

*Submission to Commission of Future Policing in Ireland – Deputy Thomas Byrne TD  
(Meath East)*

31<sup>st</sup> January 2018

Dear Chairperson O'Toole,

I welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the Commission of Future Policing in Ireland. In my submission I focus the needs and views of my constituents in Meath East, as you will appreciate, my party Fianna Fáil will have made a submission derailing some national issues which I fully support.

There is an extraordinary and well justified fear of crime in local communities across Meath posed by the threat of criminals to people and their property;

Gardaí on the ground do extraordinary work but there is a dire need for more, and more visible, Gardaí on the ground in local communities throughout Meath.

Meath East is particularly vulnerable because of an abject failure of Garda resources to keep pace with population change and the increased ability of criminal gangs to access commuter and rural areas because of the improved motorway network (Meath East is served by the M1, M2, M3 and M4 as well as local roads).

Garda resource decisions, while presumably based on many factors, do not appear to be based in any way on population trends. That is especially the case in Meath which has a vastly lower number of Gardai than Westmeath on a per capita basis, for no obvious logical or policing reason. This is grossly unfair, unreasonable and erodes public confidence in a realistic police presence. The Commission needs to bring forward proposals that will secure public confidence that Garda resources are allocated reasonably and fairly around the country.

The issue of Garda Stations is also linked to Garda presence. There is an absence of any Garda stations in large areas of rural and commuter communities in Meath. Decisions on where Garda stations are to be located were taken before the independence of this country by the RIC. This is unacceptable in a growing community which has changed dramatically in the past twenty years alone.

Ratoath, for example, is the largest town in Ireland without a Garda station. Stamullen is another example of an urban area with a large rural hinterland without a Garda station.

I don't suggest that Gardaí be confined to barracks. Indeed, they need to be on the beat as much as possible. However, the presence of a Garda station is an important presence that deters crime and gives citizens confidence. In the immediate term, there doesn't seem to be any reason why the Gardai could not be requested to open sub offices or clinics in areas without Garda stations. This would be an important first step. However, the Commission needs to ensure that Garda Stations are located where they need to be located.

Every Garda is a community Garda, but some areas have dedicated, named community Gardai who do tremendous work. I believe that the community Garda Scheme should be

extended nationwide and that every district have a Garda whose role it is to get to know the local community as well as possible.

Rural citizens feel particularly vulnerable and the Commission needs to take into account the specific needs of rural areas and the need for rural areas to be adequately policed. There is support for community alert schemes from an Garda Síochána and this should continue and be enhanced. Some rural areas in Meath lie adjacent to towns in other counties where there is a Garda station. It needs to be made clear that these stations serve their hinterland, even in the different county. The towns that this would apply to are towns that are adjacent or even partly in Meath, like Kilcock, Drogheda, Maynooth, Balbriggan, Garristown, Kingscourt. Currently, Meath residents living nearby don't feel served by this nearby Garda presence. Garda resources for these stations should also reflect the fact that they have a hinterland beyond their county boundary.

As part of my submission, I herewith enclose a copy of over 1,400 co-signatories to my submission which reflects the appetite for change that exists in communities in Meath.

Thanks for taking this submission into account which is a brief account of some of the issues affecting the commuter belt, in Meath specifically.

I wish you and the Commission the very best in your work.

Is mise le meas,

**Deputy Thomas Byrne TD**  
**Meath-East**  
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*(See attached file: petition\_signatures\_jobs\_12885527\_20180131120820.pdf)*

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