

# The Role of Local Government in Crime Prevention Pt 1

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In recent decades, there has been a movement toward local government assuming responsibilities for the prevention of crime. This international trend has been replicated across Australia. In New South Wales, Part 4 of the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997 encourages local government to undertake local crime prevention planning. In the second reading speech for the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Bill, then the Attorney-General of New South Wales made the following observations:

“... the Government is committed to encouraging and supporting local communities to develop effective responses to local crime problems. Only when an accurate local perspective is developed can communities identify which crime prevention strategies are likely to have an impact. This involves local communities actively working together to identify what their major crime problems are and to pinpoint those factors and influences which are contributing to crime locally. It also requires communities to assess initiatives for their efficacy in the local neighbourhood”.<sup>1</sup>

These comments highlight the rationale for involvement of local government in crime prevention, namely:

- An understanding of local problems is necessary to identify appropriate solutions
- Local communities can assess the relevance of particular strategies to their particular circumstances
- Partnerships at the local level can be effective in preventing crime.

These are the common arguments in favour of local government participating in crime prevention. More specifically, Weatherburn argues that:

“Local government is in a somewhat better position to influence the supply of opportunities and incentives for involvement in crime, through their development control plans and the services and recreational facilities they provide. Municipal and shire councils can exercise some direct control in this domain through the policies they adopt in relation to such things as building design, public space development and local business practice. They can also exert some degree of indirect control through the relationships they establish with local police”.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps even further to these roles, local government can also seek to influence aspects of State government departmental programs in their area and lobby State and federal governments for further resources. Moreover, local government can impact on licensed premises, local parks, establish alcohol free zones, develop programs to assist with homelessness and other social issues, educate community members about ways to prevent crime, promote community well-being through festivals, use local media to tackle negative perceptions of crime and work in conjunction with neighbouring councils to respond to issues going beyond LGA boundaries. Local government can also undertake lighting audits, chair meetings to bring security providers together and participate in community safety audits.

Despite these potential roles, Weatherburn cautions that “... most of the risk and protection factors associated with involvement in crime are under the control of the State and federal governments rather than local government”.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, many critical features associated with crime prevention will be beyond the remit of local government.

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. J. W. Shaw, NSW Legislative Council, 23/06/97 Second Reading Speech Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Bill, p. 10952

<sup>2</sup> Weatherburn, D. (2004) **Law and Order in Australia: Rhetoric and Reality**, Federation Press, Annandale, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.