

Submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland

Submitted by: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

All staff members of An Garda Síochána have been strongly encouraged to make a submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing. I wish to submit the following submission. I have 28 years service in An Garda Síochána and could make a very wide ranging submission, however I will confine my submission to a five areas.

1. Use of Social Media

I believe that substantial investment in the use of social media is required in future policing. To date, whilst there are some pockets of excellence regarding the use of social media, the organisation lags behind best practice that I have witnessed elsewhere. For example, the control of Garda social media is heavily centralised and mainly nationally focussed. The national twitter accounts have been very successful; however social media needs to be devolved to local community level, certainly to Divisional and possibly to District level where Gardaí can communicate effectively with their local communities.

In my experience [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] local people crave local information and are willing in return to engage, including submitting information via messages that can help solve crimes. Younger people in particular engage heavily with social media and often do not follow traditional media at all. Use of this channel has meant that urgent appeals and messages can be imparted instantly to thousands of local people (at time of writing the page has 27,259 followers). [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Most Divisions have no social media presence.

I have witnessed excellent examples of the use of social media in other Police Services such as Greater Manchester Police (GMP). For example, many community officers in GMP are authorised to tweet from their beat. The Chief Constable of GMP, Ian Hopkins, has a personal Twitter Account with 11,800 followers. He is very active on Twitter having sent 7,233 tweets in the last 7 years. I believe this sets the tone for the rest of the organisation to embrace digital policing. As the Chief Constable explains, officers are trusted to make very

serious decision in the course of their duties; therefore he trusts them to send tweets (subject to having been trained).

Another example I am familiar with having attend a police use of social media seminar in Finland is the 'net constable' project in the Finnish National Police Force. In this scheme a number of ordinary front line officers have Facebook accounts which they use to publish details of their duties, impart advice and warnings etc. I would like to cite one office in particular, Constable Pekka Laitainen, whose online presence is a good example of how successful this approach has been. It is also worth nothing that the Finnish Police Service is one of the most highly trusted Police Services in the world (the force is ranked number 2 out of 127 worldwide in the 2016 World Internal Security & Police Index).

Thirdly, I wish to point out that the PSNI has twitter accounts for every District and has had so since September 2009. As stated, in contrast, An Garda Síochána lags behind in comparison.

I have no doubt that future policing will have a significant digital and online aspect – this is the way people will increasingly interact with the police. The successful use of such channels does however require staffing and buy-in from management. Those charged with running and maintaining social media channels should have the time and appropriate resources allocated to manage the function properly – it is not appropriate that this duty would ever be considered as an 'ad on' task assigned to a staff member along with a multitude of other responsibilities.

2. Uniform

As a very basic requirement, all members of the service should be provided with a formal uniform. It is extremely disheartening and demoralising to see Guards and Sergeants being directed to attend funerals of colleagues in their operational uniform whilst higher ranks attend in formal uniform. This division amongst ranks should not arise. In effect, Guards and Sergeants are being directed to attend such occasions in their day to day working clothes. In other State uniformed services this is not happening. For example within the Fire Service, Prison Service and Coast Guard, all members have formal uniform for formal occasions. The fact that An Garda Síochána does not have formal uniform for all members presents an less than professional corporate image.

Other aspects of uniform that require attention are the need to have a proper waterproof uniform during wet weather. I have witnessed members getting soaked to the skin at Rock Concerts at Slane and where replacement uniforms had to be urgently sourced. This was no fault of the members and was simply attributable to the current uniform not being able to keep a member dry in heavy rain. There is also a need to revise the operational uniform to bring it more in line with modern practical police operational uniform. The experimental dispensing with the tie during the summer months of 2017 was a small positive step in this regard.

3. Fleet

The possibility of outsourcing the fleet should be considered. At present, considerable Garda time is spent managing the fleet, organising maintenance and repairs to official vehicles. Other police services and large organisations in the private sector outsource fleet management with efficiencies and benefits accruing.

4. Work Overload

Future policing structures and systems need to ensure that members are not overloaded with work. This is happening at present, particularly to members in certain positions with little or no account taken of the volume of cases that have to be managed. Sergeants in busy stations are particularly overloaded and in the vast majority of cases they are the only Sergeant managing a unit with no support/assistance or other Sergeant to relieve them if they take leave. These members do not have time to patrol due to the workload placed on them with files, emails, PULSE updating, unit briefings, meetings etc. The kernel of policing

is to be out and about amongst the community and this is essentially no longer happening due to the administrative burden.

5. Superintendent/Inspectors presenting cases in Courts

In future policing models Superintendents and Inspectors should not be presenting court cases. This is a very significant drain on the time of such personnel and as a consequence the supervisory and management function suffers. It is inappropriate that police officers are expected to be investigators and prosecutors at the same time. There is also a very significant financial costs incurred in this system, which is taken from the Garda vote. These functions should be kept separate. Such cases should be presented by properly trained legal advocates rather than police personnel.