

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM DHLÍ AGUS CEART AGUS COMHIONANNAS

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

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*Dé Céadaoin, 3 Deireadh Fómhair 2018*

*Wednesday, 3 October 2018*

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The Joint Committee met at 9 a.m.

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#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Colm Brophy,	Senator Frances Black,
Deputy Jack Chambers,	Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile.
Deputy Clare Daly,	
Deputy Jim O’Callaghan,	
Deputy Mick Wallace,	

In attendance: Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire and Senator Colm Burke.

DEPUTY CAOIMHGHÍN Ó CAOLÁIN IN THE CHAIR.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** I welcome everyone to the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality. The committee has a quorum and will commence in public session. I thank Senator Burke for his facilitation.

I remind members to please switch off their mobile phones as they interfere with the recording equipment.

I am not advised of any apologies. I know some members are on their way and we look forward to them joining us.

The committee will briefly go into private session to deal with some housekeeping matters.

*The joint committee went into private session at 9.04 a.m. and resumed in public session at 9.51 a.m.*

## **Community Policing and Rural Crime: Discussion**

**Chairman:** The purpose of this meeting is to begin our consideration of the issues of community policing and rural crime. It is anticipated that this session will focus primarily on the first aspect, but we are not locked into that by any means. Witnesses are welcome to address the topic of rural crime in conjunction with community policing as they wish. The topics are not mutually exclusive.

From the University of Limerick school of law, we have Dr. Johnny Connolly, who has also been a member of the Commission on the Future of Policing. From Foróige we have Ms Bernie Meally, area manager for the south-east region; and Ms Kayleigh Canning, senior youth officer with the Garda youth diversion project. From Muintir na Tíre we have Mr. Michael Sweeney, president; and Mr. Niall Garvey, chief executive. They are all very welcome.

Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence you are to give this committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in respect of a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members should be aware that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House, or any official by name in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I will call on the witnesses in the order I introduced them. I invite Dr. Connolly to make his opening statement.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** It is a pleasure to be here. I will talk mostly about the idea of community policing, although I am happy to answer questions on rural crime also. During my involvement with the Commission on the Future of Policing, it received many submissions on rural crime. In that context, it must be recognised that rural communities have a role to play in policing their areas in conjunction with the Garda and other participants.

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 reorients 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 can 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, and, 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 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 requiring 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.

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”. Community policing approaches also require a change in the way police effectiveness is measured. The numbers of arrests or prosecutions are crude measurements and fully assessing 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; and power-sharing between community and police in respect of decision-making.

There is no single model of community policing but the philosophy is strongly linked to the concepts of localised democracy and policing by consent, based on respect for fundamental human rights. It also requires the entire police force to adopt a broader concept of policing and a transformation of the mindset of all police officers.

Many submissions received by the Commission on the Future of Policing highlighted broad public support from both outside and inside An Garda Síochána 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 an issue 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. The activities of community police or the community policing structures are not sufficiently formalised within the organisation. 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 often no specific office space to do such basic things as conducting meetings or receiving telephone calls.

In summary, in Ireland, as in many countries, community policing within our police organisation is marginalised and undervalued. 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 An Garda Síochána, is the need for community policing to be central.

The Commission on the Future of Policing has articulated a vision of policing into the future that puts community policing at its core. It 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 but 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.

Under the current approach, community policing is a kind of specialist activity, with perhaps 10% of gardaí in a district designated as community officers. We regard district policing as the backbone of police work and the police mission. In our new district policing model, all police personnel at district level, sworn and non-sworn, should be considered to be community police. In future, all Garda personnel at district level, 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 in consultation 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 partnership with other entities, including schools, community and volunteer organisations, businesses, human rights NGOs, youth groups, faith-based groups, sporting bodies and others.

We have seen evidence of good examples of this throughout 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 be too many and too small. We are not more prescriptive about the structure because we believe firmly that the Garda Commissioner must be allowed to manage the organisation, and that includes deciding on the right structure. We believe that it should be flatter than it is now, with a lower senior management ratio.

It is also important there 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, JPCs, or local community policing fora, LCPFs, involving full community participation. Currently, the Policing Authority has a responsibility to co-ordinate and support the JPCs. It does not have the same role in respect of LCPFs. We propose that the new oversight body, the policing and community safety oversight commission, PCSOC, which will supersede the Policing Authority and the 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. The PCSOC should also work with local fora to promote multi-agency approaches to community safety at local level. It should have a fund available to support local innovation and initiatives.

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 non-sworn 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 heard repeatedly throughout its consultations that An Garda Síochána is constantly called upon to engage in non-crime roles, many of which perhaps could be conducted by other agencies. However, it must be acknowledged as well that professional police everywhere are often both the first port of call, in that people go to them because they do not 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 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 An Garda Síochána, like all professional police, has significant symbolic power in society. The professional police remain qualitatively different from other forms of policing, in their 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, who primarily are the most vulnerable in society.

A January 2015 report by the UK College of Policing, “Estimating demand on the police service”, found that 84% of calls to the police were related to non-crime incidents, notably concerns over an individual’s welfare. Mrs. Theresa May told the Police Federation of England and Wales conference in May 2015, when she was then Home Secretary, that police officers were “not social workers ... mental health nurses, or paramedics”. In reality, however, they often are all of these things, or at least on an amateur basis and unless other professional bodies who perform these roles engage or are available and accessible. An Garda Síochána will continue to perform such functions until that happens. We have made recommendations on how this should occur.

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.

Finally, An Garda Síochána should reflect the diversity of Irish society in terms of socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. This will take a determined effort, including innovative marketing of the police career and youth engagement initiatives along the lines of the “police explorer” programmes elsewhere. It is also recommended in the report that the organisation should work with higher education institutions to develop a Garda access programme, aligned with the programmes of those institutions.

In conclusion, there is a historic challenge and opportunity facing us in terms of the future of policing. As we approach the centenary of the establishment of An Garda Síochána it is about how to transform our policing model from the highly centralised and hierarchical colonial model we inherited to a community policing model and all that it 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.

**Chairman:** I thank Dr. Connolly for his comprehensive opening statement. I invite Ms Meally to address the committee on behalf of Foróige.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** I thank the committee for inviting the representatives of Foróige to speak at this meeting. I will focus on our experience of community policing. To outline the context, Foróige is a national youth development organisation whose purpose is to involve young people, consciously and actively, in their own development and the development of society. This is carried out through a range of supports, from universal volunteer led clubs to targeted interventions engaging with some of the most vulnerable and at-risk young people and families in the community. Our primary experience with community policing is through the provision of Garda youth diversion projects, GYDPs. There are 105 such projects nationally, managed by a range of community based organisations. Funded by the Irish Youth Justice Service, IYJS, Garda youth diversion projects are community based, multi-agency, youth crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour away from the criminal justice system by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects. Foróige manages 42 GYDPs nationally and is also funded by the Irish Youth Justice

Service to provide a range of supports to GYDPs through the GYDP best practice development team.

The community policing service provides vital support to many of the young people, families and communities with whom we work. Community gardaí actively contribute to the diversion of young people from offending or further offending. This is done through building positive, trusting relationships in the community, engaging in partnerships with local agencies, both voluntary and statutory, and being visible and accessible. The role of community gardaí in early intervention and prevention of youth crime should not be underestimated. Children and young people tend to follow a pathway towards offending behaviour. There are also characteristics which make it possible to predict the likelihood of a young person offending. These developmental pathways and characteristics give families, communities and systems the opportunity to intervene and prevent the onset of criminal and anti-social behaviour while also building skills, strengths and resilience in young people. Focusing on the development of assets and strengths in young people while reducing the risks not only delivers positive outcomes for young people and families, but also contributes to the overall quality of life in a community and reduces the likelihood of the escalation of a young person's offending behaviour, thus reducing the burden of crime on society and the significant financial costs associated with that.

The research has clearly evidenced that the more contact a young person has with the justice system, the poorer his or her outcomes. It is important to intervene as soon as possible and as little as possible with a young person who is at risk of offending to bring about a change in his or her behaviour. Through their presence on the ground, the community garda can monitor behaviour and identify young people who may be at risk of offending before their behaviour escalates to the point that they come to the attention of their Garda colleagues. The community garda will often deal with incidents of anti-social behaviour in an informal manner with a young person, and this low level of intervention is enough to have a positive impact on his or her behaviour. Where a young person or family may require a greater level of intervention, the interagency approach of the community policing service allows community gardaí to make timely referrals to appropriate services which can meet the needs of the young people and their families.

Garda youth diversion projects have greatly benefitted from the relationship with community gardaí, particularly in relation to early intervention with young people. The partnership approach of the community gardaí has also been effective in identifying young people under the age of criminal responsibility who may be engaging in risky or anti-social behaviour. This has ensured that the appropriate supports are put in place for young people aged under 12 years and has allowed us to address their risks and needs at an earlier stage using their strengths and interests to build skills, increase protective factors and reduce the likelihood of future offending. Engagement with community gardaí has allowed for frank informed conversations, allowing us to monitor behaviour, respond quickly and appropriately and ensure better outcomes for young people.

Community gardaí contribute to youth projects and services and other community agencies in a wide variety of ways. By sitting on local committees they can contribute to a co-ordinated response to meeting community needs. Community gardaí in many areas support GYDPs to develop a comprehensive analysis of youth crime in their catchment area using both PULSE data and local knowledge, which ensures that plans are designed which meet the specific needs of the community and take into account the nuances of their particular context. Across the country, community gardaí are involved in delivering a range of educational programmes in

both the school and community settings. These ensure that young people and communities are aware of their rights and responsibilities, but also build trust and relationships between community members and An Garda Síochána. It has been our experience that community gardaí have accompanied Irish Youth Justice Service workers on visits to families experiencing chaos and trauma, engaged with both mainstream and high-risk young people in a positive, meaningful and non-judgmental manner, and responded quickly and sensitively to young people and families in crisis.

In a police force in which there is a level of mistrust in many communities, community gardaí are the exception. As the visible, approachable and friendly face of An Garda Síochána, many young people and community members will reach out for help and advice from the person they have met at a local meeting, in the school corridor or community centre or walking through their estate before they would ever consider going to the local Garda station. The ability to access the support of community gardaí has benefitted many communities enormously from both a crime prevention and quality of life perspective. Those in the community policing service have managed to build positive and effective working relationships with the community, voluntary and statutory agencies working in partnership with them, but equally, if not more importantly, they have built positive personal relationships with community members, young and old.

Given the many benefits I have outlined, it has been disappointing to see the gradual erosion of community policing nationwide in recent years. Many Garda districts and divisions do not have a dedicated community policing service, which results in a system that is constantly firefighting and responding to issues as they arise, rather than proactively engaging in crime prevention and reduction measures.

Where community gardaí are present in communities, the benefits are tangible. However, with a reduction in resources and an increased demand, we have seen many community gardaí pulled out of community duties in response to front-line operational needs. This prioritisation of regular policing duties has resulted in a loss of the preventative work of relationship building within communities. Many community gardaí who have retired or moved position have not been replaced. We have seen at first hand the challenges for community gardaí who wish to have a greater level of engagement with communities, but because of the demands placed upon them can only now engage in an *ad hoc* manner. Many communities are suffering as a result of the reduction in resources put into community policing.

Where community policing plays a significant role in crime prevention, in our experience with Garda youth development projects the benefits in terms of targeting, early intervention, assessment of risk and need and achieving positive outcomes for young people are clear. Community gardaí identify young people at risk before they have been detected offending, often under the age of criminal responsibility. They support Irish Youth Justice Service workers to carry out assessments, engage with young people and families through the projects and deal with issues informally at a local level before they escalate. They support interventions in very practical ways as well as providing advice, support, information and educational programmes. Their partnership approach with community groups and other voluntary and statutory agencies ensures that community needs can be responded to in a co-ordinated and consistent manner leading to better outcomes for young people, families and communities. The main challenges that we see are the lack of resources put into community policing in recent years, the absence of a service in many areas and the tendency, where there is a service, to direct community gardaí to prioritise front-line operational duties to the detriment of their community duties.

Owing to the vital role community gardaí play in early intervention and crime prevention, Foróige strongly advocates that appropriate and adequate community policing resources be allocated in every Garda division and district in order that all communities can benefit from the service. Foróige welcomes the new community policing framework and the establishment of the new community policing offices in the 28 Garda divisions. This is a positive development and we are hopeful it will support the allocation of appropriate resources to this essential community service.

**Chairman:** Buíochas. I also thank Foróige for its presentation. Our next witnesses are from Muintir na Tíre and Mr. Garvey is in the hot seat to deliver its presentation.

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** As members have copies of our statement, they will be glad to hear that I do not intend to read all of it. I will begin with an overview. Muintir na Tíre has operated community alert for more than 30 years in partnership with An Garda Síochána. Community alert is the largest crime prevention initiative in Ireland with more than 1,400 groups. While relying on the age old principle of neighbours watching out for each other, community alert has also been quick to utilise modern tools such as text alert.

Statistics show that levels of rural crime are not increasing in general. However, all levels of crime can be reduced. A very real issue in rural areas is the fear of crime. This does not always relate directly to actual crime levels. For instance, whenever there is a high profile crime or reporting of a court case relating to a particularly heinous crime from several years earlier, we notice an increase in activity in community alert groups.

While crime obviously has rural and urban dimensions, isolation means fear is a much greater factor in rural areas. When people do not have immediate neighbours, they are obviously more afraid of what might happen to them, whether someone will come to their aid and even about when they might be discovered. Cases of elderly people being tortured, robbed and left tied up are thankfully rare, but they do occur and further fuel these fears. Crime prevention and detection are important but of equal importance is creating an environment in which people feel safe. Muintir na Tíre and community alert play a vital role in providing this safe environment, through means such as text alert, the new mobile app, Cairde, and supporting other schemes such as the seniors alert scheme. While communities can do a great deal for themselves, they still need improved support from An Garda Síochána and the judicial and legislative authorities. Muintir na Tíre has a memorandum of understanding with An Garda Síochána for the operation of community alert. The partnership which also includes our funders, the Department of Justice and Equality and the HSE, works well. It has allowed for efficient and effective solutions to problems such as the recently introduced text alert rebate scheme. It should continue to be a platform for providing solutions to rural crime and community safety problems. Community policing is vital in providing this support. In the years of financial restraint from 2008 community policing has been hit particularly hard, locally and centrally. When resources were limited, the role of the community garda was often the first to be hit, as resources were directed towards what were thought to be more urgent areas. This has had the effect of damaging the relationship between communities and An Garda Síochána. That relationship needs to be rebuilt urgently.

I will leave members to read in their own good time about the history, structure and mode of operation of Community Alert set out in our submission and move to page 8 which deals with community text alert. Community text alert was formally launched as a community alert programme in 2013 in partnership with the IFA, Neighbourhood Watch and An Garda Síochána. It has certainly caught the public's imagination. Over 700 groups have registered for the initiative which receives regular positive media attention. Well over 1,000,000 texts per annum are

being issued. Community text alert is often quoted as having provided the vital cog in crime detection and local Garda management often points to reduced crime levels in areas where the scheme is properly implemented. Community text alert areas are highly visible through the erection of highly visible and identifiable signage which includes the telephone number of the nearest 24-hour Garda station, to which suspicious activity can be reported. On receipt of such a call, gardaí will verify the information and can then issue an SMS text message to all registered recipients in the area. There is also the option of including surrounding areas where this might be useful, for example, in the case of a moving vehicle.

The success of community text alert is due to the fast and efficient dispersal of information between communities and the Garda. There is also a deterrent effect through the visible signage erected. However, equally effective benefits, although less obvious, arise through the organisation of community text alert groups as volunteers to visit houses to explain and gather contact numbers and watch out for older or more vulnerable neighbours. The last 12 months have seen much change in community text alert, with Muintir na Tíre having had to take over the role as the main issuer of text messages and also with new technology being introduced. The new Cairde mobile app is an example.

Policing in Ireland is famous for its reliance on the support of communities and the public at large. In previous decades most rural communities had a resident garda. This has changed because of the financial constraints since 2008. Many rural Garda stations have closed. Initially, it was explained that resources could be better used by having more gardaí on patrol, rather than sitting in a station. There was a promise that community engagement would continue through deploying resources to have gardaí available at certain times in public buildings such as community centres, but that has never happened to any great extent. As resources tightened in Garda districts during the same period, one of the first casualties in many areas was the community garda, as personnel were reassigned to roles that were seen as more pressing. While this might have been necessary in the short term, it has had a long-term impact. Most people do not now know a local garda and this has serious implications in the passing of information to An Garda Síochána and increased fear of crime. While community text alert has alleviated it somewhat, it is a one-way communication tool. Members should note that this change primarily affected rural communities, as greater numbers in urban communities meant community engagement could continue to a great extent.

During the same period resources for community policing at central level were also severely cut. The Garda community relations office has reduced in numbers and there is now only one sergeant responsible for the entire country. While we appreciate his help and work very well with him, it severely curtails what can be achieved in our partnership. Historically, the community relations bureau had one inspector, two sergeants, two gardaí and two administrative staff, but, as I say, it has been reduced to one person. These inadequate resources, coupled with the Garda management structure, hinder the central dissemination of best practice. That leads to practical difficulties in areas such as community text alert. None of this is a criticism of individual gardaí, with whom we have an excellent working relationship, it is simply the end result of the provision of inadequate resources. We would like to see increased resources at central level and a return to each community having an allocated garda who would be known to it. While we appreciate that these are operational matters outside the direct control of the committee or the Department, the issues must be highlighted. In that regard, we welcome the recent report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, in particular as it relates to district policing.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Garvey for his contribution on behalf of Muintir na Tíre and the comprehensive written submission provided for the committee. Before I open up the meeting, I note as a courtesy that this is to be the substantive work of the committee in this session of the Dáil. For information, I note that the committee will next week meet representatives of An Garda Síochána and the PSNI, which will be a first, when the discussion will be about this dual focus of community policing and rural crime. We will finish up the following week by meeting representatives of the Irish Farmers Association and the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association. We appreciate all of the delegates making themselves available and engaging with us. Deputies Colm Brophy, Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire and Clare Daly have indicated. Anyone else who wishes to indicate will be added to the list.

**Deputy Colm Brophy:** I thank the delegates for attending. I do not have that many questions in that I agree strongly with the gist of the presentations. Certainly, I support the emphasis on community policing and hope the new Garda authorities will advocate it as being at the heart of policing. My experience as a public representative, a councillor for ten years and then as a Deputy is that the community garda is at the heart of the interaction between the community and An Garda Síochána. Luckily, my area did not suffer as great a loss in the provision of community gardaí. The role was maintained throughout the cutbacks. It is the most effective tool the Garda has to deal with crime in a way that prevents its escalation to more serious levels. One thing that was mentioned by Mr. Connolly and which is a very valid point is that if a structure is not in place which focuses on a career path in community policing, it is at the heart of why it encounters problems. What I have seen over ten or 15 years is that a lot of young gardaí come into the role, perform it for a period of time, seem to really like it but, inevitably, move on. They move up or out of the role, which leaves the existing structure of community gardaí, as distinct from what was advocated in the report, as an ineffective form of community policing, notwithstanding its positive aspects. That is because it is really only an engagement with the community at one level. A part of it I have experienced through the joint policing committee in my local authority area shows, however, that there is a much better path that involves interaction with Garda management at all levels, including at the higher levels way up the line. I welcome the proposals the delegates have made. They are exactly where we should be going. In my experience in Tallaght, Rathfarnham and elsewhere Garda management has worked on the community policing model in South Dublin County Council, which is where it can be really effective. I am interested in hearing the delegates' views on my point about promotions and whether it is at the heart of the problem.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** It is central to it. Something that was very striking emerged throughout the work of the commission. We travelled all around the country to meet gardaí in their stations. They all saw themselves as community gardaí and valuing the role as a priority. They put it as a matter of "serving the community". The problem was that the structures and processes to facilitate placing it at the core of the policing organisation were not in place. Gardaí felt that the role was undervalued and took the view individually that colleagues felt it was undervalued. As such, the objective would be to get into a specialist unit. That is the way one would want to go. However, many were happy working in community policing. If they had a career path, and if they were promoted on the basis of how they engaged with communities, local structures and so on, it would be seen as much more important to the organisation.

**Chairman:** I thank Dr. Connolly. I call Deputy Ó Laoghaire.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** I thank the Dr. Connolly for attending. I was anxious that this issue would be addressed. I am a big fan of the community policing model where it

operates properly. In my experience it has made a big difference in some of the communities I represent, which have had some excellent community gardaí. It is an issue that has been neglected, however. I tabled a number of parliamentary questions on community policing earlier this year. The number of dedicated community gardaí around the country is down by 40%, but in some areas it is down by 94%, such as in Donegal. Some of that might be due to a number of chief superintendents being in a better position to defend their resources and retain personnel. I expect that there was a significant fall in every district and a catastrophic fall in some.

My first questions are for Dr. Connolly but I would like to hear others' views also. The questions reflect what is in the Commission on the Future of Policing document. Part of me wonders if it is an issue of language. Community policing sounds vague unless one has met a designated community garda and had a sense of what a community garda does. In a sense, one expects that every garda is a community garda, which is true up to a point. My concern, however, is with the attitude taken from a policy point of view that every garda should be considered a community garda. While every garda should be community-orientated and the attitude of those who are parts of core units should be in co-operation with the gardaí, there is a difficulty if there is not a dedicated community garda for a subdistrict or several community gardaí across a district. The certainty of the role is not there. There is a general principle that community policing is important, but when there is a spike in crime or when public order issues must be addressed in a district, people are redirected away from this work.

As our guests have all indicated, a huge function of community policing is in crime prevention and building relationships as opposed to crime-solving. I am open-minded but my initial view is that there needs to be a core of people who are specifically and primarily responsible for community policing in a dedicated way. While they are assisted in a general sense by other core unit gardaí, it is their primary responsibility and the people in the locality know whom to ring if they want access to the community bus or if they want to organise some sort of a public meeting about a public order issue. There should be a specific contact person who is known to people.

There are two districts in my constituency and, in the one closer to where I am from, we have had a series of excellent community gardaí. This allowed relationships and trust to be built up, particularly with younger people. While other gardaí might have been known, the community garda was known first and foremost. I would like to hear Dr. Connolly's observations on that but I invite anyone else to comment also. We could allow for every garda to be a community garda, covering a multitude, yet it might never really cut to the core of focused, dedicated development of relationships and dedicated community policing. More broadly, does Dr. Connolly believe that community policing has been adequately resourced by Garda management in recent years?

There has not been a great deal of use of the restorative justice model in this jurisdiction. The model has been used more in Britain, the North and other jurisdictions. Do we need to see more of that and who is responsible for handling it?

On local accountability mechanisms, my experience is that the LCPFs, which are quite *ad hoc* in nature, are far more effective, and I expressed that in my submission to the commission. I accept that JPCs vary hugely, but I attend meetings of Cork county JPCs as well as Cork city JPCs. There is a population of 400,000 but the JPCs are trying to deal with things on a thematic basis and, therefore, all that happens is that crime statistics are read out to people and questions are answered. There is no setting of priorities. Policing plans are formally presented but they are so general and so broad-based that, ultimately, public representatives and community representatives do not have enough of a feel of the county as a whole to properly get their teeth

into what is involved. It needs to be much more localised, which is why the LCPFs generally work well, although they are very localised. My understanding of what will be put forward by the commission is that both would be retained, although I am not sure I understand the division of labour that is envisioned in the proposal. What would be the job of the JPCs, if they are to be retained, in the event that more emphasis is put on LCPFs? In the North policing and community safety partnerships, PCSPs, are a fair bit more robust. Was that model explored at all?

**Chairman:** Could we pause at that? The Deputy might flood the page. There were quite a few questions there.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** I will leave it at that.

**Chairman:** We will give the Deputy another bite at the cherry. I invite Dr. Connolly and our other guests to respond.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** On the question about the dedicated unit or number, we discussed it at length. My view is that doing that tends to marginalise community policing. At present, it is approximately 10% dedicated to community policing units. The real problem here is we do not have any real idea of the demand on the policing service at a local level. There needs to be a good analysis of the data coming in and the demand on the local districts before a decision can be made about exactly how many should be dedicated.

The key part of this is that everyone should look toward the community and see himself or herself as community police, whether he or she is in a specialist unit or otherwise. It is not as if the community police in the organisation are being looked down on, which is where matters seem to stand currently. The key is continuity of service, as Patten report acknowledged. Over a number of years there must be dedication to an area or a location. If a specialist unit comes in briefly because of some serious crime occurring, who are just there to investigate that particular crime, they still must liaise with the garda who is there permanently or on a more continuous basis and who is engaged in problem-solving. That requires continuity and engagement over time. We know that in other countries most issues - approximately 80% in the US and the UK - that come to the attention of the police are non-crime issues which are mostly related to vulnerable people and which need interagency work and sustained engagement over time.

On restorative justice, it is an area in which I have much interest. There is huge potential and there are many good things happening with it. Restorative justice is being rolled out and used more, and it fits into the model we are proposing because it looks at the problem and not necessarily the crime. It aims to be preventive and it engages over time in bringing people together. If it is, a young person and people who are important in his or her life are involved and he or she is helped get through the particular stage. Restorative justice has much potential. I have done work recently relating to drug debt. In other areas such as sexual violence or hate crime, many are not engaging at all with the criminal justice system. They are not going to the police because they do not necessarily want to end up in a prosecution. They do not want to end up in a court case and even prison does not solve the problem if the offender ends up there as a problem may still continue from within a prison. We must look at alternative and imaginative approaches, and restorative practice has much to offer in that respect.

I do not want to dominate and, therefore, I will finish on JPCs. We received a number of submissions from JPCs and we were struck by them and by our visits by the inconsistencies. Some were doing very good and novel things in different areas but the term “talking shop” was also used quite a bit in a number of submissions and the presentation of data. This does not

need to happen at a JPC and data relating to local crime should all be available using modern data techniques on the Garda website. We were more impressed with the local community policing structures. One cannot be overly prescriptive as that might not be what is needed in a rural area. I have worked with a number of them in Dublin city and they have been extremely effective in dealing with serious crime problems. There is much dedication. There is also much resourcing, including the Irish farmers' organisation, Muintir na Tíre, Foróige, the GAA and a huge number of organisations throughout the country that have a desire to perform a role in community safety that we should be able to tap into.

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** To follow on the comments about inconsistencies in JPCs, there is also inconsistency within the Garda structure, and that is where community policing must be hammered home at perhaps the superintendent or chief superintendent level. A number of counties operate successful district and divisional meetings, engaging with the community in a real way. Cork does that very well but others I will not name do not do this at all. It shows where this is on the priority list. Looking at the metrics commonly reported in terms of numbers of checkpoints, arrests and everything else, there is never anything about the number of community engagement meetings and so on. It needs to be made more consistent at a higher level.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** I agree with a number of the points made, particularly regarding the need for a dedicated community policing service and roles. In areas where there are dedicated community gardaí, they engage well with the young people and the families they work with. In some areas there are difficulties or challenges and they need the support of local Garda management to protect the time and space in order that they can attend a committee meeting or go to a local youth club or project, sit with a group of young people, drink coffee and talk about what the number on their shoulder means, for example. We have seen some wonderful work done with a group of young people who engaged with a project and, through this, we did a relationship and sexuality education, RSE, programme. As the conversations happened, the staff started to feel there may have been some inappropriate behaviour happening. Immediately after the session, in consultation with their line manager of course, the staff spoke with community gardaí. They came in a very informal role to participate in the RSE programme, speaking about the legalities and illegalities of some of the behaviour. There were positive discussions around consent and it was an important learning opportunity for those young people. Had one of those community gardaí received a call and been told a prisoner needed a lift to court, we may not have had that learning experience for those young people. It is important that local Garda management supports those community gardaí. That echoes some of what has been said here already.

A particular skill set is required for a community garda. I am speaking from the youth perspective. Not every person can walk into a youth group or a group of young people and feel comfortable to engage in a meaningful way with them. Where it is successful, community gardaí come in with their prevention hat on, willing to build relationships with young people. It is not about looking for crimes but rather some of the solutions and how to support young people and vulnerable families. There is also a need for greater and more comprehensive training packages for those in that community garda role, as the skills are very different from somebody who might be in a regular unit or a traffic corps, for example.

We have seen an inconsistency - that word was used earlier - in how and where restorative justice operates throughout the country. We have had some good feedback from young people and families who have engaged in restorative processes with the gardaí and we would encourage more of that. In some areas, it does not happen at all. We see the restorative process, when

it is engaged in very genuinely on both sides, as a fair and equal process. It has some positive outcomes for young people and their families in terms of understanding the impact of behaviour on other people. Young people can be impulsive and may not think about the impact on people they affect with their behaviour. Through various restorative processes, there is increased awareness and many more positive outcomes for young people.

**Chairman:** Before going back to the Deputy, I concur with Ms Meally's point about skill sets. In my experience in my constituency, thoughtful appointments have been made and the result is very much in evidence in my community in Cavan-Monaghan. We need more of that.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** I agree with that. It speaks to what is in the Commission on the Future of Policing report and treating policing as a profession. This is a skill. I take on board the point made by Dr. Connolly. I have said that every garda should view himself or herself as a community garda and be community-oriented. My concern is at the other end of the equation. Where there is a good community garda and functioning structure, there is a focal point for contact and concern. However, it is just not the same if the approach is to get people to contact the station and any of the lads or ladies will help. It is not quite the same. I am sure any of them would do their best but one does not build up the same relationship as somebody whose primary purpose is to liaise and work with the community in developing initiatives. It is my view but I maintain an open mind on it.

I have a view on fora. Notification can be an issue and the community as a whole often does not know these are ongoing. Gardaí and local authorities, etc., must improve at getting the word out. Public participation networks, PPNs, are great but these involve the people most switched on to what is happening in community structures and organisations anyway, so simply contacting them does not mean it will get to the wider community.

I have a few questions for Foróige, with one or two for Muintir na Tíre. There is an issue with the tendering of youth diversion projects and some people have expressed concerns about it. Will the witnesses comment on that? Is Foróige happy enough with how juvenile liaison officers and community policing are tied together? We are not specifically addressing the juvenile liaison process here but should there be more focus on it? Much policing time, especially in urban areas, is taken up by gardaí being contacted to address anti-social behaviour, although much of the time the behaviour is not anti-social but just involves large groups of young people congregating. Gardaí then move them on to another place. Someone else then rings the Garda station and they are moved again. Sometimes those young people are involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour, but quite often they are not. I believe a huge amount of time is wasted because An Garda Síochána has to address constantly the fact that there are not enough places for young people between the ages of 14 and 17 to go, particularly those who are not interested in sport. They do not have a place to go to, so they stay in. That is an issue we have to address. Where do we expect these young people to be if not at home if they are not into sport? The lack of infrastructure means that gardaí are constantly shifting people on to the next place. It is true that sometimes there are real issues, such as anti-social behaviour and crime. Quite often, however, no such issues arise.

In terms of Muintir na Tíre, the issue of community CCTV has been discussed at this committee regularly. Data protection concerns arise. I can see both sides of the matter. It is valuable for tackling crime. How might data protection issues be addressed? Do the witnesses have any concerns? How do they envisage the scheme working?

I am mostly focusing on Muintir na Tíre, but anecdotally the targeted theft of tradesmen's

equipment is a significant issue at the moment. People are being snooped on. Those responsible are researching their victims online. Expensive equipment is being targeted in a dedicated way, and people's livelihoods are threatened. Have the witnesses come across that issue? Do they have any views as to the solution? It is only recorded as a theft, but it can devastate a household.

**Chairman:** Will the witnesses please note the points raised by Deputy Ó Laoghaire? Deputy Clare Daly has to leave in a few minutes because a delegation is visiting her at 11 a.m., but she wants to ask questions. She will not be able to remain for the replies, but with the cooperation of Deputy Ó Laoghaire I will take the two together.

**Deputy Clare Daly:** I know it can be difficult for the witnesses when we are running in and out, but I hope the witnesses believe me when I say their submissions are very important. I assure them that we analyse what they say and weigh up all the points made. The report will be the main body of work for this committee going forward.

I found it striking that there was a real difference in the vision outlined by Dr. Connolly and the reality of the interactions. The vision he spoke of is a good way to start. I see merit in what he is saying. The idea of having a dedicated 10% does not work. We should understand that policing is there to protect and serve the community in all of its aspects. We need to re-emphasise that. I was struck by what Dr. Connolly said when he suggested that it should not be about arrest and prosecution but rather about considering how a community is best served. There is a body of work in that. What do the witnesses think about that? They dealt briefly with restorative justice, but mediation and other areas could be looked at. How can those options be explored further?

Inadequate multi-agency interaction is key. It came up when we discussed the section 29 issue. An Garda Síochána is called at night to take kids into care. Generally speaking, the experience is that An Garda Síochána is very good to deal with, but it does not have the support it needs from other agencies, especially Tusla. Tusla has been particularly poor in terms of a lack of liaison with schools and in identifying problematic behaviour. Will the witnesses discuss that further? When a child gets into trouble, the parents are involved, but the school should be involved much more than it is. Probation officers and Tusla can also get involved, meaning that the situation becomes very messy. Do the witnesses have any views as to how that might be better co-ordinated?

In terms of specific communities, especially minority communities and people who were not born in Ireland in particular, will the witnesses tell us how the issues of language, hate crime and racism are dealt with?

If each group present here could change one thing to improve the area of community policing, what would it be? That question is addressed especially to Muintir na Tíre.

I am sorry for rushing. The contributions made by the witnesses have been very thought provoking. It is good to think about where we are and what the vision is. The transition is part of a bigger project we are involved in. We must reinvent what we mean by policing. I will be paying attention to the replies.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** The first point Deputy Ó Laoghaire made was about the tendering process for Garda youth diversion projects. When the call for proposal process - I believe that is the official title - was first announced in January, all of the community-based organisations

that manage Garda youth diversion projects were very concerned. Our major concerns related to the suggested timeframe. There was a lot of consultation with gardaí, community-based organisations and front-line youth justice worker. Thankfully, the Irish Youth Justice Service, IYJS, has decided to delay that process. That was a very welcome development for all youth organisations, not just Foróige. It caused a lot of concern for a few months. We identified that rash decisions had the potential to have a wide-ranging and long-term impact. The delay is very welcome. The process now proposed involves research, and will take place from the end of 2018 and throughout 2019 and beyond. That research will identify the key benefits of a programme such as the garda youth diversion programme and the factors that make such a programme effective. If there is then a call for proposals, the IYJS will be very clear on what it is looking for and what has the best outcomes for young people. We welcome the decision to delay that process.

There was a general question about our experience with juvenile liaison officers and whether we are happy with them. Foróige and other community-based organisations delivering garda youth diversion projects work very closely with juvenile liaison officers and An Garda Síochána. They are an essential part of the system. The majority of young people who engage in a Garda youth diversion project are referred by their local juvenile liaison officer. In most cases it works very well. They have close and effective working relationships in many areas. There have been various challenges with working with juvenile liaison officers over the years. Work was done in 2017 to look at how Garda youth diversion projects and juvenile liaison officers could work together in a more effective manner. Resulting from a process of consultation and research, a number of guidelines were put together that outlined what the relationship should look like and how to get the most from it. We were finding that where people had a strong and positive personal relationship, the projects were operating very well. The correct young people were being referred in a timely manner and the information flow between the youth justice workers and gardaí was very good. People were happy to pick up the phone and have a chat about an incident, gather information on it and assess it well.

There were some areas where the flow of information and perhaps the relationship were not as good. Our research found that the issue between the projects and the juvenile liaison officer, JLO, simply concerned communication and understanding of roles and responsibilities. Consequently, the guidelines break down what a youth justice worker's or juvenile liaison officer's role is. We have found that this has helped to improve interaction and co-operation within the communities at a very practical level. There have been varying responses from young people and families we have worked with on how they feel about the Garda or the juvenile liaison officer. In many cases we find a young person is much more positively disposed to a juvenile liaison officer or a community garda, where they are present, than to any other garda in the community or in the Garda station.

Things are not perfect. There are several other issues. We would like to see a more comprehensive programme of training for JLOs. In the last few years the Garda youth diversion projects, GYDP, best practice initiative has done some work with the Garda bureau of community engagement on developing training specifically for juvenile liaison officers. Every JLO that comes into post receives that training, which helps them understand the issues and needs of a young person who is likely to offend. It helps support them in deciding on the most appropriate response to those young people. Sometimes that is a very informal response, and other times it is about going through a much more formal process. Training is an issue. We would love to see more training because there is a very particular skill set for a juvenile liaison officer, as there is for a community Garda. Not everybody is born with that skill set and it is really important that

they are supported. It can absolutely be learned. It is important that good quality training is put in place to support JLOs in learning some of those skills.

Finally, I will address youth facilities, and a previous speaker's comment that there is not necessarily somewhere for young people to go so they hang around the streets. That is absolutely correct. There are deficits in facilities for young people in some communities. In other communities there are facilities but the young people or other community agencies may not be aware of them. As organisations, we have a responsibility to get out there and make sure that people know we are there.

However, the youth sector is really struggling, and has been for the last few years, because of very significant cuts to funding. The initial cut to the youth services grant scheme was 35%. There was a restoration of 7%. As such, funding for the youth services grant scheme is down 28% in the last several years. I am tempted to say that has been the case since 2008, but I could be mistaken in that. That has had a catastrophic impact on some of our services. That 28% amounts to more than €700,000. That sort of money is massive to a charity like ours and it has had serious impacts. We have lost jobs and we have not been able to replace people who have moved on. That means that we cannot provide front-line services to young people and families who need and deserve them. That is just the situation for Foróige. There are many other organisations and agencies which have been very drastically hit by those cuts as well.

**Chairman:** We move now to the representatives of Muintir na Tíre.

**Mr. Michael Sweeney:** I wish to pick up on a couple of issues. Reference was made to equipment theft. This is a very real issue in rural areas, not just for people in industry but for farms as well. There has been a substantive amount of it. It is especially targeted. Some of these individuals are able to case farms. There are quite detailed casings, sometimes with the use of high-technology equipment such as drones, etc. In areas where substantive work has been done on CCTV operations, on which I will elaborate later, there is a structure with which to trace the offences. However, that is in very rare situations. We are finding on the ground that where technology enhances security and observation, crime drops and moves to the next area and then to the next. This is a very real issue on the ground. It feeds into the fear referenced in our introduction and a sense of isolation. People live in fear, knowing that this is likely to affect them, if not now then at some time in the future. That fear often extends to not even reporting the crime when it occurs. We have to be very mindful of that. Much of the time the full impact and level of what happens on the ground is not reported. That affects the quality of the data we are reading.

I will give a brief example. I spoke to a man recently who had been sitting in his kitchen with his family, eating their evening meal, when individuals with dogs walked through their private yard and past their kitchen window, going for a walk through their farm. The family discussed whether or not to engage and decided not to. Not only that, they decided not to report it to the Garda. That is life in rural Ireland. We must be very conscious of what reality is like on the ground. There is fear of what may happen next if people report. From our perspective, the frightening part, into which we all have an input, is this: why is that individual not confident enough to report that to his local community or the Garda?

**Chairman:** Is there anything further Mr. Garvey would like to add?

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** I would like to address Deputy Ó Laoghaire's question about community CCTV. The establishment of community CCTV schemes around the country started to take off

about five years ago, particularly around motorway junctions. County Laois was a prime example. The Department then introduced the grant scheme for community CCTV and allocated €3 million to it. Perversely, that has brought community CCTV to a halt. As has been mentioned, there is an administrative issue over who the data controller for these schemes should be. The legislation specifies that the local authority should be the data controller, but many local authorities are not prepared to take on that role and we are at a stalemate. As to how we get out of it, I note there are three different types of CCTV scheme in the country. There are community schemes, whereby the community takes responsibility for the scheme and the data; there are Garda schemes typically seen in towns, where cameras around the town are monitored in the Garda station; and there are hybrid schemes, which are a combination of both. Although the Minister said they are not to be changed, the demands of the legislation need to be considered to see if a hybrid solution can be arrived at. Several groups are now deciding not to apply for the grant and are doing their own thing. In doing that, they are also walking away from getting the authority of the Garda Commissioner for the scheme. That has implications for the admissibility of evidence gathered under the scheme. That is the position of community CCTV.

I will briefly address equipment theft. Mr. Sweeney outlined its results. One practical suggestion is property marking, that is, marking equipment with an identifier. One could be flip-pant and say that if nobody bought these things then nobody would steal them, but it is an issue if one cannot identify stolen goods. There are several property marking schemes through which people can mark their property.

Deputy Clare Daly asked if there was one thing that might make community policing better. That one thing would be a change in priority given to community policing at the top level of management in An Garda Síochána, which would then filter down. That would have to be measurable.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** I will return to Deputy Ó Laoghaire's point as I have given much consideration to the numbers and units and to the dedicated unit. I appreciate that he said that he would keep an open mind on that. We require clear information as to the demand for local services and that a clear workforce planning programme be put in place, neither of which exists. Using that data, we could discuss a percentage that would look to the community and engage with it in a problem-oriented way. It is crucial that we have a vision for policing with the community. It cannot be something that is just put aside and not prioritised.

The commission's report had a great focus on training. While I appreciate that there are some people who are very good at community policing, speaking to kids and so on, it is something for which people can be trained. If someone is entering into this public service, they should know from the start that they are going into a community-based service where they must be able to engage with young people, people with mental health or addiction issues and so on. That people are trained and prepared to engage at that level is central to the idea of community policing. That is how one articulates a vision on the ground through a professional organisation, where people are properly trained and treat people with dignity no matter what section of society they come from.

I was glad to hear Deputy Clare Daly speak of the vision of community policing that we articulated. The problem is that it has fallen through the cracks, which is why one can have a good community garda being pulled away. It is great that we have articulated a vision of what it would look like in the future.

The issue of mediation is very important, just like restorative practice. I bring members'

attention to a forthcoming report by the Council of Europe on international experiences of restorative practice that should be worth examining. We must look at alternative ways of dealing with frequent problems in terms of dealing with prevention.

The multi-agency point is central to much of what we have discussed in the commission's report. We proposed setting up crisis intervention teams, which were first proposed in 2009, so that it is not just gardaí who are available to deal with vulnerable people at 5 o'clock on a Friday. We have also recommended that the Cabinet subcommittee on criminal justice should organise an annual event bringing together the various Departments which broadly have a role in the area of community safety to show that it is a multi-agency function.

If I had to recommend one thing, it would be to implement the report of the commission.

**Chairman:** That is a good way to finish that tranche of questions. I will call Deputy Wallace next. He has the jitters because he must go into the House to ask the Minister some awkward questions.

**Deputy Mick Wallace:** I do not have the jitters but I am hoping to give them to the Minister.

I thank the witnesses for their presentations which were very good. It is to be hoped that if we can get them a place in our report, there will be more thought around many of these issues. Things get said and are just left there with not enough done. Most of the good points that the witnesses are making will remain aspirational until someone is prepared to make changes to how things are done. I think everyone made the point that for aspirations to become reality, it will cost money and more resources will be required in certain areas, whether they are taken from other areas or extra money is required for us to have real community policing. I get the impression that the witnesses feel that more will have to go towards the overall budget in the first place.

I am running away, as it were, and so will ask only two questions. Mr. Garvey said Muintir na Tíre "would like to see increased resources at a central level" and "would also like to see a return to each community having an allocated garda". Does he think that some Garda stations should also be reopened?

Some of the witnesses touched on this but do they agree that schools offer a great potential in developing a healthier approach to kids coming from a troubled background? They referred to cuts to centres and so on. I see ten to 15 kids in villages in Italy gather around a lamp post or bench there and they do not cause trouble. There is a different mentality. I am not saying that they do not have youth centres or anything. Do schools not offer potential? From my own experience going to school, it has a huge influence. Teachers and individuals in the school can have a great impact on how one sees things. Some teachers had a huge influence on me. It is different from home. The philosophy that comes from home is crucial but school is different. Is it too aspirational in terms of the work to be done?

When I was young, we knew the local garda and we also knew where he was. He moved around the parish a bit but he was in the barracks at certain hours and we knew where to get him. He was completely a part of the community whereas now, with the so-called mobile garda, I do not have a clue who the garda is at home now. I would not be in a position to go and look for him or her if I needed to. That is a great loss to the community.

**Chairman:** I thank Deputy Wallace. I will begin with Mr. Garvey, to whom his first ques-

tion was directed.

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** Deputy Wallace mentioned resources which are finite. The Minister has indicated that he hopes to bring the force to 20,000 in the next two years, which is a huge increase in resources. The resources are coming. It is a question of ensuring that they are correctly allocated. The same principle applies to Garda stations. When resources were tight, they were closed. We have an open mind on whether a dilapidated Garda station should be reopened or another facility provided in another community building, if that is available. However, the Deputy is correct that there must be a physical place where one can visit one's liaison garda.

The idea at the time was that the gardaí were better off out on patrol rather than filling out paper, and while true to an extent, it is also flippant. People need a safe place to communicate with a garda, to pass information, get information and, as my colleague observed, to be able to have a conversation about what is happening in the community. That is missing at the moment. One cannot have that conversation through the window of a garda car as it is passing down the street. There need to be more physical locations and we have an open mind as to whether they are Garda stations or other community facilities.

The representatives of Foróige will probably expand on this much more, but I believe that the Deputy is correct about schools. Good community gardaí are visiting schools. They are organising events for the elderly but they are also visiting schools at the other end of the spectrum. Our information, however, is that they are few and far between.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Garvey. I thought Ms Meally from Foróige, when talking about resourcing, made a very well-prepared pitch for additional funding for Foróige.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** It was not prepared at all.

**Chairman:** I was thinking it would be great if the Minister had been watching, with the budget coming up next week.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** I thank the Chairman. It was not prepared. It just came to my mind.

**Chairman:** It came from the heart.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** Absolutely. To address Deputy Wallace's comment on schools, my view is that it takes a village to raise a child. It is not just about schools and the family of origin. All members of the community should be involved in raising young people. The Deputy is right that there are major opportunities within the education system to build skills in young people and to inspire and motivate those young people to be very active, positive citizens and to promote civic responsibility. Where communities work well, all community agencies are involved. Youth work and the education system work hand in hand.

In our experience with Garda youth diversion projects, schools are very much part of the work we do with young people. They help us to assess the risks and needs of young people. In many cases, education is a major risk. A risk factor related to offending for young people is non-engagement in school, negative engagement in school or leaving school entirely. Youth services, statutory services and other services work very hard with schools. Most schools engage really well but there are other major opportunities. The reality is that a school is constrained by a curriculum which it has to abide by. The opportunities for youth work and community work complement the work that takes place in school at a pace that is reflective of the stage the young person has reached. We can respond directly to his or her needs and tailor the

programmes or interventions that we carry out with him or her entirely based on that young person's circumstances. We all have a role in building skills for these young people. That includes the Garda and every other agency present.

I did not address a comment made by Deputy Daly earlier but would like to do so now. She posed a question about asking what we do and who we go to when a young person is in difficulty. She also asked about multi-agency or interagency working. Our experience has been that those working directly with young people are interested and willing to try to work together when a crisis occurs. The issue that we have found is that there is sometimes a lack of communication at departmental level, and that has an impact on how we can and do work together. It has caused many frustrations for front-line workers who see massive needs and possible opportunities to work together and support each other, but there is not necessarily joined-up thinking at departmental level.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** On Deputy Wallace's point about Garda stations, we have to be imaginative about this and look at co-location across agencies or in community centres. There are sometimes challenges for people talking to gardaí or going into a Garda station in a small village. It is important that the State has visibility in villages and towns. The withdrawal of post offices is problematic for many communities because, in effect, the State is withdrawing from these communities or becoming less visible in them. Community policing builds on the informal controls that already exist. We have a large number of national organisations that have a place in every single locality and village, whether the GAA, Muintir na Tíre or the Irish Farmers Association. They have an important role to play here in working with the Garda to provide facilities and so forth. That is definitely possible. It also means that agencies should co-locate.

The issue of schools is important and brings two issues to mind. I was involved with a project initiated by Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan in the north inner city where she brought schools together in a sort of convention. I wrote the report on it entitled, *Just Saying*, which addressed drug issues. We have to get into the space that young people are in. They were talking their own language about the drug and alcohol issues they were confronting. I did work on drug debt, a problem that came up constantly in schools. Kids were not going to school because they were in debt for drugs. Their parents may not have known. Many things happen in schools and schools have a role to play in assisting young people in getting discussing, negotiating and overcoming these problems.

I reiterate the point about interagency working. In the commission report, we have called, at a ministerial level, for a regular meeting between agencies which have a place in the community safety area, whether justice, health or youth justice. If there are such barriers to communication or data-sharing, they should be resolved at that level. A strong message coming out of our report is that we look at policing. We did not do a report on the police but on policing, which is not just about the Garda but cuts across all sectors of society. I hope that emphasis is reflected in the committee's work too.

**Chairman:** We will keep an eye on the Minister now.

**Senator Frances Black:** I thank the witnesses for the fantastic work they are doing on the front line. I love the vision for community policing. My gut tells me that policing services have a long way to go. The area that I am interested and work in and on which Dr. Connolly touched is addiction. I have often worked with families with loved ones who had broken into houses to feed their addiction, whether to alcohol, drugs or gambling. I would like to hear from the witnesses about that. I will not use the word "addiction" because we often treat that as another

issue. We are talking about society in general. What is the role of alcohol harm and drugs, including for people who are dependent on drugs and those who have binge weekends? What is the impact of that on fights? I refer to fighting, accidents that happen, sexual abuse and domestic violence. When we look at crime, including the serious issue of rural crime, what drives people to commit crime in general and what role do alcohol, drugs and gambling play in that?

Dr. Connolly spoke about respect and the policing service. The policing service deal with huge trauma every day. It works on the front line all the time. A report was done recently on trauma and the mental health of gardaí. There are no supports provided for gardaí in that respect. All of that trauma comes back to addiction and the role it plays. I work with families who have somebody they love with an addiction problem. They live with trauma too because they are watching their loved one go down the route of self-destruction. They are living with the chaos and crisis this causes. I am bringing this to the policing service and community policing. From my experience of working with these families, if one gives them the tools to cope with this in a way that does not traumatise them or cause them to burn out and enables them to treat their family member with respect while establishing strong boundaries and measures that prevent him or her from creating chaos, the results are unbelievable.

Coming back to community service, I have worked with many different families. I worked with a grandfather, for example, who was not an old grandfather. He was relatively young, in his late 50s. He was rearing his grandson and they were both living in a house together. This young lad started to get into drugs of some kind. He was not taking them every day but he started to get violent. It was pretty scary and the grandfather did not know what to do. He did not want to go to the police because this was his lovely grandson. He did, however, connect with the local community garda with our help. He brought the community garda into his home and sat the young lad down. The community garda talked to the young lad at length about the impact his behaviour was having and said that the next time it happened, he would be arrested if there was violence. Immediately there was a shift with the young lad and, thankfully, through a lot of interagency work, and this was only this one young lad, with the help of the community garda, and with the addiction services really supporting the grandfather, that young lad is now in recovery. This is just a small example of how such interagency work can work well.

I have another example of a sister who was very concerned about her niece. She was only ten and was living in an environment of addiction. Again, the sister went to the community garda, who was fantastic. The community garda gave her support. Unfortunately, they could not do anything for the ten year old child, which was devastating, but at least there were some supports there.

I listen to "Today with Sean O'Rourke", on which Paddy O'Gorman has a segment in which he meets people outside the courts. Almost 95% of the people he talks to are before the courts for alcohol, drugs or gambling related cases. I am trying to ask the witnesses, in their experience in the work they all do, how high a percentage of cases are alcohol, drugs or gambling related. I hear what Mr. Garvey is saying, that this must come from the top when it comes to the Garda. District policing only accounts for 10% of policing overall. That is pretty shocking when one thinks of what community gardaí could do, bearing in mind that we must be conscious of the fact that many of the gardaí are burned out from dealing with crises all the time. I loved what Ms Meally said about the community and understanding roles and responsibilities. Again, this goes back not only to the training of gardaí but also to supports for them and having that support there for them when there is a crisis. The overall approach could be life-changing for the police force in such a positive way if it came from the top, instead of this kind of zero

tolerance and lack of compassion and lack of empathy.

I will stop soon. This is just an area I am particularly passionate about. I have worked in the prison services and seen women in particular who have entered prison because of crime related to drugs or alcohol - probably more alcohol than drugs. They act out in ways they would never act out if it were not for substance misuse. When one works in that field and deals with people in a compassionate, respectful way, the results are phenomenal and off the Richter scale. All of a sudden they start to feel good about themselves, even though they have acted out in ways that have resulted in their ending up in prison. They start to feel good about themselves and shame starts to disappear. They start to realise that there may be hope. In the witnesses' experience, what role do alcohol, drugs and gambling play in crime? How high is the percentage? Has there been any research done on this?

**Chairman:** We will start with Foróige, and perhaps Dr. Connolly would like to offer an opinion on the two structures at the end. Is that okay? Ms Meally, off you go again.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** What we know is that alcohol related offences constitute up to 50% of all youth crime. By this I do not mean that one sees drunkenness as 50% of youth crime in the statistics for the country or for particular catchment areas. What one sees are the likes of minor assault as a result of a young person getting drunk and ending up in an argument and a physical altercation with someone. One might see the likes of criminal damage, whereby someone is drunk and smashes all the wing mirrors on the street as he or she walks home, or one could see the likes of theft from a shop, whereby a person either steals alcohol to drink or steals other items to make the money to get alcohol.

If one were to look at the statistics on drugs, one would believe there is not a drug problem among the youth population in this country at all. We know anecdotally, however, that there are pockets where there are huge issues of drug use and substance misuse. For us, one of the major challenges in this regard is the real lack of under 18s substance misuse services and supports. In some areas and counties there is nothing. We have youth workers and youth justice workers who will access any training they can to be able to work with a young person. Our area of expertise in respect of substance misuse in the youth work arena is around education, awareness and prevention. When it comes to the field of intervention, there are other professionals who are much better placed to meet a young person's needs. If a young person is actively engaging in substance use to the point at which it goes beyond experimentation and there is the start of a dependence on a substance, professionals should be working with those young people. What we have in many communities are youth workers and other community organisations doing their very best to support these young people because no service is available or there are huge waiting lists to access those services.

The other issue we find is that many young people with substance misuse issues have underlying mental health issues. A young person who is drinking or using substances could be doing so to help deal with anxiety, depression or chaos at home or for other reasons. We find, however, that the community adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, will not work with that young person in dealing with his or her mental health issues because he or she has a dual diagnosis of a substance misuse issue. Then there are people - again, I am talking especially about youth workers - in a community trying to hold and support young people and getting them to a point at which they can engage with a mental health service. It is just very challenging for those working on the ground.

**Chairman:** Would Mr. Garvey like to pick up on those points?

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** Yes. The misuse of alcohol and drugs is an unusual one when it comes to rural crime in that it is more of an undercurrent in rural communities. It is not a matter of out-there, in-your-face street brawls and wing mirrors being broken off cars because that just would not be accepted in a rural community. The social mores still have that effect. It may be a factor behind visiting gangs carrying out burglaries and so on. That is a separate issue. That is not to say that that misuse is not there; it is, of course. It is there in domestic situations such as those the Senator described. She is correct that the community garda can provide support in such cases - as I said earlier, the good ones do - but then it is about priority and focus. Specialist drugs units have been set up everywhere that have a very clear focus on tackling one end of the spectrum. We do not have that focus in the community garda's job. It is a by the way. If somebody knows a helpful garda, he or she will do the job. It should be part of the job and have equal priority to the enforcement on the other end of the scale.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** In terms of the links between drugs, alcohol and crime, there is a great deal of literature and research available. The Health Research Board has produced quite a bit of research on this area. Generally the link is understood using three models, one of which is psychopharmacological model. This relates to the product or the quality of the drug that contributes to violence. We have significant evidence that supports the link between alcohol and violent crime but not so much in respect of illicit drug use.

Recently, I was invited to talk at an event on benzodiazepine use among young people and the impact this was having on them in terms of forgetting their actions, for example, engaging in violence and forgetting about it the next day. The event was organised by youth workers. It is a very serious issue that is largely hidden but the consequences are not hidden, which is of concern in this area.

I was struck by Senator Black's point on the impact of trauma on work of gardaí because it was a major issue that the commission confronted in our work. We wrote a chapter calling for the introduction of a properly resourced wellness programme within the Garda and obligatory counselling to be provided following traumatic events. A programme is being rolled out in the organisation but we were very strongly of the view that it needs to be well resourced. We were struck in particular by the very high suicide rate in the Garda organisation on which data were published just before we reported. The Garda survey also highlighted the types of issues that were being confronted by gardaí.

One of the most positive features of the commission's report is that we discuss not only the prevention of crime but also the prevention of harm and responding to harm. Harm is often the result of a dual diagnosis, serious addiction issues or family trauma. As I mentioned, a recent report in the UK showed that 80% of police interactions involved non-crime events and usually involved vulnerable people with mental health issues, addiction issues, etc. That is what police organisations are doing on a day-to-day basis. Often they are doing it because other agencies may not be available after 5 p.m. That is the reality of police work and we have made it a central part of our work that people need to be trained in this. Gardaí are often the ones left to try and deal with these issues. They should be trained or, if not trained, they should be close enough to other agencies to be able to divert people to them. They understand the signs, for example, in cases of sexual violence issues, particularly associated with alcohol, which often arise. They need to have sufficiently close links with other organisations, be it in the addiction or sexual violence field, to ensure they do not do more harm in their initial reaction to the victim and can subsequently divert people to other organisations. That is central to what we are talking about in terms of a multi-agency approach.

**Chairman:** I thank Dr. Connolly for his comments and Senator Frances Black for her contribution. Our last contributor is Deputy Jim O’Callaghan.

**Deputy Jim O’Callaghan:** I thank all of the witnesses for their attendance. I have read the opening statements and I know that the committee will them very helpful in producing our final report.

I will share some of my own experiences with everyone. In my role as justice spokesperson for the Fianna Fáil Party, many of my colleagues ask me to attend meetings in their constituencies. I have found these meetings a very insightful experience and a couple of issues have stood out at them. First, there is still huge confidence in An Garda Síochána. People want to see An Garda Síochána succeed notwithstanding the problems in the force in recent years. Second, a large number of people attend meetings when they are about community policing or rural crime, much more so than any other political issue. That reflects a genuine concern and interest among the public. The Garda has a good base upon which to build.

People say the same thing at every meeting I attend. They want to see more gardaí on the beat and they want more community policing, which is what we are discussing here. The committee’s objective is to see what we can do to give effect to that, how can we make the force more efficient and, primarily, how can we get more gardaí out into the community doing work that is valued by the community. Every politician in this room goes knocking on doors and meets people. Most people are not particularly interested in a politician calling to their door but there is a much greater level of appreciation and trust in gardaí. I would like to see circumstances in which communities would know who their local community gardaí are, in the same way as they know Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin or whoever else is their Deputy in the constituency of Cavan-Monaghan. Are there ways whereby that can be done? Maybe there is too much staff turnover in An Garda Síochána and people move on too quickly. I do not know whether the issue has been covered but what are the witnesses’ views on having a separate grade of community garda and a separate line of progression for community gardaí?

Criminality has been greatly enhanced by technology. Criminals use the Internet to defraud people and to identify whether people are at home. Similarly, peace minded people and those who want to obey the law can also use technology to fight criminality. I have seen the Garda work with people on community watch schemes to try to get a whole area covered by a Garda division. People in these areas may form a WhatsApp group or community alert scheme. The witnesses may have covered this matter before and I apologise if they have. Could the committee make any recommendation in our report to improve the situation in this regard?

**Chairman:** I suggest that Dr. Connolly answers first and then each of the remaining witnesses in order, from Foróige and Macra, please.

**Dr. Johnny Connolly:** I will deal with the question on community first. We touched on the matter in the sense that the commission is talking about a district policing model where everyone is involved in community policing and outward looking. We have gone into great detail on that. We had a chat about whether there should be a community policing unit. On the basis that we do not know the demand being place on gardaí locally and because there is no clear workforce plan, we did not present figures for community policing. We were reluctant to do so because, whereas community gardaí account for approximately 10% of the force, we do not want the issue to be put to the side as if it is irrelevant.

We also have a chapter on digital innovation and social media. One of the things that we

have called for is for mobile Apps to be made available to front-line gardaí and for the Garda to ratchet up its social media profile because, in this day and age, there is no reason people should not know their local garda. There should be regular contact and there are mobile Apps that can facilitate that. We went into that in some detail in the report.

**Ms Bernie Meally:** Knowing one's local garda is very important for the young people and families we have worked with. I noted in my opening statement that in many of the communities in which we are present people can be fearful or mistrusting of the Garda. The one person that they tend to trust is the community garda because that is the person who visits their youth club and attends community meetings or they have met him or her on some pleasant trip. People have learned to recognise their community garda as a person, not just someone in a uniform which can be a major barrier for people.

It is important that there is some continuity for communities. It takes a long time to build up trust with somebody and if there is quick turnover in Garda personnel, the community must start from scratch every time a new community garda is appointed. For us, building trust takes time. Whatever supports that can be put in place to ensure community gardaí can be present or visible in the same community over a longer period would be a positive development.

**Chairman:** I apologise to Mr. Garvey. I knew the moment I said it that I should have said "Muintir" rather than "Macra". No harm done, I am sure.

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** The Chairman did not notice my grimace. Muintir na Tíre fully agrees with the recommendation that all gardaí should be community focused. It is important that the community has a face, or two or three, to cover a roster and that they have a contact point with which, as Foróige has said, they can build up trust. They attend community alert meetings and youth club meetings and so on, and that is important.

The crime prevention officer is becoming the de facto contact point for the Garda in many areas because he or she is going out to meetings and giving crime prevention advice. In many cases there is one crime prevention officer for a division which can cover two counties. Such officers are not contactable. It is not feasible. There needs to be a contact point.

An Garda Síochána is woefully behind in technology and that is something everyone accepts. Muintir na Tíre operates a text alert scheme and it sends out texts on behalf of the Garda. In many cases, Muintir takes a phone call from a garda on a mobile phone asking it to send out a text because gardaí do not have smartphones or even Internet access in many stations. Where are we going if we do not even have that as a starting point?

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** May I ask one last supplemental question?

**Chairman:** Deputy Ó Laoghaire is pushing it today but I will let him in.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** I did ask for the topic. I thank the Chair. Would there be any value in a voluntary system of central registration, where the Garda or another organisation would maintain a register? Marking equipment is a sensible precaution but people might sell stuff. If gardaí go to a market or find someone who is selling ill-gotten goods, it is not necessarily easy to disprove a claim that they were sold to the man or woman selling them. Would there be a value in a central register where tradespeople or farmers could register expensive equipment? If they sell it on, they can contact the register or, if it is stolen, they can report that. When that equipment is found, gardaí can refer to the register and see that the item was registered and then stolen. Is there sense to a system like that?

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** The short answer is yes. There are a number of registers already but the problem is they are disparate and there is no agreed national database. Muintir na Tíre has looked at this and done a pilot programme on property marking, and we might see if it can be further developed with a database. There is one in the UK which operates successfully. The police force is behind it and it is sponsored by an insurance company, which makes sense. That operates as the de facto national database. I think it should be looked at.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** Will Mr. Garvey send the committee some correspondence on that?

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** Sure.

**Deputy Jim O’Callaghan:** Postal codes could be used for that. Everyone has a distinctive postal code that is not being used for much. Property could be marked with an individual’s postal code.

**Mr. Niall Garvey:** That was the principle Muintir na Tíre used in its pilot project. The only thing is that there must be a method of recording changes of ownership. A database is still required to track that.

**Deputy Jim O’Callaghan:** That is a fair point.

**Chairman:** On behalf of the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, I thank each of the witnesses this morning. I thank Dr. Johnny Connolly from the school of law at the University of Limerick. He is not the first witness from the university to be here as, in recent weeks, one of his colleagues was also before the committee.

I thank Ms Meally and Ms Canning from Foróige. I hope the plug for more funding for Foróige was picked up on. The committee has no spending powers so it can do little other than support the witnesses’ appeal.

Thanks also to the witnesses from Muintir na Tíre, Mr. Garvey and Mr. Sweeney, for their input to this session.

The committee hopes to launch its report before the end of November. The committee will let the witnesses know about the launch and, if they are in a position to join, they would all be most welcome back.

I also thank the members for their participation.

The joint committee adjourned at 11.55 a.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 10 October 2018.