

Clr C Perry
Chairperson
Dublin North Central Joint Policing Committee (JPC)

16-9-22

Dear Councillor Perry,

I am writing to you in your role as chair of the Dublin North Central JPC and in my role as co-ordinator of Cabra Community Policing forum. The purpose of my letter is to outline my concerns regarding the lack of Garda resources and the potential affect this could have on the excellent progress made to date through the forum process regarding the safety and wellbeing of the entire community.

Cabra Community Policing Forum is funded by the Department of Justice through the Finglas Cabra Drugs and Alcohol Task Force and has been operating in the Cabra area since 2005. It is an action-based forum where An Garda Siochana and Dublin City Council work in partnership with the local community, elected representatives and all other relevant stakeholders to make the forum area a safer place to live and enjoy.

This has been carried out through a process which is based on public community consultation and bi-monthly structured meetings where residents are supported in identifying and prioritising local issues relating to crime, antisocial behaviour and related estate management.

The forum then identifies all relevant stakeholders and together they go about tackling the issues and resolving the underlying problems. The forum process is recognised as having resulted in much success to date and there have been many improvements with regards to local crime, antisocial behaviour, drug dealing and community safety in general.

In order to achieve this, and from an early stage the forum has referred to the Problem Solving method and the theory of the Crime Triangle (Eck, John E). The problem solving method, (who, what where when etc) has been invaluable in resolving the local "Issues" identified through the forum process. This has regularly guided the intervention of the local Community Gardai with the collaboration of the local youth service where appropriate and resulted in the speedy resolution of many local issues.

The theory of the Crime Triangle asserts that for any crime to occur, three things must be in place, the Victim the Offender and the Location and to prevent or deter crime, at least one of these three must be removed. This theory has assisted the forum in achieving the success it has in many ways both in relation "issues" and particularly "underlying problems"

Firstly the Victim, this intervention involves a re-assuring formal letter from An Garda Siochana, Community Gardai calling to the victim's home by agreement. And the assistance of the dedicated Garda Victims Support service.

Secondly the Offender. If it is a young person (12-17) that is identified and admits his/her part, they are then formally referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme (Cabra Step Up Project) which is located alongside the local youth services (Cabra for Youth) by the local Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO). Each referral is subsequently discussed and evaluated by a designated referral committee to decide what course of action might best suit their individual needs. As part of the overall process the JLO and the Step-Up youth workers will also call to the offender's home to

discuss and evaluate with the parents the best progression route to resolve the young person's problem.

Also, If the local Community Gardai or other local services identify a young individual who may be in danger of engaging in criminal activities, either by way of their peer group or personal conduct/ attitude, they can also refer that individual to the Youth Diversion Project and the process will follow the same route as above.

The progression route for these individuals can involve regular engagement with the dedicated Diversion Youth Workers, referral to the local School Completion Programme, referral to a local Juvenile Substance Abuse Counsellor, referral to mental health services, or re-engagement with a club or positive activity they were previously involved with etc. In addition, and vitally important, if through the above mentioned process, a mutual view evolves where the parents or family may benefit from professional help they can be signposted to the many confidential support services provided locally by the LOFT at Cabra Resource Centre or various supports through the Finglas Cabra Drugs and Alcohol Task Force family support services. These projects can provide individual counselling/psychotherapy, family therapy, stress management classes and group therapy.

Regarding adults who are involved in crime locally, the majority are usually involved as a result of alcohol or drug abuse. Many of these individuals would be regularly availing of local HSE mainstream services. However, some have benefited greatly from psychotherapeutic and aftercare services available locally leading to a substance abuse and crime free participation in the community. Local Community Gardai are familiar with and have regular engagement with all these many services and have regularly advised offenders and families of their benefits to much avail.

The other part of the Crime Triangle is the Location. The process of identifying problematic and negative locations and restoring them to positive community use has proven to be successful beyond our wildest expectations. It has transformed locations that were used for various types of crime and antisocial behaviour into facilities the community can enjoy and be proud of. Some examples are as follows :

Following Forum led discussions between Dublin City Council and the Church authorities the once problematic car park at The Most Precious Blood Church has been transformed from a once nightly joyriding location into a secure railed in car park and a location for a beautiful modern living area for many of our senior citizens. Another area for crime and antisocial behaviour was the handball alley in John Paul Park. Again, following discussions between the local community and Dublin City Council this site was ceded to the community on the agreement that they would source the funding for a new community and sports complex. Following years of local fundraising and grants from the Youth Service and Facilities Fund a modern multi-purpose facility costing six million punts now exists where the "alley bar" once was.

The Restoration of the derelict Lock Keepers Cottage on the Royal Canal is another example of the community turning a local dumping and drug dealing site into a facility to be used by the youth service for various activities and a dedicated Kayaking club has also been established at this site.

The community Garden on the royal canal is another example of similar processes and there are many more.

There is no doubt that the Problem Solving and Crime Triangle process employed by the forum has been hugely successful and has in turn helped to identify and engage all the local stakeholders and

services at ground level in an agreed collaborative and action-based fashion resulting in excellent outcomes for the Cabra Community.

Community Policing.

The belief that crime and antisocial behaviour damages a community is as old as crime itself. The need for the community to be involved in the response is of the same age. However different communities have differing needs. These can be based on age profile, economic factors, social and educational factors and varying objective and subjective perceptions of a particular community. Communities can also be affected by various rates of crime based on these different needs.

It is generally accepted that where crime rates are above average it is usually associated with high levels of long term unemployment, low educational achievement and lack of progression to third level, above average lone parent families and lack of modern social and recreational facilities. All these can result in lack of communication skills, crime and antisocial behaviour, increased anxiety, substance abuse, mental health issues and many other problems.

With a lack of communication mutual distrust evolves between the community and statutory agencies particularly the Gardai and crime and antisocial behaviour goes largely unreported. Despite this, or maybe as a result of this, there can exist a very strong community spirit and local support within these areas. In many instances localised issues can be addressed between residents but if not handled satisfactorily can lead to a fracturing of previously strong relationships. Sadly, the resilience and humanity of these marginalised communities can go unnoticed until proper communication and engagement takes place between the residents and various agencies, particularly the Community Gardai. This has been clearly identified and accepted in Cabra through the Community Policing Forum process.

The current lack of resources does not help perceptions of policing service in marginalised communities. This may inadvertently lead to further disconnection between communities and Gardai. This can also lead to an increase in crime and antisocial behaviour due to a stated reluctance on behalf of the residents to report any such instances. The main reason for this is the belief that no action will result from the call and the fear of reprisal due to lack of Garda presence in the first place. The vicious circle is complete by the fact that with the lack of calls, Garda management may not be aware of any issues.

Experience through the many years of the policing forum has proven that crucial information to prevent and detect crime and antisocial behaviour will be relayed to Community Gardai once they have established a constant and trusted relationship with the local community. Crucially the community have also realised and accepted through the same process that while the Community Gardai can deal with many of the reported issues they alone cannot be expected to deal with the underlying problems. The community Gardai with all stakeholders and services now engage collaboratively and empathetically with the community and engage pro-actively in resolving community issues and problems resulting in a much better working environment for all service providers and a community slowly growing in communication skills and confidence with a vast increase in third level and good employment attainment.

If any of the above crucial parts of the combined responses are removed, particularly the Community Gardai there is no doubt that irreparable harm will result to the multi-agency, simple pragmatic and practical process of dealing with issues and problems around crime, antisocial behaviour and family problems in the forum area.

It would also damage the hard earned and vastly improved relationship, mutual respect and trust built up between the local Community and An Garda Siochana.

The recent drastic reduction in Garda resources, particularly at Cabra station and especially to the Community Policing Unit is alarming to the local community and if it persists there is no doubt that irreparable harm will be done to the above progress and will result in the undermining of the community policing forum process which has helped in no small manner in bringing An Garda Siochana, Dublin City Council, local services, elected representatives, the local community and any other relevant stakeholders together over the past number years to work collaboratively and has to date, made Cabra a better place to live and enjoy.

Yours sincerely

Niall Counihan

Co-ordinator Cabra Community Policing Forum