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Labour

POLICING OUR COMMUNITIES

AN AGREED AGENDA
ON GARDA REFORM





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FINE GAEL AND THE LABOUR PARTY

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KEY POINTS

- Root and branch reform of An Garda Síochána

- Implementation of real community policing
 - ⇒ More effective training;
 - ⇒ Longer assignments;
 - ⇒ Greater recognition for community Gardaí;
 - ⇒ Community Gardaí living in the community.

- Policing forums that involve local communities in policing plans in more areas

- An Independent Garda Authority to drive the reform agenda
 - ⇒ Radically revising Garda rostering so that Gardaí are on the streets where and when they are most needed
 - ⇒ Ensuring the comprehensive civilianisation of the Force so that the maximum number of Gardaí are available for frontline duties
 - ⇒ Demanding international best practice in all areas of management;
 - ⇒ Opening up senior Garda recruitment to external candidates and ensuring the best recruitment and promotion practices are operated
 - ⇒ Using performance data from different Garda regions, districts and divisions to drive innovation and initiative in tackling crime.

- Frontline Gardaí to be increased through new recruitment, civilianisation and improved rostering

- Improved Garda training and equipment

- Improved Garda diversity to reflect changes in Ireland's population profile

- New Garda Organisational Structure

Introduction

Since the foundation of the State, Ireland has been well served by the men and women of An Garda Síochána. Our police force has a proud tradition of service, both to the Irish people, and to the communities they have served on UN service abroad. An Garda Síochána has stood firm in the face of threats to the security of the State, and has protected our communities from criminality. It is a tradition of service of which the men and women of An Garda Síochána can be justly proud.

But tradition alone will not provide the Irish people with the world class police service to which they are entitled, and which An Garda Síochána could provide. The ingredients for such a world class system already exist, but the Gardaí are currently falling far short of that goal. In a changing world, there is an increasing need for An Garda Síochána to adapt and change, so that it can better serve the community. Indeed, the failure to reform has been in large measure responsible for a decline in confidence in the Gardaí. If the Garda is to become a modern, effective police service, it must redevelop itself, with a fundamental commitment to community policing, with modern management structures, and with proper systems of accountability.

Fine Gael and Labour will ensure that this reform happens and is committed to:

- ⇒ new and innovative community policing;
- ⇒ proper and comprehensive training of Garda recruits and on-going training of existing Gardaí;
- ⇒ best practice management and reorganisation;
- ⇒ improved accountability and transparency.

I. Community Policing — Working with people you know in communities you know

All the evidence shows that community policing works. It is the best way to combat anti-social behaviour, street violence, and the causes of delinquency.

Redevelopment of Garda community policing would involve a new commitment to community policing. Community Gardaí need to become the new front line of policing in Ireland.

- We want community police officers who stay working in communities for significant periods of time, and whose time is not diverted away to other duties at the drop of a hat, whenever a need arises.
- We want accountability to the community, through local policing forums, with local Gardaí acting in liaison with local public representatives.
- We want effective community based sanctions and diversion programmes and we need better youth facilities.
- We want community policing structures that are developed in conjunction with local community and youth leaders and are responsive to community needs.

2. Making Community Policing a priority

- 1. Longer assignments**

One of the barriers to successful community policing is the frequency with which Gardaí are relocated. Community Gardaí need to view their positions as relatively long term commitments to a community or an area.
- 2. Greater recognition for community Gardaí**

At the moment, Gardaí do not see community policing as a career option or an area in which they can reasonably expect advancement. This must change and Garda organisational structures must be amended to reflect a focus on community-based policing and an acknowledgement of the value of the Gardaí involved in it. Community policing needs to be seen as a serious career choice for Gardaí.
- 3. More effective training**

Community Gardaí need to receive dedicated preparation and on-going training to provide them with the appropriate skills for dealing with local issues on the ground.
- 4. Community Gardaí closer and more available to the community**

A successful community policing programme will mean that residents of every estate and every village in Ireland will be able to personally name their community Garda. This will be achieved by making community Gardaí more available to members of the community through direct telephone lines/mobile telephones, e-mail, etc.
- 5. Living in the community**

Community Gardaí must form an integral part of a community, and there is no better way for that to happen than for them to live in the community. The feasibility of An Garda Síochána providing members with houses in both urban and rural communities — including incentives to encourage them to live on estates with anti-social behaviour problems or elevated crime rates — should be explored.
- 6. Community transport**

Community Gardaí do not get the same results from behind car windows and in cars where they don't meet people or talk to members of the community. Community Gardaí should be walking the beat, visible on public transport, and making more use of bicycle patrols.

We are committed to real community/neighbourhood policing, which means policing communities with Gardaí primarily back on the beat – not just cruising around in squad cars.

3. Community accountability: Policing Forums

It is only through a partnership involving the police and community that crime, service delivery and police-community relations can be analysed and appropriate solutions designed and implemented. We believe neighbourhood policing should be at the core of police work and that the structure of the police service, the staffing arrangements and the deployment of resources should be organised accordingly.

Local policing forums will determine, through consultation, the needs and policing priorities of their community. They will promote Garda accountability, transparency and effectiveness.

And the Community Garda attached to an urban neighbourhood or rural area will have lead responsibility for ensuring the policing of that area in accordance with those local priorities and objectives, within the overall policing plan.

Accountability will be realised by creating mechanisms through which Gardaí can be made answerable for addressing the needs and concerns of the communities they serve.

Closely linked with accountability must be transparency. If the police are to be held accountable for all their actions, then, any decision making processes which inform police actions must also be transparent. If a Garda is tackling a problem, identified locally, in partnership with the community and other agencies, he or she must be able to account for what can or cannot be done.

These changes will help to ensure development into a community-oriented policing service, which becomes more accessible and acceptable and therefore more efficient and effective.

We have long advocated the development of joint policing committees. We propose a proper system of accountability in the shape of joint policing committees based on local government structures.

Under the Government's proposals there will be in all 114 joint policing committees. Donegal, with a total population of around 138,000, would end up with 5 joint committees – but there are to be none in Tallaght or Ballymun.

Our model will involve the community far more than the present proposals. We will include public representatives, the Garda in charge and other officers, representatives of residents' associations and community groups as well as members of the public and local authority officials. We will require the 'Garda in charge' to meet forum members at regular intervals, to both receive and impart views on the challenges of policing in their area.

4. Garda Numbers

Community policing involves much more active partnerships with the community and a more visible and regular police presence on the streets. And that demands manpower and making the best use of Garda time and resources.

We believe that the size of the force should be decided by Government after consultation with the Garda Authority, who will arrive at their view based on a coherent strategic approach to improved policing.

The success or otherwise of An Garda Síochána is a function of its size, strength and management. We cannot expect effective policing when Gardaí are stretched to the limit and spread too thinly.

The outgoing Government promised 14,000 Gardaí. That promise has not been met and cannot be delivered before the general election.

The present target of 14,000 Gardaí was fixed without any reference to a real commitment to community policing or the demands that such a commitment makes on policing numbers. A real and sustained commitment to visibly patrolling the beat cannot be met from within the existing Garda strength and structures. Fine Gael and Labour believe the numbers in An Garda Síochána should swell to meet the demand of the society it serves — Garda numbers should be dependent on demographics and population growth.

The ongoing strength of An Garda Síochána should be one for submission to Government by the new Garda Authority. However, we believe that a real commitment to community policing, including greater incentives for Community Gardaí and a programme of extensive training and re-orientation for the purpose, will require a Garda force of at least 15,000 in the lifetime of the next Government. This is in addition to the release of existing Gardaí through greater civilianisation and more effective rostering.

5. Garda Training and Equipment

Well trained and competent Gardaí do not materialise out of thin air. Consideration must be given to their training and preparation and investment must be made in that process now.

While the Garda College in Templemore will remain a cornerstone of the training structure, there is a need to both improve initial training, and to enhance on-going training within the force. In particular, it is important that Garda recruits spend some of their training in an urban context, and in an educational setting which involves regular contact with students from other walks of life in the way that Army and Navy cadets do. In particular, we believe it will be important to enhance training in the following areas:

- urban crowd control;
- traffic management;
- human rights;
- sexual offences;
- firearms training;
- driving training;
- legal training; and
- specialised training in other areas.

Above all, there is a need to build on the basic training that all recruits receive. Gardaí should receive on-going training throughout their careers in all areas of operations. This training could be prescribed by a supervising officer or could be in response to demands for a specific skills set, but it should comprise a minimum annual element and dedicated training on new technologies as they are introduced to the Force.

There will also be modules of shared training with the PSNI in Northern Ireland. And we will seek to increase the number of Gardaí who are themselves from those areas that face the worst problems of crime and anti-social behaviour.

It is also important that Gardaí are properly equipped. We will ensure that Gardaí are properly equipped with modern personal protection equipment, including stab-vests and pepper-sprays.

6. Garda Diversity

In order for An Garda Síochána to be a representative force, it must reflect the diversity of modern Ireland. There will be a dedicated recruitment campaign in communities that are currently poorly represented or lack visibility within the Gardaí.

We need more Gardaí to be recruited from:

- socially deprived communities in all urban areas;
- the immigrant population;
- the travelling community; and
- the gay community.

There will be a fast-track facility for citizenship applications from all non-Irish citizens who are recruited into An Garda Síochána and who wish to become Irish citizens.

7. An Independent Garda Authority

It is clear that the radical re-orientation of the Garda Síochána we are calling for will not be delivered by either by the Gardaí themselves or by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, whether acting in concert or in isolation.

Transparent and accountable policing in partnership with the local communities should be matched at national level with appropriate civilian oversight of the force.

We will legislate for an independent Garda Authority, representative of civil society, to stand between the Commissioner and his officers on the one hand, and the Minister and Department on the other.

The Garda Authority will inject public accountability into the running of our police service.

The Government will appoint members of the Authority, following consideration of the nominations by the Oireachtas, through the Joint Committee on Justice. The members will be selected from a range of different fields, equipped with the expertise both to set policing priorities and to probe and scrutinise different areas of police performance, from management of resources to the safeguarding of human rights.

An Independent Garda Authority will drive the agenda for reform, ensuring that measures are implemented rather than put on the long finger. It will have a clear remit and will inject professionalism and modernism into a force that has served the country well but now needs to be updated.

The Authority will incorporate the current Garda Inspectorate and will adopt its functions in relation to efficiency and effectiveness. The Authority will be made up of civilians with extensive experience of change management and strategy in both public and private sector positions.

The Independent Garda Authority will drive a root and branch reform agenda by:

- Radically revising Garda rostering so that Gardaí are on the streets where and when they are most needed;
- Ensuring the comprehensive civilianisation of the Force so that the maximum number of Gardaí are available for frontline duties;
- Demanding international best practice in all areas of management;
- Opening up senior Garda recruitment to external candidates and ensuring the best recruitment and promotion practices are operated;
- Using performance data from different Garda regions, districts and divisions to drive innovation and initiative in tackling crime.

It will also:

- review the use of the Garda annual budget;
- report to the Minister on progress in given policy areas;
- ensure inter-agency cooperation;
- maintain close ties with the Northern Ireland Policing Board;
- recommend the numerical strength of the Force; and
- remain accountable to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Minister will remain politically accountable for An Garda Síochána to the Oireachtas.

8. New Garda Organisational Structuring

The Garda Authority will implement changes in the organisational structure of An Garda Síochána.

Currently, the management of the Garda is top-heavy with a large number of senior personnel responsible for top-level implementation of policy and change management. This structure needs to be streamlined and devolved such that regional Assistant Commissioners have the power to take actions in their own areas, in tandem with responsibility for their actions.

The Garda Commissioner also needs to take a step back from the day-to-day running of the Force so that he or she can concentrate on big picture issues such as the implementation of reform with the Independent Garda Authority and the overall management of the Force. The Commissioner's operational responsibilities need to be devolved to a Deputy Commissioner, his or her strategic management role to another, and his or her administrative responsibilities to yet another.

The Deputy Commissioner for Administration will be a civilianised position and all the departments that would fall under their remit should, as far as possible, be staffed by civilians. This would include HRM, ICT, Finance, Health & Safety etc. There will also be a single civilianised position of Director of Communications, whose responsibility will be to act as a spokesperson for the Force and to ensure communication of Garda messages to the press and internally to all Garda personnel.

Real civilianisation has a two-fold benefit and allows An Garda Síochána to get the best of both worlds :

1. There is a substantial store of knowledge and experience in both the public and the private sector that could be put to very good use in running the Garda organisation. If the Garda fails to embrace civilianisation, this wealth of intelligence will be lost to the State. Civilianisation allows the Garda to bring in skills in (particularly administrative) areas where trained Gardaí may not have the requisite skills so that best international practice can be implemented.
2. As things stand, there is a number of fully trained Gardaí involved in non-core jobs such as IT, HRM, the Garda Press Office and other administrative positions. At a time when Ireland is more in need of Gardaí than it has ever been before, civilianisation will make these Gardaí available for policing duties, where their skills and training can be put to better use.

The new Garda organisational structure will look like this:



