

Proposal on the use of Community Impact statements in Ireland. February 2017

What is a Community Impact Statement?

A community Impact Statement (CIS) is a statement compiled by a consortium of stakeholders in a community, including the Police, describing the impact of anti-social-behaviour on a specific neighbourhood or identifiable group of people. It is used as the basis for developing a focused action plan on such a problem. It is also used as a benchmark against which progress can be measured. In the UK, a CIS can also be made available to a court in considering sentencing of an individual convicted of criminality which impacts on the identified community or group. This is not initially part of this proposal.

Where does the idea come from?

Community Impact Statements have been used in the UK¹. The Crime Investigation Module of The Garda Inspectorate Report recommends that they be introduced in Ireland². Three policing Forums, Canal Communities, Safer Blanchardstown and the North East Inner City have developed the proposal with support from Citywide, Fatima Groups United, Community Action Network and the University of Limerick.

How might they help here?

Our experience shows that persistent anti-social behaviour and criminality can slowly erode a community from the inside out. Impacts include severe personal strain by constantly being exposed to disruption of the peaceful enjoyment of the home, exposure to violence, drunken and drug-related behaviours such as urinating or defecating near homes, children being drawn into gang life, children looking up to local criminals, the abuse of women by gang culture, drug debt intimidation and much more. The problems are compounded by a lack of reporting because of fear, the belief that nothing will change, or loyalties to offenders who may be long time neighbours or family members. Responses can be piecemeal and results temporary and partial.

Community Impact Statements use local knowledge and the relationship between local police, the community and local services to draw up an accurate picture of the problem and its impact on people. It provides a focus for developing a tailor-made plan and a means of monitoring the outcomes of that plan. Because of the standing of an impact statement it can create a sense of commitment by those agencies required to give their attention to the problem.

How would it work in practice?

Under the auspices of a partnership structure where Gardaí are centrally involved (such as a Local Policing Forum), a Statement is compiled. This is prepared with input from residents, community, youth and drug workers, Garda knowledge and records, Local authority officials and knowledge and other sources. A Garda Inspector would then endorse the report.

A planning meeting involving relevant parties would then develop a strategy for tackling the problem and take responsibility for monitoring the outcomes by updating the Statement at agreed intervals.

¹ Crown Prosecution Service *Community Impact Statements (Adult) Guidance* Viewed on <http://www.cps.gov.uk/> February 11th 2016

² Garda Inspectorate *Crime Investigation Report* p303 October 2014 viewed on <http://www.gsinsp.ie> February 11th 2016

What is proposed now?

It is proposed that Community Impact Statements be piloted in three areas in Dublin, where strong partnership arrangements such as Policing Forums already exist. The Pilot should last one year and be evaluated. The work in the three areas should be co-ordinated so that learning-as-we-go can be maximised. If successful, it is proposed that the use of Community Impact Statements should be promoted as a tool for tackling the impact of drug related crime on communities.