probable increase in crime in Woden/Weston Creek and South Canberra;
- overcrowding at Tuggeranong Police Station with serious OH&S implications;
- an untested reliance on questionable technology with car computers;
- further decline in police morale;
- possible overcrowding/industrial problems at the new Belconnen facility if it is not of sufficient size and necessary resources;
- insufficient space allocations; and
- questionable cost-effectiveness of Woden shopfront proposal.⁹

24. The AFPA questioned the methodology in the Col Brown report underlying the formula for space allocations. The AFPA stated that the Col Brown report relied on NSW police building codes to give an estimate of 4 square metres for investigators and general duties police officers. The Association informed the committee that the Commonwealth equivalent is 6 square metres, the Victorian standard is 6.3 square metres and the ACT Government allows 7 square metres for staff of equivalent rank and status. The AFPA also believed it was 'ludicrous' to imagine the Tuggeranong Police Station could fit up to 200 police officers.¹⁰

⁷ United Firefighters Union, *Submission*

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Australian Federal Police Association, *Submission*

¹⁰ *Transcript* 7 September 1998, pp8-24.

25. The **Woden Youth Centre** submitted that the Government's consultation process had been inadequate and conducted with undue haste. The Centre claimed that cost seemed to be the driving force behind the consultation rather than the impact on people, crime prevention, community policing and practicality of closing Woden Police Station. The Centre noted that the costings do not consider the value of land given, sold, lost to or by the ACT. The Centre argued that the proposed amalgamation of Woden and Tuggeranong would make the job of police more difficult and an inadequately staffed shopfront in Woden makes Woden and police more vulnerable to serious crime and occupational health and safety concerns. The Centre suggested that crime in Woden, such as car theft, physical assaults, handbag thefts, sexual assaults, drug dealing and shoplifting would increase. The Centre drew attention to the adverse impact on the Woden/Weston communities which has a high proportion of the population on low incomes and contains significant public housing, in particular Burnie Court. The Centre argued that whilst upgraded and technologically enhanced police vehicles will no doubt be a good advance they will not be the answer to every situation. The Centre did not accept that Tuggeranong Police Station would be able to accommodate an additional seventy police from Woden.

26. **Mr Michael Calkovics** submitted that Woden Police Station should not be closed because: the current site is owned by the Government saving \$700,000 per annum; the crime rate won't rise as a direct result of the station closure; police response times will be quicker; and there will be less wear and tear on vehicles, less cost of fuel and wages and less impact on insurance companies due to no increase in the crime rate in Woden.¹¹

27. The **Victims of Crime Coordinator** submitted that current facilities for receiving and assisting victims of crime at Woden and Belconnen police stations are inadequate and much better at Tuggeranong. She also highlighted the importance of police accessing technological advances such as in-car computer terminals to access information on databases and suggested the use of low-cost instamatic cameras to be carried in every patrol car.¹²

28. **Pastor Fred Veerhuis** from the Woden Lutheran Church also objected to the proposed closure of Woden Police Station. Pastor Veerhuis highlighted the safety and security concerns of Woden residents, stating 'we have lost count of window breakages, damage to doors, petty theft, building damage, major theft event and so on'.¹³ He raised concerns for his family which lives on the church's premises including:

¹¹ Mr Michael Calkovics, *Submission*.

¹² Victims of Crime Coordinator, *Submission*

¹³ Pastor Fred Veerhuis, Woden Lutheran Church, *Submission*

- the regular discovery of used syringes in church property;
- regular discovery of disturbed garden beds used to cache drugs;
- the all too frequent encounters and confrontations with people at the door or in the yard wandering around in a daze from alcohol/drugs; and
- discovering a young man searching his yard for a suitable weapon to defend himself after a clash with a 'gang' at Burnie Court.

29. **Weston Creek Community Council** submitted that the location of the current Woden Police Station is poor because it is not user friendly and parking is inconvenient. The Council noted considerable community support for a new police station reasonably close to Woden Town Centre, with refurbishment the option least favoured by the community. Regarding the proposed technology in police cars, the community view was it should increase police productivity.

The committee's conclusions

30. The committee noted that the Government has taken into account the view of the community that a shopfront would not be adequate to cater for the Woden/Weston Creek areas. The Government came to that conclusion before this committee released its report. The Government's initial proposal to implement a shopfront in Woden would clearly have been unacceptable to the community. The costings in the Col Brown report underpinning this proposal have been called into question by the Totalcare analysis and preliminary work by the Auditor-General. The information provided by local residents also highlighted the need for the Woden/Weston to be serviced by a full police station rather than a shopfront.

31. This process highlights the necessity for Government to consult fully with key stakeholders when considering such proposals.

32. There is one outstanding issue related to the appropriate size of space allocations per officer. The committee found that 4 square metres suggested in the Col Brown report was insufficient and that future emergency service accommodation (including the Woden JESC) should allow for at least 6 square metres per officer.

Recommendation

33. The Committee recommends that:

(i) the Department of Justice and Community Safety seek advice from the Chief Minister's Department's community consultation section on best practice in consultation and apply this to the consultation process with key stakeholders in the site selection, management and implementation of the Woden JESC; and

(ii) the Woden JESC and other emergency service accommodation be designed to allow for at least 6 square metres per officer.

Paul Osborne MLA

Chair

6 December 1999

Appendix A: Submissions

1. United Firefighters Union of Australia, ACT Branch
2. Australian Federal Police Association, ACT Police Branch
3. Ms Kim Sattler, Woden Youth Centre
4. Mr Michael Calkovics
5. Ms Robyn Holder, Victims of Crime Coordinator
6. Pastor Fred Veerhuis
7. Weston Creek Community Council

Appendix B: Public Hearing

7 September 1998

Weston Creek Community Council

AFP Association

ACT Government

United Firefighters Union

Pastor Veerhuis

