

Submission on the Future of Policing in Ireland:

I welcome the process involved in the work of the commission and the opportunities this process allows for individuals, communities and organisations to present their views and make suggestions.

I acknowledge the role of the Gardaí and their engagement with the public, particularly in times of difficulty, times of recessionary budgets, cuts to services and a moratorium on recruitment.

I particularly acknowledge their engagement and work in the North Inner City of Dublin during very difficult times as a result of the on-going feud and also because of the extent of drug-dealing and related issues, like intimidation.

Training: both initially and on-going are vital, especially when we consider the range of issues Gardaí can deal with daily and the skills needed; those issues include domestic abuse, assault, suicide and attempted suicide, self-harm, addiction, anti-social behaviour, drug dealing, murder; working with those with mental health issues, working with migrants; working with those in addiction, the homeless - the list is endless. The Community Gardaí need a wide range of skills and techniques to do their work and that needs to be reflected in their training and also in the availability of courses during the course of their career.

There is also the need for support for the Gardaí by being able to avail of courses relating to their own Emotional Well Being, similar to courses in other countries for members of the Police Force; also that counselling is available for those members of the force in need of such services, perhaps through the members' own addiction issues, addiction within their own families, post- traumatic stress disorder; also preparing for retirement.

Like my own previous profession (second level teaching) a wealth of experience has gone from our professions; I believe there has to be some way that such experience is not lost for good, that those who have so much to offer can continue to do so.

Gardaí spend considerable time doing the type of work that could be done by civilians; there are plans to address this but there does not seem to be any urgency but if addressed it could free Gardaí for their work.

The work of the Community Gardaí is very valuable and worthwhile; except in exceptional circumstances I think there needs to be a minimum term for the Community Garda and opportunities to progress in their career as Community Gardaí.

The relationship between the Gardaí and the community is absolutely crucial and I want to support the model of engagement that has been operating in the North Inner City for many years – Community Policing Forum. (I want to acknowledge that I am a member of the Board and so I know the work). I believe this is the model that needs further development and I would like to see in other areas. The C.P.F., like many community/voluntary groups suffered during recessionary budgets; they also are facing much pressure and stress due to the on-going feud which has impacted on the community they serve.

Members of the community are comfortable using the C.P.F. as the conduit between themselves and the Gardaí (also the local authority); it is a safe space, an anonymous space where very sensitive issues can be addressed in a confidential way. Those intimate meetings are invaluable.

I have attended the local meetings, facilitated by the C.P.F. where those in authority, in Gardaí and D.C.C., have faced questions and criticisms from the community and addressed them in an open forum.

Dáil colleagues from outside Dublin have been taken aback, and then impressed, when I tell them of the work of the C.P.F. – way Gardaí and local authority answer to the community in open meetings.

C.P.F. are best placed to work with communities and Gardaí, as both conduit, facilitator and mediator.

Finally the need for the community courts for certain crime and the further use of restorative justice practices where appropriate.

Maureen O'Sullivan T.D.

Dublin Central