

Submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland - Community Engagement & Traffic Corps

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. As per the Terms of Reference, there is a "need for pro-active, routine and continuous engagement with local communities" and given the need to rebuild and grow the level of trust between the Irish public and An Garda Síochána, I feel that this is best achieved not only at national level through improved management and oversight, but also by improving local community engagement.

* In general, when I visit any Garda station, members of the force are polite, friendly and helpful. For years, in my own town, I would know many of the Gardaí by name. However, in recent years, I realise that I know none of the current Gardaí stationed in my town by name.

* I would like to see more Gardaí active on foot, on bicycle, on horseback and on motorbike, in all towns. Although the mileage covered may be less, the value to community engagement should not be underestimated. Engaging with the public as they go about their daily lives is a much friendlier and inviting approach. It would also increase the visual impact of a Garda presence in communities.

* Trust needs to be pro-actively built. A simple, no-cost recommendation is for Gardaí to make more eye contact on the street. A simple smile and hello costs nothing, but reassures older people (like myself), encourages and builds trust with the young and greatly reduces any barriers to engagement that people coming from diverse cultures and backgrounds may feel.

* I would like for the Commission and management to reconsider how the Traffic Corps is structured. Its aims include enforcing road traffic legislation, reducing the incidence of injury, assisting free flow of traffic and promoting a culture of safe road use.

Why not include within the Traffic Corps, Gardaí using a wider range of traffic modes. Gardaí on bikes, mounted police, an increase in the number of Gardaí on motorbikes. It could also include a number of Gardaí on foot in each Division. Traffic safety and traffic flow should take a wholistic approach. Awareness of issues experienced by pedestrians, those using wheelchairs, those cycling will be greatly increased if the Traffic Corps use a diverse range of traffic modes themselves. This is likely to enhance enforcement of existing legislation and provide valuable insights to The Garda National Roads Policing Bureau. It would also be worth considering that Gardaí in the Traffic Corps should not be limited to one mode of transport themselves, so that all Gardaí are exposed to how the general population travels or wants to travel - by foot, by bicycle, by public transport, by car.

* I would like to see An Garda Síochána receive more training about diverse communities and how best to interact with them. For example, the Deaf community, people of different behavioural and mental abilities, people with different physical abilities, people who do not have

English as their first language, people who come from different cultures with different social engagement norms. Our communities are made stronger by people of all different types, but only when people are not left in the margins of society. It is important that An Garda Síochana can communicate and interact professionally and comfortably with diverse communities.