



*Irish Rural Link*  
*Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann*

## **Irish Rural Link Submission on Future of Policing**

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**Contact Seamus Boland/Louise Lennon**



**Department of Rural and  
Community Development**

*An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail*

## Irish Rural Link Budget Submission on Future of Policing in Ireland: Summary

Issue	Recommendations
Operation Thor	Operation Thor is a welcome programme and works well in helping to reduce crime. It must be continued to be resourced at all times of the year.
Community Text Alert and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes	Continued funding and support must be put in place for neighbourhood watch and community text alert schemes so that it does not rely on voluntary support only. Better engagement with new communities to take up the schemes and with residents where schemes are available is important to alleviate volunteer fatigue.
Re-Opening of Rural Garda Stations	The pilot to re-open six Garda stations as outlined in ' <i>Programme for Partnership Programme</i> ' has still not happened. This must now commence and impact assessment carried out. It should be rolled out to other areas where there is a need for Garda stations to re-open
Recruitment of more Gardaí and Civilians	The moratorium impacted many areas of the country, especially in rural areas, where the presence of Gardaí in these areas almost disappeared following the crisis. While recruitment is happening again, the number being recruited is still below the levels that are needed. Recruitment of civilians to do the admin tasks that would free up Gardaí to police their communities is not happening quickly enough. It must be implemented as a matter of urgency.
CCTV Scheme	While the CCTV scheme is good in theory and could be a solution to helping to reduce crime, especially in rural areas and to increase safety for residents in communities, however, the concerns that have been raised – data protection, who is responsible for maintenance and cost of maintenance all need to be examined in greater detail. Local Authorities could play a bigger role in the scheme and more engagement with communities by both Local Authorities and Gardaí is needed to make the scheme more sustainable.
Rural Policing Forum	Explore in detail the establishment of a Rural Policing Forum and pilot such a Forum in a rural area where a Garda station has been closed.
Recording and Reporting of Crime Figures	Controversies surrounding the recording of crimes by Gardaí continue to reduce the level of trust and confidence in the policing system by the general public. It is also making it difficult for policy makers to make decisions when data is not available. With the CSO unable to publish crime figures as a result of this, it is making it more difficult to explore new innovative measures to increase security for people. It is a great concern that 1 in 4 stations are not connected to the force's IT network. These stations must be connected as a matter of urgency. Recommendations from review of Pulse system must be implemented to regain trust and confidence from the general public in the policing system.

## **Overview**

Irish Rural Link (IRL) is the national network of rural community groups, representing over 600 groups and thousands of individuals committed to socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities. A robust policing system is essential to ensure that people can feel safe and secure in their communities and indeed in their own homes. While rural areas are very often viewed as a safe place to live, the past few years have seen more people feeling less secure in their homes, especially older people. This could be attributed in some part to the closure of 139 Garda Stations across the country and decrease in the presence of Gardai in rural areas during the financial crisis and the years following this. While the number of crimes had begun to decrease in late 2016, no crime statistics have been published by CSO since Q4 2016 as a result of a decision by further deferred the publication of Recorded Crime statistics due to decision by An Garda Síochána to extend their review of homicide data<sup>1</sup>, therefore deferring publication of Recorded Crime Statistics. IRL are concerned that as a result of this as well as some rural Garda stations not having access to the PULSE system, people are not confident in the policing system to report crimes and are aware of crimes that are going unreported by people.

With the spate of recent attacks on older and vulnerable people in rural areas, IRL continue to call for a modern rural policing system that protects rural communities especially the most isolated of its residents. We commend the work of Operation Thor in cracking down on ringleaders of rural crime since its inception. However, we acknowledge Gardaí cannot be on every crossroad at all times. Recruitment of new Gardaí, recruitment of civilians to free up Gardaí from paperwork and increase support for community and text alert schemes is all needed to work to reduce crime and improve policing system.

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<sup>1</sup> CSO Press Release September 2017

<http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcsorecordedcrimestatics7thseptember2017/>

## **Operation Thor**

IRL welcome the introduction of Operation Thor and commend its work since its inception. In the first two months of the Winter phase of the operation there was a reduction by 23% nationally in the number of reported burglaries<sup>2</sup>. However, IRL would be concerned about the number of burglaries and other crimes that go unreported to the Gardaí, especially in rural areas. While the incidents of crime, in particularly burglaries are higher in the winter months, it is not limited to this time of year. An Gardaí Siochana needs to be properly resourced to ensure that Operation Thor can operate at the same level throughout the year.

**Recommendation: Operation Thor must be properly resourced and operate at same level all year round.**

## **Neighbourhood Watch and Community Text Alert Scheme**

Neighbourhood watch and Community Text Alert Schemes are greatly valued in communities where they operate. The text alert scheme has helped to fill some of the void that was left following the closure of Garda Stations in rural areas. It has given some sense of security to people living in rural areas where the scheme is operational. It also helps to establish better relationship and trust between the Gardaí and local communities and We welcome the additional funding of €50,000 to the scheme at the beginning of the year<sup>3</sup>. There is an opportunity that these schemes can be an integral part of policing but they need to be properly resourced, funded and supported – supported by the Gardaí, Government, Policing Authority and communities themselves. More communities should be encouraged to explore the schemes and see if they are suitable for their area. There is a danger of volunteer fatigue among community groups so it is important to engage with as many residents in an area as possible so people responsibilities can be shared.

**Recommendation: Continued funding and support must be put in place for neighbourhood watch and community text alert schemes so that it does not rely on voluntary support only. Better engagement with new communities to take up the schemes and with residents where schemes are available is important to alleviate volunteer fatigue.**

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<sup>2</sup> RTE News 11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017 '*Winter phase of Operation Thor reversed burglary trend*'  
[https://www.rte.ie/news/2018/0111/932445-gardai\\_burglaries/](https://www.rte.ie/news/2018/0111/932445-gardai_burglaries/)

<sup>3</sup> Dept of Justice and Equality (2018) Announcement by Minister for Justice and Equality  
[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Text\\_Alert\\_Rebate\\_Press\\_Release](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Text_Alert_Rebate_Press_Release)

## **Re-opening of Garda Stations**

Announced as part of 'Programme for a Partnership Government' (2016) six Garda stations were to re-open on a pilot basis. However, to date none of these stations have been re-opened and no timeframe as to when these finalised. This pilot needs to be put in place and a review carried out to see if it should be extended to other areas. Community engagement should take place and alternatives put in place, such as increased patrolling with necessary technology, text alert schemes etc where Garda Stations will not be reopen

**Recommendation: Carry out the pilot scheme of reopening of Garda Stations and review impact reopening of these stations has on crime in an area. Extend reopening to other areas.**

## **Recruitment of Gardaí and Civilians**

While an additional 800 Gardaí to be recruited as part of Budget 2018 and an additional 500 civilians is welcome, these need to be recruited as a matter of urgency and rural areas must get an increase in supply of Gardaí. Concern was raised by the Policing Authority about the low level of civilians being recruited in Garda stations across the country<sup>4</sup>. Recruitment of civilians is essential to free up Gardaí to police their areas and communities and not be caught up with admin work.

**Recommendations: It is without doubt recruitment of Gardaí is essential and the recruitment of civilians to provide the admin support for Gardaí is also important. Future Budgets must have allocations for recruitment to increase the numbers in the force.**

## **CCTV Scheme**

The CCTV scheme is a community based scheme intended to support local communities who wish to install and maintain CCTV security systems in their area with the intention of increasing safety of people living in the area and combat illegal or anti-social behaviour. While €1 million in funding was allocated to the scheme in 2017, there is very little uptake in the scheme and those that have applied are still needing approval – mainly due to data protection issues, who is responsible for maintenance of the system and the cost of maintenance once the scheme is finished (The scheme is to run for three years). The community of Duleek in Meath installed CCTV cameras, accessing funding from a different source. While they have seen a decrease in crime, concerns are now being raised about data protection.

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<sup>4</sup> Policing Authority (2018) 'Report in accordance with Section 62(O) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005' [http://www.policingauthority.ie/Website/PA/PolicingAuthorityWeb.nsf/page/IAHD-AVADDN9414523-en/\\$File/Final%20Section%2062O%20Report.pdf](http://www.policingauthority.ie/Website/PA/PolicingAuthorityWeb.nsf/page/IAHD-AVADDN9414523-en/$File/Final%20Section%2062O%20Report.pdf)

**Recommendation: While the CCTV scheme is good in theory and could be a solution to helping to reduce crime, especially in rural areas and to increase safety for residents in communities, however, the concerns that have been raised – data protection, who is responsible for maintenance and cost of maintenance all need to be examined in greater detail. Local Authorities could play a bigger role in the scheme and more engagement with communities by both Local Authorities and Gardaí is needed to make the scheme more sustainable.**

### **Establishment of Rural Policing Forum**

With rural crime still at unacceptable levels and following the spate of recent burglaries and attacks on older people, there is now a need to explore the idea of rural policing forums (one in each divisional area). This forum would replace the Joint Policing Committee. It would consist of elected local authority members as well as representatives chosen from the community, preferably from the groups involved in community alert and neighbourhood watch. It would meet in the presence of the superintendent in the area at least 6 times per year with consideration of at least one meeting held in public. It would allow community groups to explore measures such as CCTV and community text alert schemes as well as other initiatives to increase security in their community.

**Recommendations: Explore in detail the establishment of a Rural Policing Forum and pilot such a Forum in a rural area.**

### **Recording and Reporting of Crime Figures**

It is well published and highlighted about the issues around recording of crimes on the PULSE system. The reliance of the figures recorded have been questioned now for over a year with CSO unable to publish figures on crime since the last quarter of 2016 with unable to release any figures.

However, it just not incorrect recording of figures but a more concerning issue is that a total of 156 Garda stations are still not connected to the Garda force's IT network and have no direct access to the Pulse system<sup>5</sup>. The majority of these stations are based in rural areas. This would suggest that figures that there is underreporting of crime in the policing system – further decreasing confidence in the system and people less reluctant to report a crime.

**Recommendation: Garda stations not connected to the force's IT network must be connected immediately. Recommendations from review of Pulse system must be**

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<sup>5</sup> Irish Examiner Sept 2017 'Quarter of Garda stations can't use key Pulse system'  
<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/quarter-of-garda-stations-cant-use-key-pulse-system-806041.html>

**implemented to regain trust and confidence from the general public in the policing system.**

## **Conclusion**

This call for submissions to the Future of Policing gives the Policing Authority and Department of Justice the opportunity to explore suggested recommendations from the public and interested groups on how they want to see the country being policed and ensure that their homes and communities are a safe place to live.

Consideration needs to be given to alternative and more modern forms of policing especially in rural areas where Garda Stations have closed over the past number of years and Gardaí presence remains low. Better supports must be given to community groups to maintain and set up Text Alert and Neighbourhood Watch schemes, while also re-examining the CCTV scheme. The recruitment of more Gardaí must happen as a matter of urgency and they must be equipped with the technologies to allow them to patrol areas effectively and record crimes remotely especially in rural areas.

Irish Rural Link believes that the establishment of Rural Policing Forums to replace the Joint Policing Committee in each divisional area would achieve a more collaborative approach between communities, community groups, Local Authorities and Gardaí to reducing and preventing crimes in rural areas.

## **Irish Rural Link the Organisation**

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 600 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

***'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'***

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

***'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.'***