

Submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland

From Longford Community Resources Clg's Social Inclusion Network January 2018

The Social Inclusion Network of Longford Community Resources Clg is a small network of groups and individuals from across County Longford who are concerned with poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

Following the call from the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland for submissions, the Social Inclusion Network held a short consultation at our meeting of 24th January 2018. Below are the suggestions which arose at the meeting.

Obviously all of the suggestions will require additional resources or the redistribution of resources, and may require lobbying national government to make such resources available and/or to change practices and policies.

1. Culture and Ethos

Values, Equality and Human Rights

Having articulated clearly the role of Gardai in today's society, we would suggest that the starting point – prior to addressing management, structures, governance etc - would be to undertake a fundamental review of the culture and ethos of the Gardai. This would involve reviewing, revising and affirming a shared set of values for the organisation. A vital component of this would be to have regard to the Public Sector Duty: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014), to ensure that all functions - policy, operations and actions - are underpinned by a commitment to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect human rights. Practically this would mean running training and workshops across all levels and sections of the force and associated bodies

Making values such as respect, dignity, equality, inclusion, participation, justice, honesty, accountability, and transparency visible and core to all decision making and operations will, we believe, bring about positive change both for the force itself and to society in general.

It is these values which would in turn inform any revisions recommended by the Commission on the Future of Policing under the subsequent headings of the review.

Other Suggestions Under This Heading Are:

Engaging with the Public

- Have more Gardai on the streets, engaging with the public in our communities – including in disadvantaged areas - on foot/bike/horse/cars.
- Extend the opening hours/re-open rural Garda stations.

- Ensure that all members of the public – regardless of their background, status etc – are treated with dignity and respect.
- Ensure that all frontline staff within the organisation greet the public with a positive, welcoming attitude, in order that the individual has a positive experience in their dealings with the Gardai. (People are less likely to report crime if they have a bad experience at any level)
- Ensure that people feel that they have been listened to. (For example, people could be reluctant to report a crime if they fear that their problem will be considered minor).
- Ensure that frontline Gardai have an understanding of the diverse backgrounds of people living in the community from the point of view of ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, disability, mental health etc.
- Ensure that every Garda station has someone to answer the phone and that the phone does not go unanswered (as has been the experience for a number of our participants).
- Talk to groups – particularly those from minority and marginalised communities - informing people about what the Gardai actually do, how to prevent crime, and how to report crime. For example, running campaigns with young people on what to do if assaulted.
- Increase the involvement in schools, youth services etc so that young people can build up positive relationships with the Gardai.
- Ensure that frontline Gardai have a good knowledge of local services and supports in order to be able to refer members of the public to those services.

Responding to Reports of Crime

- When someone reports a crime they should be made aware of the procedure which Gardai will take in dealing with the crime. This should be dealt with in as timely a manner as possible.
- It is important that the Gardai feedback to members of the public on how their reported crime/issue has been dealt with and on any outcome there may be.

2. Structures and Management Arrangements

Leadership, Management and Supervisory Arrangements

- Ensure all staff are treated with dignity and respect, whatever their rank or role.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that the ideas and experience of all members of the force, and of the public when appropriate, informs leadership and management. For example, develop mechanisms to make sure that rank and file Gardai are able to make suggestions for improvements and ensure that their suggestions will be taken in good faith and given due consideration.
- Give more opportunity for involvement in decision making at different levels within the force in order to encourage participation and develop ownership.
- Provide adequate supervision to frontline Gardai, which is supportive, encouraging and empowering for them in their roles.
- Provide specialised support - such as counselling - for Gardai who have had to deal with particularly difficult situations such as bereavements or incidents against themselves.

Information Systems

- Provide Gardai with the necessary technology to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently.
- Carry out a stringent review of paperwork and data gathering that currently has to be done by Gardai compared to the amount of time it takes away from dealing with the public and tackling crime. Undertake a cost benefit analysis looking at what data/information is vital to gather and what areas are less necessary.

3. Composition, Recruitment and Training

Recruitment

- Continue to actively recruit people from minority and marginalised groups into the Gardai.
- Having explicit human rights and equality values and processes informed by these, should lead more people from minority and marginalised groups to feel that they could have a place within the Gardai.
- Promoting people from minority and marginalised group within the Gardai would increase diversity in the higher ranks and also potentially attract people from underrepresented groups to apply to join.
- Deliver talks/visits to youth groups and schools to encourage young people from underrepresented groups to consider a career in the Gardai.

Composition

- Recruit more civilian staff into the Gardai to deal with the more administrative tasks and free up Gardai to concentrate on tackling crime. Recruitment of civilian staff should be at all levels within the force to bring in new perspectives into the organisation.
- Improve the status of the Community Gardai so that they are more highly regarded and valued within the force.
- Have a more defined remit for the Community Gardai so that they have a clear role and do not get pulled into other areas of policing (eg business policing). This would create more time for community police to be out in the communities.
- Increase the numbers in the Community Gardai.
- Have a specialist team of Gardai who can be called in to deal with specific issues in other areas. For example, in a small rural area Gardai might be reluctant to challenge a local drug dealer – even over a minor issue – for fear of reprisal against themselves or a family member. This is where a more anonymous squad would come in useful.

Training and Ongoing Professional Development

- All staff should undertake equality, human rights and intercultural training. This should be repeated at regular intervals.
- Frontline Gardai should receive training on dealing with particularly difficult situations such as bereavement – for example – how to approach a bereaved family; suicide awareness; domestic violence awareness; mental illness; alcohol and substance misuse etc. In addition, staff should receive training related to the

needs and issues of the community being served. These should be refreshed regularly.

- Frontline staff should receive training on all services and supports that they can refer people to. Again, this should be up-dated at regular intervals.

4. Structures for Governance, Oversight and Accountability

- A simple step by step guide to be circulated to the public on prevention of crime, the role of the Gardai and how to report crime.
- There should be an independent body holding the Gardai to account.

5. Other Areas of Relevance

- Encourage all Government Departments to look at what they can do to address the root causes of crime.
- Encourage the Government to invest in more community workers and youth workers to work on the ground, getting people involved in activities and developmental projects. This is in order to help individuals and to try to change the circumstances in which they live which might be leading people to get involved in crime.
- Encourage the Government to invest in the range of support services such as social workers, drugs rehabilitation services, domestic violence support, mental health projects, counselling, family support etc, to assist both victims of crime and perpetrators of crime.
- It is important that the Gardai deal with 'small' and less serious crimes such as anti-social behaviour, double parking, waste dumping etc, and hold people accountable (for example, on the spot fines). If people get away with these sort of crimes, they may feel emboldened to escalate the types of crimes that they engage in.
- It is important that the Gardai deal with the markets for stolen goods and educate people on the implications of them buying cheap goods through these.
- There needs to be reform of the judicial system, and sentencing needs to make sense with regard to the severity of the crime.
- Reform is needed of the prison system. Whilst prison is appropriate for certain crimes such as crimes against the person, people convicted of much lesser crimes would potentially benefit more from rehabilitation within the community (through which they would learn about respect for themselves and others) and through being made to contribute something financially in recompense.
- There needs to be a review of the current supports offered to victims of crime and a robust support system put in place.

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