

Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice

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Community Policing

Community policing is a philosophy of policing that promotes community-based problem-solving strategies to address the underlying causes of crime and disorder and fear of crime and which provides reassurance. Many community policing approaches involve the police performing a role in addressing community problems which may not be directly related to crime. Problem solving policing re-orientates the police role away from an exclusive focus on the crime. Problems, not crime, become the organising core of police activity. The concern is with preventing future harm. Similarly, solutions can be broader than simple law enforcement and involve the participation of other agencies such as housing or health agencies. Furthermore, the criminal law becomes only one means of addressing problems. Civil laws can also be utilised, planning regulations or, increasingly, mediation and restorative justice schemes can have a part to play.

Problem – solving policing requires analysis of the causes of the problem, identification of the options open to addressing it and then the development of a means of evaluation of the impact of the problem so as to assess performance.

Such an approach requires partnership between the police, the community and other relevant agencies. Through partnership structures, communities seek involvement in decision-making and problem solving. Community policing in this way involves community empowerment. It also has implications for the police in terms of structural change. To be effective such an approach requires devolution of power within the police organisation and the decentralisation of police authority to patrol officers and a far greater emphasis on collaboration between police and community. The community policing approach emphasises ideas of consumer service, flexibility, consumer feedback and negotiation.

Finally, this change in the police role necessitates training to enhance police understanding of the nature of community problems and for the development of problem-solving techniques. This was described in *The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland* (The Patten report) as the need for 'more focus on developing personal communication and negotiation skills, scenario-based problem-solving exercises, self-assessment and peer assessment'.

Also, community policing approaches require a change in the way police effectiveness is measured. The number of arrests or prosecutions are crude measurements and to fully assess community policing approaches requires more qualitative measurements such as problem resolutions but also community-oriented expectations and defined objectives.

Throughout the world, there is great variety in community policing models and approaches. Despite this variety, a number of common characteristics define the community policing approach. These are:

- Flexibility of police structure, devolution of authority within the police and the development of localised command structures;
- Creation of systems of local accountability;
- Community crime prevention schemes;
- An increase in the number of foot patrols;
- Cultivation of police – community relations through continuity of service by officers in a specific area over a prolonged period;
- Problem-solving of non-crime issues;
- Partnership between police and public;
- Power-sharing between community and police over police decision-making.

Another illustration of this approach is 'The Nine P's of Community Policing: Philosophy, personalised, policing, patrols, permanent, place, proactive, partnership and problem solving¹.

There is no single model of community policing but the philosophy is strongly linked to the concepts of democracy and policing by consent, based on respect for fundamental human

1 Trojanowicz R.C (1998) *Community Policing; A contemporary perspective*. New York: Anderson. See also Sirpa Virta in *The Sage Dictionary of Criminology*, E.McLaughlin and J Muncie 3rd ed. P55-56

rights. It also requires the entire police force to adopt a broader concept of policing and a transformation of the mind-set of all police officers.

The Commission on the Future of Policing

Many submissions received by the Commission highlighted broad public support from both outside and inside AGS for better community policing. At present community policing is very informal and dependent on the personal commitment of local management to this form of policing and the level of support provided. Other criticisms made of Community policing include the following.

- The diversion of resources to other duties would appear to vary significantly within the force. The lack of available records to quantify this is in itself a nissue of concern;
- There is a considerable lack of supporting infrastructure for community policing units;
- The work and outcome of the work undertaken by community Gardaí is inappropriately measured, if at all
- There is no clear command structure;
- That the activities of community police or the community policing structures are not sufficiently formalised within the force;
- Community policing is under-resourced;
- It does not have a proper career path or equality of status with respect to working conditions and allowances;
- Community policing personnel are moved to other policing units when the need arises, such as for sporting events or temporary transfer deals in response to pressure on policing resources and this breaks down continuity in community police service;
- The programme for recruiting suitable members to community policing is ill conceived;
- Community police do not receive adequate training, in conflict resolution problem solving or communication skills;
- There is no specific office space to conduct meetings or receive telephone calls;

In summary, in Ireland, as in many countries, Community Policing within our police organisation is marginalised and under-valued. We have extensive evidence of this and yet,

the one constant theme running throughout most submissions to the Commission on the Future of Policing, particularly from AGS, is the need for community policing to be central.

The Future – Policing with the Community

The Commission has articulated a vision of policing into the future that puts Community Policing at its core. The Commission has made radical proposals that will transform the way in which policing is delivered to local communities. The term “community policing” is used in many different ways. In the report of the Commission we use the term “district policing”, which we consider to be the best fit for Irish circumstances and for the new model that is proposed.

In the current approach “community policing” is a kind of specialist activity, with perhaps 10% of Gardaí in a district designated as community police. We regard **district policing as the backbone of police work and the police mission**. In our new district policing model, all police service personnel at district level, sworn and non-sworn, should be considered to be community police. In future all Garda personnel at district level, whether sworn or non-sworn, and whether assigned to emergency response or community engagement, should work as a single district policing team, to solve problems affecting community safety, reduce crime and prevent harm. They should develop their own district policing plans, consulting with **local community fora**. They should be equipped to deliver all routine policing services, with support from the divisional level for administration and certain specialist functions.

The structure of An Garda Síochána should reflect the focus on the front line by **becoming flatter and less siloed**. Headquarters should set policies, broad strategy, standards and objectives. Front line police units should decide how they can best deliver those objectives and be accountable to their supervisors for the outcomes. There must be a high degree of delegated authority, complemented by stronger local supervision, notably at sergeant and inspector level. Innovation, initiative and new approaches should be encouraged, and evidence-based success applauded and disseminated.

Excellence on the front line should be valued and recognised. The building of genuine community partnerships should be a requirement for all Garda districts. To be effective in preventing crime and protecting people from harm, police must work in partnerships with

other entities, including schools, community and volunteer organisations, businesses, human rights NGOs, youth groups, faith-based groups and others. We have seen evidence of good examples of this around the country but the practice should be universal and police leaders should be assessed on their success in building such partnerships. Gardaí should be assessed for their performance in this respect, and it should be a factor in determining assignments and promotions.

Supporting the districts will be the **division-level units. These should be large enough to be self-sufficient for all routine administrative and operational purposes.** They should also have detective teams and other specialists to support the districts. Crisis Intervention Teams, including staff from mental health and child services agencies, should be based at division level. Each division should have an information centre, supporting the districts in data collection and analysis. In effect, we envisage that a division should be, for most policing purposes, a mini-police service in its own right. The current 28 Divisions seem to us to be too many and too small. We are not more prescriptive about the structure because we believe firmly that the Commissioner must be allowed to manage the organisation, and that includes deciding on the right structure. We do believe that it should be flatter than it is now, with a lower senior management ratio.

Localised structures

Joint Policing Committees and Local Community Policing Fora - It is also important that there should be effective fora for police to engage with communities at district level. In the new model for district policing, we envisaged that district police leaders would develop local policing plans based on local objectives and priorities agreed with Joint Policing Committees or LCPFs, involving full community participation. Currently the Policing Authority has a responsibility to coordinate and support the JPCs. It has not had the same role in respect of LCPFs. **We propose that the new oversight body, the Policing and Community Safety Oversight Commission (which will supercede the Policing Authority and Garda Inspectorate) should develop these local structures to function effectively, building capacity for participation by community stakeholders, setting standards for their operation and evaluating their performance.** The key objective would be to build community trust and address problems through authentic engagement. PCSOC should also

work with local fora to promote multi-agency approaches to community safety at the local level. It should have a fund available to support local innovation and initiatives.

Removing non-core duties

The public, police and politicians all told the Commission that they want to see more police on the front line. We agree. More police working in and with the community will help prevent and detect crime, reduce fear of crime, and protect people at risk. Many police are now doing jobs that do not require police powers, and should be done by nonsworn employees or outsourced. Police also have unnecessary administration duties, such as keeping paper records, duplicating electronic ones. These should be stopped. **These steps will allow significant numbers of Gardaí to be redeployed to front line district duties.**

The Commission has heard repeatedly throughout our consultations that AGS is constantly called upon to engage in non-crime roles, many of which perhaps could be conducted by other agencies. However, it has to be acknowledged too that the professional police everywhere are often both the first port of call, in that people go to them because they don't know where else to go and are then directed elsewhere or they are the last port of call, as there are no other sources locally available or accessible due to it being the evening. The police are also unique in the extent of their extensive legal powers which can be called upon at any time in the conduct of their general or specific roles, or when a non-crime issue becomes a crime issue. It is also very important to note that AGS, like all professional police, have significant symbolic power in society. The professional police remain then qualitatively different from other forms of policing, in its symbolic power, generalist mission and regulatory position. The key task for the Commission was to identify how this unique position can best be utilised for the benefit of those most dependent on it, which primarily are the most vulnerable in society.

A January 2015 report by the College of Policing – Estimating demand on the police service – found that 84 per cent of calls to the police were related to non-crime incidents: notably concerns over an individual's welfare. Theresa May told the Police Federation conference in May 2015, when she was still Home Secretary, police officers were 'not social workers... mental health nurses, or paramedics'. In reality however, they often are all of these things, or they are at least on an amateur basis and unless other professional bodies who perform

these roles step up to the mark and become more engaged and accessible, AGS will continue to perform such functions.

Crime data

District police should have real time access to crime data and to information about public concerns. They should keep their residents well informed about community safety issues and engage with them proactively to solve problems affecting crime and the perception of crime, thereby leading to both the reduction of crime and stronger confidence in community safety. Front line police are a vital source of information about crime, fear of crime and vulnerabilities in the communities they serve.

Recruitment

Finally, An Garda Síochána should reflect the diversity of Irish society (socio-economic, gender, ethnicity). This will take a determined effort, including innovative marketing of the police career, and youth engagement initiatives on the lines of Police Explorer programmes. It is also recommended in the report that the organisation should work with Irish higher education institutions to develop a Garda Access Programme, aligned with the programmes of those institutions.

Conclusion

There is a historic challenge and opportunity facing us in terms of the future of policing. As we move to the centenary of the establishment of AGS: how to transform our policing model from the highly centralised and hierarchical Colonial model we have inherited, to a Community Policing model with all that the latter entails. The Commission has set down a transformative vision, whereby the philosophy, principles and processes that define Policing with the Community can be effectively delivered in an Irish context.