

Local Safety Committees and the Community Governance of Crime Prevention  
and Community Safety

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# Local Safety Committees and the Community Governance of Crime Prevention and Community Safety

## Abstract

Over the past thirty years or so, the onus of crime prevention and community safety in Victoria has been shifting away from police to a more community-based role involving partnerships between multiple community stakeholders. This paper focuses on one such group of community stakeholders known as the Local Safety Committee (LSC). LSCs represent a form of public sector governance that is concerned with the *Community Governance of Crime Prevention and Community Safety*. This paper describes the outcome of two survey questionnaires involving 41 LSC members from six Local Government Areas in Victoria: Bendigo, Boroondara, Brimbank, Glen Eira, Port Phillip and Shepparton. The survey was undertaken to further explore participant responses and check emerging assumptions and hypotheses with respect to the findings of previous focus group sessions held with the six LSCs. The research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the community governance of crime prevention and community safety, yielding insights into the structure, issues and concerns of local safety committees.

**Keywords:** public sector governance, community governance, crime prevention and community safety, local safety committees

# **Local Safety Committees and the Community Governance of Crime**

## **Prevention and Community Safety**

### **Introduction**

Since at least the late seventies, the onus of crime prevention and community safety in Victoria has been shifting away from police to a more community based role. While many of the major crime prevention programs and initiatives of the past thirty years have been developed by police, their success is dependent on the support of the broader community. Some of these police programs and initiatives include: Safety Houses (developed in 1979), Neighbourhood Watch (1980s), Crime Stoppers (1987), Police Community Consultative Committees (PCCCs) (1989), Police Schools Involvement Program (multiple initiatives) (1989) and the Confident Living Program (1992). A community partnership approach was further encouraged by the 1997 Victorian Department of Justice - Safer cities and shires guide to developing strategic partnerships and 2002 Safer streets and homes crime and violence prevention strategy for Victoria (CPV, 2002).

A community partnership approach goes beyond policing and punitive measures and naturally lends itself to a preventative and multifaceted perspective on community crime and safety. Each facet or stakeholder in the partnership contributes to an overall picture of the needs and strengths of the community. In this paper we refer to the shift in the onus of crime prevention and community safety from police to community based partnerships as community governance. However, more specifically community governance may be defined as *community level management and decision making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community, by a group of community stakeholders*. The focus on 'community' rather than

on a corporation, organisation, local government or the public sector is the distinguishing feature of community governance vis a vis these other forms of governance.

This paper focuses on one such group of community stakeholders known as the Local Safety Committee (LSC). The paper describes the outcome of a survey involving 41 LSC members from six Local Government Areas in Victoria. Although six LGAs constitute only 7.6% of the 79 LGAs in Victoria, the study makes a contribution to research in this area and to our understanding of the community governance of crime prevention and community safety, yielding insights into the structure, issues and concerns of local safety committees. A brief overview of LSCs and the broader context of this research follow in the remainder of this introduction to provide a background to the research.

### ***Local Safety Committees***

The LSC concept was formally launched by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Chief Commissioner of Police on 8 August 2000 (Auditor General Victoria, 2001). A related LSC Resource Kit consisting of policy and guidelines (including reporting requirements) on the establishment and maintenance of Local Safety was launched by Victoria Police in April 2002 (Auditor General Victoria, 2003). According to this resource, a LSC is a “multi-agency and community forum made up of representatives from government, non-government and community agencies and organisations at the local level who share a collective commitment to improving community safety” (Victoria Police, 2002, *Introduction to Local Priority Policing*, p.1.). An important aim of the LSC is to develop a multi-agency community safety plan to address community safety issues that are specific to each district (Victoria Police, 2002, *Introduction to Local Safety Committees* - p.1).

### ***Evaluating Community Governance***

The research discussed in this paper was part of a broader project aimed at Evaluating the Community Governance of Crime Prevention and Community Safety. The project was initiated in 2002 by the Centre for International Corporate Governance Research (CICGR) at Victoria University (Armstrong and Francis, 2002) in partnership with Crime Prevention Victoria (CPV) and was funded by an Australian Research Council grant. Evaluating the Community Governance of Crime Prevention and Community Safety has to date involved a number of stages and components over a three year period. This has included the construction and analysis of a state-wide data-base relating to crime rates and community characteristics and focus groups with LSC members from the six LGAs: Bendigo, Boroondara, Brimbank, Glen Eira, Port Phillip and Shepparton to explore the governance arrangements and role of LSCs in crime prevention and community safety.

Following a qualitative analysis of the focus group responses (see Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis, 2004) two questionnaires were developed to further explore participant responses and to check our assumptions and hypotheses with respect to the findings. The structure and outcome of these questionnaires are discussed in the sections that follow.

### **Method and Results**

A total of 41 LSC members (25 male & 16 female) from the six previously named LSCs/LGAs participated in the surveys. The method of recruitment was by distribution of the two questionnaires together with a letter, information about the project and consent forms either in person by the researchers, by mail or by a key person, who was either the chair or other leading committee member. Communication between the researcher and the key person occurred on several occasions prior to the return of questionnaires. Participants included

professionals from local councils, police, road safety and local health and community services and community members. The first questionnaire called the *Local Safety Committee Questionnaire* (Armstrong, Francis, & Totikidis, 2004) was directed to *each LSC member* while the second called *Local Safety Committee Questionnaire to Examine Hypotheses Relating to Reduction of Crime in LGAs* (Francis, Armstrong, & Totikidis, 2004) was directed to the *chairman or committee as a whole (only one per committee was required)*.

### ***Local Safety Committee Questionnaire***

*Overall Percentage of Agreement.* The LSC questionnaire consisted of 36 simple statements regarding the opinions of LSCs in relation to the findings of the focus group research. Each statement in the questionnaire included a five point likert scale (ranging from Strongly-agree to Strongly-disagree). Ten background questions about participants were also included as part of this questionnaire. On return of the questionnaires, the data were entered into SPSS files and basic statistical analyses were conducted.

Table 1 shows the percentage of participants who agreed, neither agreed or disagreed, or disagreed with each survey statement (see first three columns); as well as mean responses for each LGA (last six columns). The overall percentages are discussed in this section, while the mean responses are discussed in the following section entitled *Similarities and Differences Between the LGAs*.

Table 1 shows the highest percentage of responses for each statement in bold italic font. There was agreement with the majority of statements with 43.9% - 100% of participants choosing this response for 30 out of the 36 of the statements. One of the six exceptions to this was that most participants disagreed with statement 4:

- The police views dominate discussions” (75.6% disagreed).

The high percentage above shows support for the police as well as indicating that the LSC is a shared committee even though it was in many cases initially a police initiative and may sometimes appear to be police driven.

Table 1  
Percentage and Mean Rate of Agreement with Each Survey Statement

Survey Statement	Dis- Agree	Neither	Agree	Bend	Boro	Brim	Port	Shep	Glen
	Percentage			Average rate of agreement					
1. Overall our LSC is very successful in preventing crime in our area	9.8	36.6	<b>53.7</b>	3.00	2.80	3.00	3.25	2.57	3.00
2. Most members are representatives of government agencies	29.3	4.9	<b>65.9</b>	2.90	2.20	2.67	2.60	3.25	3.29
3. The police are the most important members of the LSC	31.7	7.3	<b>61.0</b>	3.00	2.83	3.00	2.00	3.13	3.14
<b>4. The police views dominate discussions*</b>	<b>75.6</b>	7.3	17.1	<b>2.00</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>1.60</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.17</b>
5. There is good gender balance on our LSC	12.5		<b>87.5</b>	3.30	3.60	2.67	3.40	3.00	2.86
6. Accountability to the local government authority is crucial to the successful operation of the committee	17.1	9.8	<b>73.2</b>	3.10	3.50	2.00	3.00	2.71	3.17
<b>7. High levels of accountability operate* to central agencies</b>	17.1	34.1	<b>48.8</b>	3.00	3.000	3.00	2.60	2.60	2.66
8. The diversity of ethnic communities in our area is not represented on the safety committee	36.6	9.8	<b>53.7</b>	3.00	3.00	2.67	2.20	2.50	2.67
<b>9. The local community is directly represented on our committee*</b>	22.0	9.8	<b>68.3</b>	<b>2.75</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>2.86</b>
10. Most members of the committee live in the area	7.3	<b>46.3</b>	<b>46.3</b>	3.38	2.67	.	3.00	3.57	2.00
11. There is a shift in approaches to issues from a criminal justice perspective to a wider concern with community wellbeing	4.9	7.3	<b>87.8</b>	3.33	3.67	3.33	3.40	3.14	3.14
12. LSCs have no formal authority, no funds and limited administrative assistance	19.5	12.2	<b>68.3</b>	3.13	2.20	3.50	2.60	3.22	3.00
<b>13. The most significant contribution of the committee was the development of a safety plan**</b>	26.8	7.3	<b>65.9</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>2.29</b>
14. LSCs are 'planning' not 'doing' committees	41.5	12.2	<b>46.3</b>	2.88	3.00	2.33	1.80	2.29	2.50
<b>15. I have a strong sense of achievement from our LSC**</b>	22.5	22.5	<b>55.0</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>2.80</b>
16. Our LSC communicates with the Local Council	4.9	2.4	<b>92.7</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>3.50</b>
17. Our LSC communicates with our community	31.7	14.6	<b>53.7</b>	2.60	2.80	2.33	3.20	2.29	2.60
18. The local council has a member on our committee			<b>100.0</b>	3.80	3.67	4.00	3.80	3.56	3.57
<b>19. The local member of state government is a member of our committee**</b>	<b>56.1</b>	7.3	36.6	<b>3.90</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>1.43</b>
20. The LSC acts as an advisory group for council	12.2	9.8	<b>78.0</b>	3.10	3.67	3.00	3.40	2.75	3.00
21. The LSC acts as a reference group for	19.5	26.8	<b>53.7</b>	3.00	3.25	3.00	3.20	2.71	2.80

Survey Statement	Dis- Agree	Neither	Agree	Bend	Boro	Brim	Port	Shep	Glen
	Percentage		Average rate of agreement						
government agencies									
<b>22. The LSC lacks sufficient authority to get the coordination we need to address safety issues*</b>	<b>41.5</b>	31.7	26.8	<b>2.67</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>2.60</b>
<b>23. The LSC lacks accountability*</b>	<b>39.0</b>	29.3	31.7	<b>2.33</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>2.50</b>
24. CPV provides opportunities to coordinate projects	14.6	<b>58.5</b>	26.8	2.80	3.33	3.00	2.00	2.75	2.00
<b>25. The local Council Safety/Health Officer makes a significant contribution to the success of the committee*</b>	19.5	22.0	<b>58.5</b>	<b>2.43</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>2.60</b>
26. There is little sharing of data between agencies	<b>63.4</b>	9.8	26.8	2.22	2.50	2.33	1.60	2.38	2.20
27. Our LSC has the right mix of skills	9.8	29.3	<b>61.0</b>	3.00	2.75	3.00	3.20	2.80	3.00
28. Members of our LSC willingly share information		4.9	<b>95.1</b>	3.20	3.40	3.00	3.60	3.11	3.14
29. Members of our committee do not have authority to make decisions on behalf of the agencies	36.6	19.5	<b>43.9</b>	2.29	3.00	2.00	2.50	3.11	2.60
30. Members of our LSC are committed to community safety		2.4	<b>97.6</b>	3.50	3.50	3.67	3.40	3.75	3.29
31. LSCs form very successful partnerships with government agencies	4.9	17.1	<b>78.0</b>	2.90	3.00	3.00	3.20	2.83	3.20
32. LSCs form very successful partnerships with the businesses in the area	22.0	34.1	<b>43.9</b>	2.83	2.50	3.00	2.75	2.60	2.75
<b>33. LSCs form very successful partnerships with social service providers*</b>	14.6	24.4	<b>61.0</b>	<b>2.78</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>2.67</b>
34. The biggest barrier to achievement is lack of funding	26.83	14.63	<b>58.54</b>	3.14	2.20	3.00	2.60	2.89	3.00
<b>35. Our LSCs facilitates partnerships between agencies*</b>	2.44	14.63	<b>82.93</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>3.14</b>
36. Our LSC provides coordination of the activities of various agencies addressing crime prevention	12.20	12.20	<b>75.61</b>	2.71	3.17	3.00	3.40	2.86	3.14

Notes. Response categories were: Strongly-disagree = 1; Quite-disagree = 2; Quite-agree = 3; Strongly-agree = 4. These categories were aggregated into two categories for the calculation of percentages. SPSS One-Way Analysis of Variance was used to test for statistically significant differences in LSCs responses. A total of 11 out of the 36 statements were significant. Two tailed tests. \* = <.05; \*\* = <.01. Post hoc analyses to determine 'which' groups differed significantly could not be conducted due to the small sample.

Many participants also disagreed with statements 22, 23, 26, which suggests that committees feel reasonably confident and competent in managing some of the complex issues confronting them. These are outlined following, respectively:

- The LSC lacks sufficient authority to get the coordination we need to address safety issues (41.5% disagreed)



- The LSC lacks accountability (39.0% disagreed)
- There is little sharing of data between agencies (63.4% disagreed)

Whilst a greater percentage of participants disagreed with statements 22 and 23, it should be noted that close to 60% either agreed or could not say that the LSC lacked sufficient authority and accountability.

Further exceptions were that many participants said that they did not have a member from state government on the committee (statement 19: 56.1% disagreed) and many could neither agree nor disagree with the knowledge-based statement regarding CPV involvement:

- CPV provides opportunities to coordinate projects (statement 24: 58.5% neither agreed nor disagreed)

Most of the other responses point to the positive successes of LSCs, with most participants agreeing that:

- Members of our LSC are committed to community safety (statement 30: 97.6% agreed)
- Members of our LSC willingly share information (statement: 28: 95.1% agreed)
- Our LSC communicates with the Local Council (statement: 16: 92.7% agreed).

Agreement with statements 8 and 34, however, do warrant further attention. These two statements yielded agreement from 53.7% and 58.5% of participants and appear below, respectively.

- The diversity of ethnic communities in our area is not represented on the safety committee
- The biggest barrier to achievement is lack of funding

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Lack of funding may be a particular problem when the LSC has high expectations of itself as a crime prevention committee as opposed to only a discussion group.

*Similarities and Differences Between the LGAs.* The last six columns in Table 1 show the mean response to each survey statement for each LSC and the total sample. Four response categories were used to calculate this mean: Strongly-disagree = 1; Quite-disagree = 2; Quite-agree = 3; Strongly-agree = 4. Although similarities and differences between the LGAs are present in the table, comparisons of means using SPSS One-Way Analysis of Variance only revealed statistically significant differences for 11 out of the 36 statements. These significant statements appear in the table in italics with asterisks to point out the probability of error at the .05 (\*) and .01 level (\*\*).

Post hoc analyses to determine 'which' groups differed significantly could not be conducted due to the small sample. For this reason we took the conservative approach below, presenting a summary only of the most marked differences in the mean responses:

- Brimbank and Shepparton differed the most from and Port Phillip and Boroondara in terms of their responses about police involvement the first two agreeing that police views dominate discussions
- Port Phillip and Brimbank differed the most in their response to question 9, with Port Phillip agreeing that the local community is directly represented on the committee and Brimbank suggesting that their local community was not well represented
- Glen Eira and Port Phillip differed markedly from Boroondara in response to statement 13 which seems to suggest that the Glen Eira and Port Phillip LSCs have moved on from the development of a safety plan and are contributing in other ways

- Shepparton expressed the least strong sense of achievement from their LSC (statement 15) with both Port Phillip and Boroondara feeling greater confidence in this regard
- Shepparton also agreed least with statement 16: Our LSC communicates with the Local Council and agreed most that the LSC lacks sufficient authority to get the coordination needed to address safety issues and that the LSC lacks accountability.
- Port Phillip expressed the most positive response (disagreement) to the two statements about authority and accountability, with Boroondara also disagreeing with the statement that the LSC lacks accountability.
- Brimbank and Shepparton differed the most on question 25, with the former expressing satisfaction with having a local safety/health officer and the latter expressing dissatisfaction about not having one
- Port Phillip also expressed the most positive response with the two statements (33&35) about partnerships agreeing that LSCs form very successful partnerships with social service providers and that the Port Phillip LSC does facilitate partnerships between agencies

### ***Local Safety Committee Questionnaire to Examine Hypotheses Relating to Reduction of Crime in LGAs***

The second questionnaire consisted of 57 mixed format questions including open ended (requiring a short written response), closed ended (yes/no) and likert style questions. The questions made up eleven themes which inquired about the LSC Committee Composition, Attendance, Funding, Collegiality and Networking, Action Plans and Reach, Responsibility and Reporting, Information, Consultation, Data and measures, Particular Issues and Safety Officer. The term hypotheses is used in a general sense rather than statistical sense in the present context to refer to the issues/themes considered important for a successful committee and ultimately for the reduction of crime in the LGA. As mentioned elsewhere, the eleven themes were developed following analysis of previous qualitative research with LSC members. In the present context, they are used only as a framework for showcasing the LSC issues. Moreover, as only four of the six LSCs participated in the second questionnaire (Bendigo, Boroondara, Brimbank & Glen Eira), the results should be viewed as case studies and as a preliminary step towards theory building rather than as conclusive.

*Committee Composition and Attendance.* Participant responses on the themes of Committee Composition and Attendance appear in Table 2. This table shows that Bendigo is the largest LSC (29 members), meets more regularly (monthly) and has been in existence longer (9 years) than either Boroondara, Brimbank or Glen Eira. Despite being the largest Bendigo did not have a ‘community member’ on the LSC and did not provide a response as to how or whether any one else could join the committee.

Table 2

## Participant Responses on the Theme Committee Composition

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
1. How many members are on your Local Safety Committee:	29	16	16	11
Community member		2	5	Yes*
Community service provider	10	6	4	Yes*
Vic Roads Officer		1	1	Yes*
Police officer	4	1	3	Yes*
Local government worker	3	5	3	Yes*
Local MP	1			No
Other (please provide details below)	DSE-1 SES-1 Councillor-1 Education-2 Licensee Industry-3 Transport-1 Justice system-2	State government-1		Neighbourhood watch, Councillor, MFB, Education officer
3. How could I (or other member of the public) join the committee?		Invitations open to the general community when length of term for member expires	Application in writing or personal reference - would need to be able to contribute	
4. What is the formal occupation of the Chair of the Safety Committee Meetings?	local MP	Local government councillor	Vic Roads Officer	Councillor as elected
5. What is the average number present at meetings?	15	10-12	12	8
6. How often does the Safety Committee meet?	monthly	quarterly	6 times per annum	bi-monthly
7. How long has the Committee been in existence? Years ... Months ...	9 years	4 years and half years	4 Years	

Note: \*Glen Eira indicated that they had members from the above groups but did not specify the number

*Funding.* Participant responses on the theme of funding show that LSCs get some limited support from local government (see Table 3). This usually includes administrative and other minor costs, the provision of a venue for the LSC meeting. In addition, Bendigo

Table 3

Participant Responses on the Theme of Funding

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
8. Who funds the local Safety Committee?	Council funds executive officer. Other funding for programs from various sources.	Local government	No specific funding. Council assists with venue and secretarial services.	Council
9. How much funding have you received in the last 3 years?	\$210,802 - includes funding for executive officer	No specific budget allocation for committee	\$500.00	30,000 plus 35,000 salary for community safety officer
10. What funding contribution does Council make to the local safety committee?	funding for executive officer position and administration	council staff	\$500.00	as stated
11. Does Council give any other support in kind?	some additional resourcing and office supplies	Administrative support, venue, catering	Yes secretarial services	Community safety officer, desk, computer, vehicle access, etc.
12. Is there a separate person with expertise in gaining and administering funds for projects? (Yes or No)	yes	no	no	
13. If yes please specify who	executive officer			no
14. Have you ever asked CPV for direct funding? (Yes or No)	no	not sure	no	no
15. If yes what was the reaction?	Forum has raised cessation of project officer funding and short term funding as issue - long term sustainability and community expectations		Funding has been received for one project but this was only administered by LSC	

acknowledged receiving funding for an executive officer who has expertise in gaining and administering funds for projects and Glen Eira acknowledged receiving funding and salary for a community safety officer.

*Collegiality.* Participant responses on the theme of collegiality revealed a “quite-good” rating by all four LSCs for items 16 and 17 which were: Please rate the collegial spirit and goodwill that exists in the Committee and: Please rate the networking that comes from being a Committee member (an exception was that Glen Eira rated the latter as “excellent”). Boroondara and Brimbank also both quite-agreed with question 18, which asked participants to indicate the level of agreement with the statement: People rather than programs deliver while Glen Eira “quite-disagreed” Bendigo neither agreed nor dis-agreed with the statement.

The final question (19) on the theme of collegiality asked whether the LSC worked closely with any other relevant groups (such as Neighbourhood Watch) that do not have a representative on the Local Safety Committee? To this, Bendigo indicated that they work closely with VicRoads and Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnerships; Boroondara indicated PCCC's and Women's Health West; Glen Eira indicated Neighbourhood Watch representation and Brimbank indicated no other groups other than those already on the committee.

*Action Plans and Reach.* Participant responses on the theme of action plans and reach are shown in Table 4. The responses showed that action plans align with council plans and that LSCs consider social disadvantage in their plans (Bendigo & Boroondara) or in the development of projects (Brimbank). Only Glen Eira stated that they do not have social disadvantage as part of the action plan. Action plans were developed within a year to three years with Bendigo indicating the development of two major plans and Brimbank indicating four.

Table 4

Participant Responses on the Theme of Action Plans and Reach

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
20. What action plans does the Committee have?	Strategic direction 2004-2006	Oversee the implementation of councils community safety plan. No actual plan for committee.	Community safety plan	Action plan developed annually
21. Is social disadvantage part of that plan? (Yes or No)	Underlying factor to priority areas	yes	No, but forms part of the overall but this drives many of our projects. A key factor in Brimbank.	no
22. What time frame is usual for action plans?	Two years	Three years	Within a year	within a year
23. What plans have been brought to fruition?	Implementation of a way forward - safer cities and shires strategy and strategic directions 2002-2003		Four plans	



*Responsibility and Reporting.* Participant Responses on the theme of responsibility and reporting show that the LSCs have some responsibility to local government and are accountable to their respective organizations and committee members (Table 5). While the LSCs claimed that they were not subordinate to anyone, Boroondara and Brimbank affirmed a connection with the Police committee.

Table 5

Participant Responses on the Theme of Responsibility and Reporting

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
24. Is the Committee one of Council? (Yes or No)	no	yes	What does this mean?	yes
25. Does the Committee report to Council? (Yes or No)	no - advises	yes	no - has its own representatives	yes
26. Are the members accountable to their own organisations? (Yes or No)	yes: required to represent organisation and report back	yes	yes	yes
27. Whose permission is needed to implement plans?	Agreement from members	Agency responsible	The whole committee	Decision makers attend meetings
28. Is the Committee subordinate to any other body? (Yes or No)	no	no	no	no
29. If Yes then please specify				
30. Is the Committee in partnership with any other Committee or organisation?		No. However, Victoria Police do not have a separate LSC as they joined the existing committee operated by local government	Yes - VicPol - PCCC's	

*Information and Consultation.* Participant responses on the themes of information and consultation (see Table 6) revealed that some mechanisms were in place for communicating and interacting with the public and other LSCs. Public strategies included websites, the

Table 6

Participant Responses on the Themes of Information and Consultation

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
31. Is your Committee available on the WWW?	yes	no	yes	Yes
32. Is there a website which feeds information to the ratepayers about local safety?	yes: Information on what the committee is doing. www.bendigo.vic.gov.au	yes. www.boroondara.vic.gov.au	yes	Yes
33. Can ratepayers have input (provide feedback) to the Committee via the web (email)?	yes	no	yes	Yes
34. What other publicity are available to ratepayers?	Other publications include initiatives of the forum and strategic directions	Local media including local paper and councils local paper, community radio.	Newspapers - Council newsletters	Community safety initiatives promoted through Council's publications and newsletters, GE News
35. What consultations take place to apprise the public of what is going on in relation to crime prevention and community safety?	Regular media releases on activities. Development of councils strategic plans includes consultation around safety.	Focus groups and surveys on the community safety plan.	PCCC's - WHW - Community Safety Programs, Council newsletters, websites	Regular forums with community participation
36. What process is there for public input into safety programs?	Input via website of direct contact with executive officer	Community consultation process. Feedback/evaluation of programs.	Email. Written submissions.	As above
37. What feedback is there to other committees?	Promotion of strategic directions and initiatives. Members encouraged to report back activities to organisation/networks	Ad hoc - as issues arise	unclear	Linked to PCP, MPPH, Social Planning activity within council.

production of publications for ratepayers and community consultations. However, the overall success of these cannot be ascertained from the present questionnaire. There did not seem to be a formal mechanism for communication with other LSCs.

*Data and Measures.* Participant responses on the theme of data and measures appear in Table 7. The table shows some attempts towards measuring outcomes and utilising data, including crime and victim data and public health databases. LSCs also expressed awareness of available community perceptions of crime and safety surveys with Bendigo indicating that while they knew about the CPV survey, they understood that it had no budget to expand the sample size to increase the validity of survey. Further to this, Glen Eira identified an ongoing need for work in the area of perceptions of crime.

Table 7

Participant Responses on the Theme of Data and Measures

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
38. How is success in programs measured?	Community response and long term outcomes	Performance measures and outcomes	Depends on the program/project and KPI's set	Data produced by Vic Police, MFB and Social Research Officers within council
39. What hard core data does your committee have/utilise?				
Accident reduction		yes	yes	yes
Police recorded crime	yes	yes	yes	yes
Official victim statistics		yes	yes	yes
Other	PCP community health plan data. Census, burden of disease.	Perceptions of local safety surveys	safety surveys	ABS, DHS, MAV stats

LGA	Bendigo	Boroondara	Brimbank	Glen Eira
40. What information is available concerning perceptions of crime and safety in the community/LGA?	Only CPV survey and no budget to expand sample size to increase validity of survey	State government survey	Safety surveys, COAG, local council, CPV.	Community consultation ranked community safety as a key ... of recent corporate plans
41. What physical /environmental changes have been made in relation to crime and safety as a result of committee recommendations?	Taxi Rank, Engineering works to improve pedestrian safety, CCTV	Not sure	Reduction in graffiti, several parks re-designed	Traffic infrastructure, school crossings, lighting, pedestrian crossings, speed limit signage etc, etc.
42. How is their effectiveness assessed?	Crime rates, pedestrian safety	N/A	Monitoring change - see Q38 & 39 consultation with affected persons	
43. What social changes have been made in relation to crime and safety?	Drink spiking campaign, responsible consumption of alcohol campaign, Liquor Accord.	Disability, drugs, communication education	What do you mean by 'social'. Very broad.	Perception of crime still an issue
44. How has their effectiveness been measured?	Level of awareness, help seeking behaviour.	No formal evaluation undertaken		see Q38 & 39
45. How often is there program monitoring?	Ad hoc as required. Program development etc., not focus of forum. Forum operates at a more strategic level.	Community safety plan - annual and quarterly.		Monitoring is ongoing through collection of statistics

*Particular Issues.* Several questions on other particular issues that might impact on the work of LSCs were asked, including questions on conflict, minority or marginal groups in the local community and safety officers. In summary:

- LSCs indicated that any conflict within the group was dealt with in accordance with the forum handbook, controlled by chairperson during meetings or settled by consensus.
- Two LSCs were aware of minority or marginal groups that presented a significant problem in the local community

- One of the LSCs above dealt with this problem by considering the issues involved and forwarding on to a relevant organisation or council staff; the other through specially developed programs
- The LSCs were generally aware of what other LGAs were doing about safety and claimed that it was not difficult to find out what is going on in other LGAs
- The LSCs each had a safety officer at relatively senior, below team leader level or officer level with three LSCs indicating that the officer had health science; environmental health and health promotion; and social development and planning qualifications.

## **Discussion**

The primary focus of this paper was to present the outcome of two questionnaires undertaken with 41 Local Safety Committee Members from six Local Government Areas in Victoria. The questionnaires were conducted as a follow on from previous qualitative focus groups with these six committees. The questionnaires allowed us to pursue some of the issues that were raised in the focus groups, to gauge the importance of the issues and to assess how widespread certain concerns and feelings were across committees. The first questionnaire showed general agreement with positive items and disagreement for negative items indicating support of the work and commitment of LSCs (Table 1). A contraindication to this was the uncertainty with respect to the role of CPV by over half the sample. A role for CPV in the future could be to inform LSCs of its activities and establish working partnerships. Also problematic was the uncertainty or agreement by 60% of the sample with respect to the LSC lacking accountability; sufficient authority to get the coordination needed to address safety issues; and members not having authority to make decisions on behalf of the agencies they represent. In addition, more people agreed than disagreed that LSCs are 'planning' not

‘doing’ committees. These responses may suggest that LSCs would like to achieve more and have more power to do so or otherwise realise the limitations in taking action.

Another issue is that while LSC partnerships with government agencies and social service providers were rated as successful, many members were either uncertain or disagreed that LSCs formed successful partnerships with businesses in the area. Businesses should be regarded as stakeholders in crime prevention and community safety; and opportunities for partnerships should be explored.

The comparisons of LGAs showed that Shepparton had the greatest number of differences working against the success of the committee. This included a low sense of achievement, insufficient partnerships with agencies, insufficient communication with local government and lack of a safety officer. It was therefore not surprising to hear that this LSC had stopped meeting for a time and were trying to re-establish the committee. Port Phillip on the other hand had rated best on a number of success indicators, including direct representation on the committee by the local community, strong sense of achievement by members, successful partnerships with social service providers and agencies and perceptions of having sufficient accountability and authority to address crime and safety issues. Brimbank rated best on communication with local council and the contribution of a safety officer to the success of the LSC. They did however, draw attention to the detail that the local community might not be well represented (note that Brimbank is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Victoria); and that partnerships with social service providers might not be as good as they could be.

Although the second questionnaire was limited by the sample size, it served to showcase some of the issues considered important for successful committees and how they could be formally explored in research. The eleven themes were: LSC Committee Composition, Attendance, Funding, Collegiality and Networking, Action Plans and Reach, Responsibility and Reporting, Information, Consultation, Data and measures, Particular Issues and Safety Officer. Further research to expand the sample to the state of Victoria (all LGAs) could be the next step in this exploration. This would enable comparisons to be made across LGAs and in conjunction with the previous questionnaire and further examination of LGA crime and crime prevention initiatives and provides a useful needs analysis and evaluation framework.

The purpose of this study was to conduct some confirmatory quantitative analysis of findings obtained from a qualitative study of local safety committees using focus groups conducted in six LGAs in Victoria. In general, the results support the previous findings such as the commitment of members of committees to community safety, some ambiguities about the role of the committees, and the importance of links into the local government structure. Despite some marked differences between the committees, all committees reported that the operation of the committees was considered successful in the use of information to guide decisions, influence on community problems and the development of partnerships between agencies and with the community they served. Where difficulties arose they were linked to lack of communication, lack of integration with and accountability to local councils, and lack of resources such as Council support of a safety or health officer with responsibility for the Committee. Police continue to play a significant role in the committees and the findings suggest that their role is changing from one of detecting crime and catching criminals to one that also incorporates crime prevention activities in conjunction with other agencies and the community.

This research makes a contribution to our understanding of the community governance of crime prevention and community safety, yielding insights into the structure, issues and concerns of local safety committees. It also demonstrated the important role played by Local Safety Committees in their commitment and effort to reduce crime in their local communities.



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