

# **Submission**

## **Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland**

### **The Workers' Party Dublin Mid-West Constituency Council**

The Workers' Party, Dublin Mid-West Constituency Council, welcomes the setting up of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and in particular the holding by the commission of informal public meetings. It also welcomes the fact that the commission has acknowledged in its terms of reference the concern that exists relating 'to the accountability of An Garda Síochána, its leadership and management capacity and its culture and ethos' (page 1). The Party welcomes the recognition given to the need for 'proactive, routine and continuous engagement with local communities'.

It is regrettable, however, that the terms of reference fail to capture in a more specific manner issues pertaining to policing and safety in working class communities and in particular those where disadvantage is all encompassing. It is in working class areas like North Clondalkin, where appalling living conditions, brought about through neglect and poor planning by local and national authorities allied to criminally shoddy workmanship by private contractors and paid for by the tax payer, expose members of the community to extreme danger. Women and children are particularly vulnerable. Unfortunately, it is in such communities that the greatest disconnect between the community and the Gardaí tends to exist.

There have been major and successful efforts by communities across many working-class areas, including North Clondalkin, to build community organisations and foster a community spirit. These initiatives, driven by the local residents and community leaders, have always been on a completely voluntary and not-for-profit basis. The aim of these initiatives has always been to improve the lives of the residents whether through educational, environmental or other projects. Those initiatives need the support of state organisations, but are often actively undermined by those bodies, including the Gardaí.

An Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 commits the Gardaí to ensuring that every individual and community will be treated equally, fairly and with dignity. A key focus of the renewed community policing model aspires to:

*'gaining public confidence and trust, listening to the problems of the local community, and demonstrating that An Garda Síochána is committed to a new way of policing focused on the needs of the community to provide a greater sense of security within the community'* (p. 25).

The reality is that for people living in disadvantaged communities in North Clondalkin such commitments amount at best to lofty aspirations. Communities experience serious crime in their areas and don't believe that the Garda efforts are directed at this but that instead police time is taken up with minor transgressions of youngsters, thus alienating families. Families don't see that the Gardaí have the capacity or willingness to deal with the serious crime that is ravaging these communities.

North Clondalkin is one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country where many residents and particularly women and children experience a very high level of violence on a daily basis. The experience of many residents who have been victims of crime is that the local Ronanstown Garda station is clearly unable to provide them with the support and protection that they are entitled to receive. Recently at the Public Accounts Committee, in relation to the controversial proposal to reopen Stepside Garda station, [REDACTED] singled out Ronanstown Garda station as one of the stations to which he would send Gardaí, based on policing needs. This was a clear recognition of the under-resourcing of this station.

While under-resourcing is one issue, the approach of Gardaí to issues of misconduct and drug crime has been a source of major concern to community leaders in the area for many years. Firstly, victims of crime are not satisfied that crimes and incidents reported by them are then entered onto the pulse system. There is a strongly held belief that this happens in order to artificially maintain low crime statistics for the area. Secondly, community leaders feel that when they report crime, particularly in relation to drug crime, that this information often finds its way into the hands of local criminals putting innocent lives in jeopardy.

Leaders also find that when they try to highlight those issues that they themselves can become the targets of Garda/detective harassment. This echoes a view expressed by [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED], that it was an eye opener to members of the Coalition of Communities Against Drugs in the 1980s and 1990s to see the level of Garda harassment aimed at activists. With all the developments that are supposed to have taken place in relation to community policing one would have hoped that such outmoded approaches to policing would no longer exist.

Local Policing Fora and Joint Policing Committees are seen as key to providing a link between the community and the Gardaí. The former are tasked with addressing the problems associated with drug misuse in their areas through facilitating the sharing of information and improving communication between agencies and stakeholders. The guidelines for Joint Policing Committees emphasise the need for collaborative approaches between all stakeholders to address local issues. Yet community representatives often feel that there is a class bias against them and that they are not facilitated to have their voices heard at those meetings. In fact, they sometimes feel that they are actively excluded.

The Dublin Mid-West Constituency of the Workers' Party believes that there is an urgent need for independent qualitative research to be carried out in order to ascertain the level of success of such fora and committees and the extent to which they provide a real platform for local residents to have a voice in relation to issues of safety and Garda protection. In the absence of such research at present, the Party believes that it is imperative that the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland extends its schedule in relation to the number of working class communities with which it will hold consultations. While it is commendable that the commission has scheduled meetings in two neighbouring constituencies it is necessary to point out that the experiences of residents living in Tallaght and Blanchardstown do not necessarily represent the lived experience of people living in North Clondalkin. The high level of gun crime, murders and gang related activity which has escalated in the area in more recent times, warrants in our view, the type of attention and government support afforded to North Inner-City communities over the past number of years. The shooting dead of young and innocent residents in the course of this activity has left the North Clondalkin Community feeling very vulnerable indeed. The Workers' Party believes that a meeting with local residents would be highly informative and illuminating and would certainly enhance the commission's deliberations.

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