

Together we can find solutions

Kimberley Community & Crime Forums

February 2022



Top 5 IMMEDIATE Priorities

Immediate additional police into the town to deal with the crisis and improve security.

Getting more government services to stay in regional towns.

Get kids off streets at night – fund safe houses.

Get kids into education - with pathways to work.

When kids are in trouble – deal with the parents.

ABOUT

A series of Community and Crime forums were held in February 2022 in Broome, Kununurra, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Derby.

This document seeks to record the feedback from those meetings with a view to providing a pathway forward to shift the current negative trajectory and support community led solutions.

This should not be interpreted as a full consultation process, rather a snapshot of community views during a period where the highest level of crime against persons and property was record and antisocial behaviour was a cause of community angst.

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Disclaimer:

The comments collated in this document reflect discussions by members of the Kimberley community at the Crime and Community forums held in February 2022. The content of this report does not necessarily represent the views of the author, the Liberal Party of Western Australia or the National Party and should not be attributed in part or in full to any individual or participating member of Parliament.

PART 1: Priorities from the Forum Series



୍ଦିମ How can I stay if I can't sleep at night?

Immediate additional police into the town to deal with the crisis

At the time of writing, the State Government had deployed additional resources into the Kimberley including specialist police, the canine unit and drones as part of Operation Regional Shield.

Enforcement was highlighted at the forums as critical for the communities peace of mind - the plea of the participants was to not wait until a crisis before more resources are deployed as people - including essential workers - are packing up and leaving town.

Discussions on improving security were wide ranging and included consideration of the deployment of local residents walking the streets - to employing commercial security guards.

These conversations were tempered with the need to avoid any potential for vigilantism, so the discussions focused on the utilisation of trained and experienced Police to curb the upward trend in crime.

When the sun sets our town changes...

Calls were made to ensure CCTV is operational and introduce monitoring for rapid deployment of Police. It is understood that CCTV is not routinely monitored.

Street lighting was also seen as critical with people feeling that there is a link between street lighting and the location of crime in their towns.

Concerns were also raised about the hiding places in nearby bushland and drains.

It was suggested that an audit of towns and crime locations be undertaken to look at any contributing factors and address them.

It was highlighted that government housing, and in particular those owned/managed by the WA Country Health Service, needs much better security including monitored security, duress alarms and CCTV. Fencing was also seen as essential as well as an audit of the location of the housing to avoid high crime areas.

It was seen as important that a "regional police strike team" be established which could be deployed rapidly at any location in the Kimberley - or across regional WA.

Support for additional police was strong, but not universal - particularly in the central Kimberley where there was a focus on supporting additional local Aboriginal involvement in patrols either with trained rangers or Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers.

Police cadet programs are encouraged as they provide role models and a pathway for young people to positively engage with the Police, particularly in our remoter towns.

Overall, the key priority is for an immediate circuit breaker of a greater police presence combined rapid deployment of community safety infrastructure such as street lighting and CCTV, as well as personal safety devices/monitored alarms in government controlled dwellings with subsidisation in owner occupied housing.



There was strong discussion in relation to the lack of government services, both the total allocation of service and the availability at key times.

What frustrated Kimberley residents was the strong reliance on FIFO and DIDO staff for service delivery, particularly in the towns in the central Kimberley.

Participants described seeing a fleet of white government four-wheel-drives arrive once a week, with services being dispensed for a few hours before staff exit town before dark. Whilst the accuracy of this statement may be challenged, the fact that this concern was expressed multiple times in different towns across the Kimberley is noteworthy.

The community was clear - mental health, child protection and domestic violence issues are not constrained to office hours and there was a strong belief that support services can only be delivered by permanently located staff, or a new local model.

The need to build trust and confidence was cited many times, particularly where there is long term trauma and cultural awareness is required. There were calls to employ more locals who will stay in the Kimberley.

The complexity of increasing in situ provision of services was recognised - including the impact of inadequate housing, crime and isolation.

Suggestions included increasing opportunities for locals to train and give support where/ when professionals are not available.

The issue of alcohol harm was raised as part of the discussion about local services. In Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, locals said they were frustrated by the belief by decision makers that there was no real alcohol issue because these towns had alcohol restrictions. The sobering up facilities in these towns had been closed. The message was clear, sly grogging meant residents are still impacted by alcohol related harm in those restricted towns and facilities are still required and are a priority.

The outcomes was a call for an urgent review of service delivery to remote towns in the Kimberley - including Derby, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing - with a focus on increased local delivery of services including the use of Aboriginal organisations and local professionals.

There is a shared experience of a loss of
self-sufficiency and disempowerment.
Cycle of sobering up and falling back down.
Policy delivered to us, not by us.
ଏଏ We need longer term funding to attract and retain good staff.
Of Don't lable kids!
30 We have a real fear that somebody will be killed. 30
This is a cost shift from encaseration to the community. My group, we do our own back to country,
bring our families together and teach them respect.
We will nurture any child referred to us
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KEY ISSUE IS - TO REMOVE THEM TO WHERE?????
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If you ring at 3:30pm nobody cares
Nobody is in charge
Despite everything, there is still community goodwill



3 det kius on the streets at hight - fund safe houses

The community was universal in their agreement that children and youths should not be on the streets late at night.

The challenge is what to do with minors that are not involved in crime or serious anti-social behaviour but are on the streets well past midnight.

The importance of understanding the underlying reason why sometimes very young children were on the streets at night was highlighted by both community members and representatives who worked with service providers.

Activities in the evening designed to ensure that young people are occupied, and often fed, normally run until about 9pm. Depending upon the town, children are either bused home or are encouraged to walk home by the Night Engagement Youth Officers or rangers.

They may arrive to a quiet and safe home, but the circumstances can change rapidly during the night to a loud alcohol fuelled party where the children feel unsafe and leave - finding safety in numbers on the streets.

The community calls on the Government to create safe spaces for kids at night in every town.

Children should not be wandering the streets – especially after 10pm. One story recounted how children broke into an office, not to create chaos, but rather to find a safe place to sleep. We need to provide our children with an alternative - to have a safe place to sleep so attendance at school the following day is at least an option.

Regardless of whether it is by compulsion under legislation, or young people coming voluntarily, there was almost unanimous support for investment in safe places for young people to get some sleep during the night.

The view was, a matter of urgency, the government should investigate/ call for expressions of interest for the provision of a safe facility for children, with appropriate staffing and facilities including the capacity to provide breakfast. The call was for facilities in Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham.



Education is of paramount importance to young people.

The challenge is that schooling has become redundant for many who see no future employment opportunities or a pathway away from drugs, alcohol, violence and poverty.

There was also recognition that schools are not equipped for the disruptive behaviour of some students.

Indeed, the view was expressed that, even if there was no poor behaviour, if all of the students turned up some schools may not be able to cope. Whilst the veracity of that particular claim is untested, some towns appear to have lost faith in the education system's capacity to deliver literacy and numeracy outcomes for all local youth.

Distrust was expressed in the bureaucracy of the Department of Education. This represents a serious corrosion of our community's faith in our kids future.

Some want more local control over our education, while others called for a wider range of education pathways. It was seen to be critical to have all children in a structured environment, even if it meant having to deal with learning challenges at the level which suited the children - with a potential for an off-site intensive program to help students "catch up".

The meetings were animated in the discussion of education with many suggestions including "boarding facility to support school attendance" which would provide the chance for young people to go to school, live safely, have three meals a day and go home on weekends.

Feedback indicated this has been tried before but the lack of staff at nighttime and the close proximity of the dorms for boys and girls created significant challenges. But many expressed that these are problems that could be resolved if the model is appropriate.

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Crisis of schooling - how do we make it more interesting?

An important function of a facility such as outlined above would be to service youth coming to town when their local community school only goes to year 6. Some of these young people end up in an already overcrowded relative's house and can drop out of the education system. An "on-country boarding school" was raised as a strategy to remove youth from negative influences. An Agricultural Boarding school (out on a pastoral station) was also put forward as a way to get young people to connect to the land and hopefully into jobs in the future.

This was seen both as a solution to those who were at risk and those who already had interaction with the justice system.

On-country detention was also discussed, with the emphasis being on troubled children already on the pathway to Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre. The focus would be on structure, routine, outdoor work and exercise as well as intensive support to raise literacy and numeracy levels, augmented with cultural learning and possible animal handling as therapy.

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School attendance is collapsing - it is seen as optional

The nature of the education in schools was discussed with a strongly expressed view that the current program in some towns did not resonate - particularly with disengaged youth. The ongoing promotion of students, regardless of their literacy and numeracy skills, was seen as adding to dysfunction.

Alternative pathways to provide intensive literacy and numeracy was seen as a priority to ensure that this issue is addressed.

The opportunity to include cultural understanding in the schools system was also highlighted, with the Certificate II run in Halls Creek held up as an example.

Pathways to employment were discussed, with some highlighting the student "product" leaving school did not meet the needs of employers. A significant barrier to sustained employment has been the inability to read and write to workplace standards combined with a lack of work ethic - often due to a lack of role models known to young people.

The suggestion was raised to reduce the age that students can be streamed into VET pathways to provide incentive to attend school, particularly if the business sector could provide some mentoring and workplace experience.

The Shire of Halls Creek introduced a Year 12 graduate traineeship program however struggled to fill the places due to a lack of students graduating school. The Shire has provided employment and Certificate outcomes to previously unemployed people through their road crews and administration staff which is providing a pathway to other, often higher paid jobs, both locally and across the north more broadly. This model is viewed positively.

More pathways are needed with the opportunity for government maintenance contracts to create school based traineeships and local apprenticeships opportunities, which in turn can help deliver local services.

Ranger programs, police liaison officers, school staff and other government employees should, wherever possible, be sourced locally even if extra attention is required to transition people out of unemployment and into the workforce.



5 When Kids are in trouble - deal with parents.

The theme of parental responsibility was very strong throughout all forums. Strategies included a huge range of options from punitive options, such as fines/docking of welfare for child non-school attendance, to on-country family programs to facilitate better understanding the importance of caring and nurturing children.

It was well recognised that parents may not have the skills, and may be themselves the product of dysfunctional parenting. The key issue remains how to break the cycle and what to do in the interim while longer term strategies take effect.

Some of the observations by participants were quite disturbing and speak to the depths of despair being felt in some communities:

"Suicide no longer scares us."

"Kids can be abandoned when adults enter into a new relationship."

"Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre now a right of passage for youth gangs."

"Parents are addicted to mobile phones and ignore kids - just one more addiction."

One of the key matters is who can support parents to develop strong families, how this could be undertaken and funded.

It was recognised that it would take local people, who have the skills and relationships, to work with families. Discussion included restoring return-to-country programs which provided funding/transport for family groups to go out of town to re-establish family relationships and respect. This may be as simple as camping or a more intensive on-country counseling and therapy approach.

There is no one single pathway, however the government should be open to expressions of interest for education, training and activities that help to redefine family interactions to deliver outcomes for children and young people.

This was acknowledged as a highly complex issue, but needing the most focus over the long term because without the parents, without safety, children will not thrive.

PART 2 - Feedback

Children and Young People

Reward and encourage all young people, not just those currently or likely to be involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour.	Participants felt that more balance should be provided for activities and recognition of all young people in the region rather than focusing for those already in the justice system. It is noted that there are programs in the Kimberley are highly inclusive.
Safe houses for children and youth in crisis.	Noting the challenges around any form of compulsion within the legislative framework, somewhere safe for children to go to sleep and be fed was widely acknowledged as a priority.
Ask children and youth what they want to do.	There was a general view that children and youths felt disempowered and had no voice about what they wanted in terms of services and activities. This should be routinely facilitiated (ie, not a one off, rather as an annual process).
Greater variety of activities.	The dominance of sporting programs was noted with some saying greater diversity - such as art classes and fishing clubs - would be welcomed.
Volunteer exhaustion.	It was recognised that having volunteers involved in activities for children and youth had many benefits including forming a diversity of long term relationships. There was comment by some that they had tried to get programs moving before, but became overwhelmed over the longer term. Recognition should be given to providing support for volunteer programs - even in a coordination role - to keep them functioning.
A dedicated building for youth activities.	There was concern that in some towns activities for children and youth were restricted by the availability of rooms in multipurpose buildings that may have other bookings. This "unreliability" meant that youths did not get into the habit of going to a location to participate in activities. (Note: this is not necessarily the situation in all towns across the Kimberley).

Substance Abuse

Sobering up facility in each town.	Sobering up facilities are not just required in towns such as Broome, Derby and Kununurra where takeaway alcohol is available. Residents in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing commented that sobering up shelters were needed in those town due to illegal on-selling of alcohol making it readily available.
Drug and alcohol rehabilitation services.	Families said they could get people to sober-up on-country but they relapsed when they came back into town. There is a need for services in each town to support people in the longer term - noting that illegal alcohol and drugs are readily available. It was also noted that when people return from incarceration, there is a need for strong support to help them not relapse into binge drinking.
Stem the illegal sale of alcohol.	Noting the significant step forward in the carriage of alcohol laws, there needs to be a very strong campaign to stem supply. This is a deeply challenging issue as there are many backroads that can be used and supply may come from outside of the Kimberley. It was suggested Police need to consider greater use of technology to track sly groggers, because there were sophisticated systems using mobile phones to avoid Police. Greater use of "intelligence" was suggested to try to improve controls.
Mandatory drug and alchol rehabilitation for parents of children that offend - where this is a factor in child neglect.	The legal parameters for including this in any sentencing/ intervention are unclear however it was a strongly supported suggestion. It is noted that not all youth offenders are in dysfunctional homes however it was seen as a tool, along with parent coaching and family wrap around services, to try to stem intergenerational issues.
Make the Banned Drinkers Register (BDR) work.	Many felt the BDR was one of the keys to success. There is need to have rapid responses. Just like a move on notice police should be able to stop a person under the influence and being anti-social or violent from purchasing more alcohol in the short to medium term. Just the threat of that restriction would act as a brake on bad behaviour. The Northern Territory model was referenced on multiple occassions.
Family Violence.	Family violence is never ok. It was never tolerated historically and must be dealt with urgently.
Other substances	The widespread use of illegal substances, including the sniffing of substances, was noted.

Families and Parents

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Need to recognise that families are at different stages and have, and need different support mechanisms.	The easy approach is to categorise all young offenders as having dysfunctional alcohol fueled homes. This is not the sole driver for anti-social behaviour. Feedback is that this is true in most, but not all cases. The key is to have a range of support mechanisms ranging from parents/grandparents/ foster carers desparate to stop the child/youth from reoffending to a complete breakdown in the fabric of family relationships. This is definately not "one size fits all."
Invest in families early, dont wait until there is a problem.	Whilst resourcing has been prioritised towards offenders, justice reinvestment models can support families to ensure that they have the skills and support that they need to cope. This does mean greater allocation of funding but it will, over the longer term, reduce the issues being experienced.
Life and parenting skills programs.	It was regarded as essential that life and parenting skills programs are implemented. "How can they teach what they dont know" was a comment.
Provide parenting support.	Whilst parenting skills development is essential, so to are programs to support parents over the longer term. This would mean greater communication between agences to facilitate early intervention.
Stronger interventions where parents not parenting.	Discussions covered a range of options that spanned State and Federal Government controls - including but not limited to - "docking" social security payments. This is a highly controversial and challenging policy space.
Greater support for grandparents looking after children.	Grandparents (and sometimes great grand parents) have a significant role to play in the lives of some young people but they need support, respite and funding noting that social security may not recognise their role in the short to medium term.
Removal of children from troubled homes.	It is recognised that it is extremely difficult to get foster carers however there was general agreement that removal of children from homes that are subject to violence, substance abuse etc should be implemented faster than is currently the case.
Recognition of safe homes.	There are many people in the community that are unoffical "safe homes." They have friends of their children sleeping on couches etc as an escape from home. One lady said "on some nights I wake up and there are kids sleeping on the floor - they know it is safe hear. My problem is they are hungry in the morning and I only work part time" The role of these unofficial safe homes is an important part of the puzzle.
Yarning on country.	There was significant discussion about taking families out of their current circumstance and on to country. Whilst there are many pathways for this to happen, the "Yarning on Country," where generations get together was seen as important in some towns.
Police and children.	Police need to build relationships with the parents - not just children and not give "treats" in reward for bad behaviour.

Education, Training and Job Ready Youth

Reform education to have a Kimberley focus.	This was an all encompasing term to say that life in the Kimberley is not like a Perth suburb. Pathways must exist for high performers, but we should never let our children and youth fall through the cracks because the education system is irrelevant to their needs.
Option for "vocational education" earlier.	It is essential that pathways remain for tertiary education, but it was also recognised that the very low graduation rate from Year 12 meant alternatives are needed. Alternative pathways at a younger age - particularly in "hands on" skills that could lead to a traineeship was seen as a strategy worth pursuing with a view that any engagement in education is better than none at all.
Ensuring "suspended" students still have a pathway to literacy, numeracy and job pathways.	It is essential to ensure the safety and well-being of all students and the opportunity to learn in a disruption free environment - it was also recognised that those that are prevented from education will not achieve the literacy and numeracy skills to be able to enter the workforce in the future. Further, if/when they do return to school, they are so far behind that their literacy/numeracy skills may be equivalent to students potentially several years below that age group. Alternatives must be brought in with a view that young people can re-engage with the education system through intensive learning programs that ensure that their skills are age appropriate. It is noted that this is difficult, challenging and will take a different teaching resource to mainstream education.
Boarding facility in town for out of town high school students.	Boarding schools in towns was discussed as important because some remote communities do not have education beyond Year 6 and students need to come into towns such as Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing to attend the District High School. Feedback was there was limited/no support and young people were sometimes placed in the care of dysfunctional over crowded households. The concept of a boarding facility was to provide an option of a safe place to sleep, breakfast and dinner, clean clothes and potentially study support - or at least a place to study.
On country boarding school.	It was acknowledged that this has been tried - and had challenging outcomes in terms of management - it was still supported in forums as an option to be explored.
Agricultural Colllege.	Providing skills vital in the Kimberley, an Agricultural college can attract a diversity of students interested in working on the land with the potential for adding in ranger program training.
Boot Camp.	This is a more stringent version of the on-country boarding school/agricultural college which focuses on structure and routine. Potentinal to combine with intensive literacy/ numeracy, counselling, leadership etc. It might, for example, use the close management of animals (horses and calves) to help kids connect in a caring way.

Housing, Accommodation and Urban Renewal

Invest in social housing to reduce overcrowding.	This is seen as a priority right across the Kimberley. Investment is urgent and must be made now.
Short Stay for Medical (including family support).	Movement between regional towns - such as Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek can be triggered by family medical requirements. This can exaserbate housing over crowding. Short stay for medical procedures should be provided - including for family support so as not to exaserbate housing overcrowding.
Clean up streets and parks - fix pot holes, install curbing, fix parks and playgrounds.	When children have to walk through glass to get to poorly managed playgrounds there is an issues. Broken cars litter the streets - potholes are enormous and poor amenity leads to despair and low expectations. The urban landscape must be seen as part of the solution and "normalised" to broader community expectations.
Invest in urban renewal - remove culdersacs, reduce social housing intensity where possible.	Investment is needed in our towns and communities so that we can improve the urban environment and reduce concentrations of dysfunction. Close liaison with local Shires is recommended to identify priority areas and relevant solutions.
Open pathways for home ownership.	Currently our tenure system precludes Aboriginal people from owning their own homes in remote communities. Even in towns like Halls Creek, the reserve system and a shortage of developed lots is an obstacle to home ownership. There is an urgent need for review.
Improve and increase the government housing stock for essential workers.	Deep concern was expressed about the quality of the government housing stock and the locations in which they were situated. When combined with the community pushback about FIFO and DIDO services, this was seen to be a priority.
Reinstate programs to assist people manage and understand homes.	The "homemaker" program was raised as an example of a program which helped people that may not have previously been responsible for a home to deal with routine maintenance etc. Whilst defunded, these programs were seen as part of the reskilling of the community.
Fund accommodation for those transitioning into larger towns for employment.	Feedback is that young people coming out of communities into employment may be overwhelmed with the combination. Accommodation, while they get on their feet will assist in the transition to work.
Street lighting.	Whilst Horizon Power is undertaking street lighting upgrades in conjunction with local government, it is a priority to ensure that streets are not left in darkness as - anacdotally - this adds to the propensity for crime and breakins.

Secure Communities, Justice & Sentencing Options

CCTV functionality and roll out.	There is an urgent need for increased surveillance as the presence of CCTV can have an impact on criminal and antisocial behaviour.
CCTV monitoring.	Concerns were raised about existing CCTV with the claim that some of it is not monitored 24/7. Community members in Derby suggested they would be willing to establish a roster to monitor a CCTV room in the local Police Station.
Security upgrades for GROH and WAHC's housing.	Public servants raised concerns about the standard of security in government housing. Some had suffered multiple break-ins and home invasions but reported that they could not get approval for security systems to be installed. Feedback was the private rental stock was now requiring security to be installed. An urgent review of security has been urged to facilitate greater safety across properties owned or managed by government.
Police presence.	Discussions ranged from military on the streets to recognition that there needs to be a rolling team of highly trained police across regional and remote areas to support the local teams. Support should be triggered by trends, not crisis with officers deployed to flatten the curve of anti-social and criminal behaviour rather than waiting for it to escalate.
Representation in court.	Feedback was provided that there may be as little as 15 minutes legal support allocated - with little knowlege of circumstance and family connections.
Kimberley focused and culturally appropriate justice.	Traditional lore was raised across the Kimberley. Noting cultural matters, this report acknowledges the role Elders and Aboriginal leaders can play in the justice system and calls for local involvement - particularly in youth justice.
Rapid sentencing options.	There was a call for a quicker response in the Justice system, with comments that it is unfair to have juveniles being charged but not facing consequences for many months.
Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers.	Calls were made to reinstate APLOs noting the officer in Halls Creek has been transferred away. There was strong support for more APLOs and local Police Cadets to ensure continuity and a local face in communities.
Night curfews for people under 14yrs.	Curfews were supported <i>in principle</i> however were strongly debated - in particular recognition of why children were on the streets and where they could be taken - safely. Curfews were seen as a measure that maybe used by Police at the discretion of the local OIC.

Programs and Local Solutions

Co-design.	Whilst the importance of co-design was recognised, many felt that the outcome of co-design was inadequate. The tender and contracting was a tightly constrained and not adaptable to individual and local needs. This may not reflect practice or the bulk of contracts so is mentioned with caution.
Move forward faster.	There are programs that are successful, but the lapse of years between proposal, funding small trial initiation, review and broader implementation is supressing solutions. Some programs should be clearly labled as innovative - and as such - subject to greater risk appetite than normally recognised in government. The current situation warrents such action.
Competitive vs collaborative models.	There was also discussion about competing local interests and the potential for a grant regime that - as an option - encouraged stability through consortium applications to ensure sustainability of programs, rather than the needd for subcontracting within a government contract.
Community Compact.	A community compact was raised by the Hon Melissa Price MP and has been successfu in other jursdictions. The concept is to clearly spell out the community expectations of parenting, with local signage.
Programs of merit.	Target 120 was raised in many forums as being worth of expansion (and the State Government is progressing this). Night Engagement Youth Officers is an excellent program and it is pleasing to see this rolling out more widely.
Funding cycles.	Longer funding program cycles were recommended to enable the attraction and retention of quality staff/leaders.
Youth Leadership.	Youth leadership programs in all locations should be encouraged to provide ongoing feedback, to enhance adaptability and to provide positive recognition of young people.

In Conclusion

I wanted to want to thank again the people of the Kimberley who came out in force to speak to us over the five days of forums and the many conversations afterwards. This report attempts to capture the spirit and intent of the those conversations.

I have sat on many sides of this complex issue and recognise these matters are the result of decades of challenge, but it is the deterioration in recent times that is of most concern and a major motivation for action. The issues are not new, nor are the overarching solutions.

Sadly, our kids, our families and our towns are now in crisis.

My commitment remains to continue to highlight these issues to parliament - and to work with you - our community along with the local member, agencies and organisations, to find solutions.

I also commit to vigorously pursuing the issues should the attention of the State government faulter.



Disclaimer: The comments collated in this document reflect discussions by members of the Kimberley community at the Crime and Community forums held in February 2022. The content of this report does not necessarily represent the views of the author, the Liberal Party of Western Australia or the National Party and should not be attributed in part or in full to any individual or participating member of Parliament.
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