

2026

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Dickson shops taskforce – Final report and improvement - Assembly Resolution of
6 March 2025 - Government Response**

**Presented by
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Introduction

On Thursday 6 March 2025, the Assembly passed a resolution regarding concerns about a number of issues occurring at the Dickson Shops. As part of this resolution, the Assembly called on the ACT Government to:

- a) report to the Assembly and the Dickson community by October 2025 outlining progress and what meaningful steps have been taken to address concerns, and
- b) report back to the Assembly again in the first sitting week of 2026 with available data trends demonstrating the impact of the cross-directorate working group, such as statistics showing the level of local health, mental health and homelessness service provision; police complaints about antisocial behaviour, security incidents and bicycle thefts; and commercial vacancy rates at the Dickson shops.

This final report represents the culmination of nearly twelve months of coordinated, cross-government effort, aligning priorities and resources across multiple directorates to deliver meaningful improvements at the Dickson Shops precinct. However, as highlighted in the earlier progress report, the challenges in this area remain complex and multi-faceted.

In recognition of this, engagement between directorates and residents, business operators and landlords on issues at the Dickson Shops will continue to occur through the Canberra Community Working Group (CCWG) (convened by ACT Policing) as the principal forum for sustained community engagement.

Dickson Working Group (DWG)

The DWG has prioritised engaging directly with residents, business operators, and landlords to capture their perspectives, address concerns, and incorporate feedback as part of the response to the resolution.

Following the October 2025 tabling of the *Report on progress and improvements at the Dickson Shops*, the DWG met twice more in 2025 with Dickson stakeholders on 10 November and 4 December 2025. At these meetings residents (represented by the Dickson Residents Group), some business operators and landlords reiterated concerns previously raised and captured in the October progress report.

One further meeting was held on 21 January 2026 with residents, business operators, and landlords.

To support ongoing transparency and evidence-based decision making, the ACT Government will provide quarterly data updates from the City Renewal Authority (CRA), Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD), and ACT Policing to the CCWG meetings each April, July, October and January which will also be provided to the DRG ongoing

ACT Policing chairs the CCWG which has a strategic focus on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour in Dickson and other North District areas. Key strategies of the CCWG include:

- design by the Canberra Renewal Authority of youth friendly areas to divert youth away from crime and into activities that encourage physical outlets, for example skate parks;
- proactive invigoration of a coordinated approach between ACT Policing and ACT Health to address specific homelessness cases;
- upgrades to lighting and CCTV in identified crime hotspot areas;

- as part of its commitment to community consultation, all ACT Policing Station Inspectors are to continue, and further establish, where operational capacity allows, engagement with local business owners and operators, to raise awareness about burglaries and other criminal conduct, and when requested, provide education on how to protect and secure businesses from criminal offending; and
- attendance by Senior ACT Policing members at community forum sessions when available upon request.

Update

Improving safety

What the data is showing

Between 1 January 2024 and 31 December 2025, 757 incidents relevant to the Dickson retail precinct were reported to ACT Policing. Within these 757 incidents, 370 criminal offences were reported.

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 proactive police activity recorded in PROMIS, including random breath testing and criminal targeting operations, where a criminal offence may or may not have occurred.

One or more offences are recorded against an incident when credible criminal activity is reported to, or becomes known to ACT Policing. 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 is not credible evidence to the contrary.

Annual Offences Reported to ACT Policing in Dickson Retail Precinct – 1 January 2020 to 2025						
Offence	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Assault	12	18	8	14	13	9
Sexual offences	1	0	2	0	3	1
Other offences against the person	1	0	0	0	0	0
Robbery	2	8	2	6	4	2
Burglary	3	5	6	2	2	2
Stolen Motor vehicle	2	3	2	1	1	0
Theft (excl motor vehicle theft)	37	66	67	91	149	127

Property damage	7	5	6	6	4	2
Other offences against property	3	12	6	14	6	8
Justice procedures	18	10	3	7	6	8
Firearms and weapons	1	1	1	7	5	2
Other offences against good order	5	9	4	12	4	1
Drug offences	2	2	0	1	0	1
Traffic Offences	14	7	12	6	5	4
Other Offences n.e.c	7	9	0	0	1	0
Total	115	155	119	167	203	167

Source: PROMIS as of 08 January 2026

Total offences reported to ACT Policing in the Dickson Retail Precinct have fluctuated over the past five years, making it difficult to identify a consistent trend.

Action update

Looking ahead, ACT Policing is exploring ways to sustain and build on the momentum of the proactive police activity and operation into 2026.

Enforcement efforts will continue to be a key focus, with an emphasis on high-impact actions that deter crime and antisocial behaviour. The continued reporting of incidents is necessary to support intelligence and data led responses.

Supporting vulnerable individuals

What the data is showing

Over the period of March 2025 to December 2025, Street to Home visited the Dickson area 26 times. The sustained engagement from Street to Home built trusted relationships which enabled them to engage with 17 individuals to offer accommodation and support.

Unfortunately, not all people wanted to engage. However, Street to Home continued to foster a connection. During these engagements, Street to Home provided assistance with food, emergency material aids, transportation, information, advice, and “soft referral” to services. Street to Home also engaged with Woolworths and local restaurants to gain information about where people sleeping rough may be, so they could seek to engage with them.

Action update

ACT Government is continuing to strengthen existing outreach models to deliver agile, place-based support by coordinating existing government and community services. Recognising that trust-building is essential, especially for individuals who may not be ready to engage with services immediately, future outreach will prioritise tailored engagement strategies that meet people where they are, both physically and emotionally.

Dickson activation and support for business

What the data is showing

The City Renewal Authority has implemented a targeted program of activation and promotion in the Dickson Group Centre to boost visitation, improve public perceptions, and enhance safety – directly supporting local businesses. This annual program includes enhanced cleaning and greening services in Dickson’s public spaces (above the standard maintenance provided to other group centres), ensuring the precinct is more attractive and welcoming for visitors as it evolves and grows. It also delivers regular placemaking events that draw foot traffic and engage the community. For example, “Dickson Soul” – a live busking program – brings local musicians to perform at the Dickson Shops on Saturday mornings, creating a lively atmosphere and a reason for people to linger and explore. Similarly, in the lead-up to Christmas, free pet-friendly photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus were offered on weekends, a popular family-friendly activity that encouraged residents to visit Dickson during the holiday season. A large new mural, supported by the City Renewal Authority and delivered in collaboration with local students, has been completed on Poppyfield Street, improving the presentation of this key entrance to the Dickson Shops ahead of works commencing in the surrounds.

A centrepiece of Dickson’s Place Experience and Marketing program is Canberra’s largest Lunar New Year celebration, held on Dickson’s upgraded Woolley Street each year. This signature event attracted over 7,000 visitors in 2023 and has grown to 15,000 in 2025, helping to cement Dickson’s reputation as a dining and cultural destination across the year. Such major events not only showcase Dickson’s unique multicultural character but also generate increased patronage for local eateries and traders during peak times.

All these initiatives form part of the City Renewal Authority’s broader [Place Experience and Marketing Action Plan](#), which is updated annually to guide activation efforts. The 2025–26 program continues this support for Dickson with dedicated resources for events and improvements.

Action update

Businesses can access up to four hours of free tailored business advice through the [Canberra Business Advice and Support Service \(CBASS\)](#) funded by the ACT Government. This service can support business owners in areas such as business planning and marketing or refer to specialist services where required. This service is available and promoted to all businesses in Canberra and promoted through targeted communication such as CRA’s ‘Open for Business’ guides.

ACT Policing also has a dedicated a Business Liaison Officer (BLO) which serves as a vital link between ACT Policing and the business community. This role is responsible for fostering positive relationships, ensuring effective communication, and enhancing collaboration between ACT Policing, business owners and state/regional level managers. The BLO works to address concerns, promote crime reduction initiatives, identify and target recidivist offending, and facilitate problem-solving efforts to maintain a safe, secure, thriving business environment.

The BLO has weekly contact with the primary state and national retail Managers in the Dickson shopping area such as Woolworths, Coles, multiple liquor outlets, Office Works and Chemists. The BLO also has frequent contact with the Retailers Association.

In response to a recent request from the City Working Group regarding the increase in unlawful graffiti and property damage, the BLO facilitated a meeting between a local well known street artist and the ACT Government to discuss alternative ways to combat the issue.

The Restorative Justice Unit has been engaging with the DWG to raise awareness about the availability and benefits of the restorative justice program for commercial victims such as business owners. [Restorative justice](#) is a program available to victims of crime who would like to engage with perpetrators to help them understand the impacts of their crimes and to hold them accountable.

Enhancing the physical environment of the shops

The much-needed upgrade of public spaces at the Dickson Shops is expected to deliver significant benefits, including improved amenity, safer and more accessible public spaces, improved stormwater drainage, and a more attractive environment for visitors and businesses and prospective tenants. These interventions activate spaces, thereby deterring antisocial behaviour, improving perceptions and actual safety over the medium term, and fostering community cohesion and belonging.

To maintain confidence and activity during construction, City Renewal Authority will implement parallel support measures, including targeted marketing and activation programs, and promote an [‘Open for Business’ guide](#) to help traders stay visible and connected with customers throughout the works.

Update on Poppyfield Commons

The nursery site, previously home to the Garden (75 Dickson Place, Dickson - Blocks 13 and 14 Section 34) will be used as a community recreation space, prior to the site being redeveloped as part of the Dickson Green redevelopment.

The Canberra Tradesmen’s Union Club is currently inviting community input through a [survey](#) to help shape the activities and events that will be offered in the indoor and outdoor spaces at the provisionally titled ‘Poppyfield Commons’ site.

It is expected that this activation will enhance community engagement, improve passive surveillance, and support evening activity in the eastern end of the Dickson Shops precinct.

What the data is showing

Consumer spend in Dickson Group Centre

Metric	May 2025	Aug 2025	Nov 2025
Total spend	\$17.5m (+3.8% vs last year)	\$18.2m (+3.8% vs last year)	\$17.9m (+1.15% vs last year)
Total customers	107,000 (+5.7% vs last year)	109,000 (+3.7% vs last year)	110,000 (+0.2% vs last year)
Spend from outside ACT	\$2.3m	\$2.5m	\$2.5m
Customers from outside ACT	24,000	28,000	28,000

Source: Banking transaction data.

Consumer spending in the Dickson Group Centre remained strong across 2025. Year-on-year growth was positive throughout, though moderating from 3.8% in May and August to 1.15% in November. Customer numbers also increased steadily, reaching 110,000 in November, supported by consistent visitation from outside the ACT, which contributed \$2.5 million in spend and 28,000 visitors in both August and November. These trends suggest that activation efforts and precinct improvements are sustaining engagement and economic activity.

Compared to Nov 2024, spend at takeaway and fast-food outlets, as well as pubs, taverns and bars, increased by between 13% and 20% respectively. Consumer spending at cafes declined by 35% (residents -40%; visitors -7%), which is more significant but consistent with the ACT-wide trend (-11%).

Office vacancy rates

	A grade	B grade	C grade	D grade	Overall
Total stock (sqm)	18,000	0	20,385	2,545	40,930
Vacancy rate	0.0%	0	41.4%	0.0%	20.6%
Absorption past 12 months (sqm)	0	0	-800	0	-800

Source: Property Council of Australia (July 2025)

Data is available for office space in the suburb of Dickson as a whole. Dickson has about 40,900 sqm of office space. All A-grade and D-grade offices are fully leased, showing stable demand for the highest-quality and lowest-cost space. However, 41.4% of C-grade building space is vacant. This older stock represents a large share of the precinct's offices, and its high vacancy pushes the overall vacancy rate to 20.6%.

Over the past year to July 2025, Dickson recorded - 800 sqm of "negative absorption", meaning more office space was vacated than taken up. This indicates that ageing buildings are not attracting tenants.

Community perceptions of Dickson

Community sentiment data collected in a May 2025 study commissioned by the City Renewal Authority provides a baseline for improvement. In the annual survey of approximately 700 adults from the Canberra region, perceptions of Dickson Group Centre were mixed:

- Ease of access: 63% positive
- Safety: 52% positive
- Comfort: 52% positive
- Cleanliness: 39% positive

For comparison, the City Centre recorded higher ratings across these indicators:

- Safety: 71% positive
- Comfort: 69% positive
- Cleanliness: 63% positive
- Ease of access: 57% positive

These findings underscore the importance of public realm improvements, community-focused development and associated support initiatives, which aim to strengthen Dickson's reputation as a welcoming, active destination for shopping, dining, and community life.

Action update

Looking ahead, the City Renewal Authority and the City and Environment Directorate will keep working with the community and businesses during major redevelopment work being undertaken in the precinct and continue to deliver activation during and after construction to maintain vibrancy and community connection throughout the redevelopment period.

In response to ongoing challenges with illegal dumping, new bin enclosure designs are being explored, alongside engagement with local businesses to identify practical, precinct-specific solutions.

City Renewal Authority will use the data provided in this response as the baseline against which they will analyse trends in spend, visitation and perceptions before and after Dickson Shops upgrades.

The ACT Government remains committed to working collaboratively with the community, ACT Policing and relevant ACT Government Directorates to ensure the Dickson Shops precinct is safe, vibrant, and welcoming for all.