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### **The Young People in Northbridge Policy**

Pre-teenage children who are not under the immediate care of a parent or responsible adult will not be allowed on the streets of Northbridge after dark under a **curfew** policy unveiled today by Premier Geoff Gallop.

A 10pm restriction will also apply for unsupervised children aged 13 to 15.

The Premier said a hard-line approach would also be adopted for all young people under the age of 18 who engaged in anti-social behaviour in Northbridge or were under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Dr Gallop said the policy was developed in response to a growing problem of young, unsupervised and often vulnerable children roaming the streets of Perth's main adult entertainment district at night.

A three-month crackdown earlier this year resulted in police removing 454 juveniles from Northbridge streets - 65 per cent were girls.

"This is about protecting children who, quite frankly, should not be wandering the streets at night," the Premier said.

"It is also about protecting the rights of people to go about their business in Northbridge without being harassed by gangs of juveniles.

"In many cases they are engaging in aggressive and offensive behaviour making them not only a nuisance to others but a risk to themselves.

"Many are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs and in obvious physical and moral danger."

The Premier said the policy would apply every evening from Saturday night onwards and be enforced by police officers and Department of Community Development officers using existing powers under the Child Welfare Act.

Four additional youth workers have been appointed to work with the Police Service's Juvenile Aid Group, the Noongar Patrol and Mission Australia's On Track service, which will care for any children apprehended by police.

Dr Gallop said children considered to be at low risk of moral and physical danger would be advised to leave the area and make their way home. Children misbehaving or considered to be at medium to high risk would be removed from the streets, assessed and linked to a safe place or safe people.

Children who were offending were liable to face police action and be dealt with in accordance with the law.

The Premier said the Government had consulted widely since first flagging the policy but he accepted that some people would still be uncomfortable with the concept of a youth **curfew**.

"What I will not accept, however, is the view expressed by some that Northbridge is a safer place for some of these kids rather than their homes or other alternatives," he said.

"This is an irresponsible and defeatist view.

"No Government could or should accept that Northbridge at night is a safe venue for any unsupervised young child, regardless of their circumstances.

"This policy recognises that fact and proposes to deal with the problem in a tough but sensitive way.

"It also recognises that some of these children come from dysfunctional families who, in many instances, are themselves in need of support.

"We want to work with these children and their families to build better and safer futures."

The Premier said the Government had allocated unprecedented resources towards new and existing programs to address family dysfunction, as well as other underlying causes of social disadvantage, particularly in the indigenous community.

This included about \$4.5million a year towards the Strong Families and Indigenous Families programs and a new Health Department initiative to provide multi systemic therapy for children exhibiting extreme risk taking behaviour.

The Government was also keen to work with the City of Perth and other stakeholders to develop new initiatives to improve the safety and amenity of Northbridge.

It was also looking to create alternative activities for young people across the metropolitan area.

"The **curfew** is not a 'stand alone' policy but part of a broader, more comprehensive strategy to make Northbridge safer for all users," Dr Gallop said.

"At the same time, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to tackle the underlying problems that result in young children being on the streets at night."