



Canals Area Local Policing Forum
Public Meeting 7-9pm, 9th April, 2019
St. Michael's Parish Hall, Inchicore, Dublin 8

Chair: John Burns

In Attendance: Superintended John Gordon; Community Garda Graham O'Neill, John Paul McCabe (Dublin City Council)

Special Guest: Jack Nolan (researcher commissioned by The Department of the Housing, Planning and Local Government)

The main part of the meeting, after an Introduction from Chair John Burns, consisted of discussions at six separate groups, with a host and 5-6 members of the public at each table, and the consequent feedback from the tables by hosts. Superintendent Gordon and Dublin City Council representative John Paul McCabe also gave their responses to the issues raised at the end.

The questions discussed at the tables were:

- 1. What is happening at the moment that is making your community feel unsafe?**
- 2. What progress has been made on any of these issues?**
- 3. What is happening that is helping it to be safer?**

The answers to question one are grouped here under five different themes:

1.1 Anti-social/low-level criminal behaviour by groups of children and young people

This was reported from every table, and ranged in seriousness from verbal abuse of members of the public; acts of vandalism including damage to cars and at local secondary school; regular racing of (it was unclear whether these were stolen) cars in at least two locations in Inchicore; gangs moving around on bikes, which is very frightening and dangerous; bullying and intimidation; drinking in fields and cannabis-smoking in all areas; fire extinguishers set off and sprayed on passers-by; stones thrown at cars; delivery drivers and staff at shops attacked; attacks on vulnerable people; fights, sometimes organised on social media; breaking of windows, and lighting of fires in public areas.

Euro-Spar and St. Vincent Street were reported to be the focal points for much of the above activity.

1.2 More serious and/or organised crime

Every table reported that attacks and robberies are taking place at the Drimnagh LUAS stop. Stabbings were reported from one table, with a very serious attempt on someone's life having taken place last year in a nearby location, with the person widely accepted to be responsible still in the area, having suffered no consequences for fear of intimidation. Muggings, sophisticated burglary operations, and open drug dealing are also taking place.

1.3 Racist incidents

At least one racist incident was reported at every table. These varied from members of the public having witnessed verbal or physical abuse of ethnic minorities; people having to go out of their way to do their shopping, because of likelihood of racially motivated intimidation at Euro-Spar; secondary-school-age children having to be brought to and from school, for fear of racially motivated intimidation/bullying; children having to be brought to play in parks far away from the area because of same, and incidents where youths block the passage of car on certain road, and throw stones if passenger tries to get them to move.

1.4 Structural and other issues, that perpetuate the above problems

Every table reported issues around lack of visible Garda presence in the area. Garda response was also heavily criticised as being non-existent or too slow, leading to apathy and people not bothering to report the above issues any more.

It was also commented by every table that the gangs of children/youths are brazen and seem to have no fear of the Gardaí (or anyone) and also appear to know how and when Garda operations are run in the area, thus being able to avoid being caught in action. There was an impression that Gardaí can't tackle a lot of the troublemakers because of their age. There was thought to be so much money in the drug-trade that many young people will not even consider a career in any other area. The community also feels intimidated and fears back-lash if reports are made; damage of property/breaking windows is commonplace in cases where someone is thought to have reported ASB/crime. People that are more vulnerable (including the elderly), feel isolated, as they are afraid to leave their houses in some cases, and the feeling that there seems to be no repercussions to these youths compounds the issue.

On the other hand, many also expressed concern for the children, as young as ten or even less in some cases, who are seen out very late, sometimes until after midnight (including on week-nights), who then end up getting involved in anti-social behaviour. It was also commented that older criminals target these children to do drug-related work for them, with obvious damaging consequences. It was thought that many parents should take a lot more responsibility for their children, and that the guidelines in *Children First* should be enforced.

Every table also criticised the lack of lighting in the area, particularly around the Canal and leading from the LUAS down along St. Vincent Street, which was making it even easier for the gangs to operate. The trap-like passage leading pedestrians from the LUAS stop was also thought to be giving the thugs an easy target.

One table commented that Dublin City Council could improve its estate management practices, in terms of allocations and managing anti-social behaviour.

1.5 Miscellaneous

Tables also reported dangerous cycling along the canal tow-path; vulture-fund evictions due to take place; an illegal eviction that had taken place and involving poisonous gas being pumped into a flat where a family was in residence; fears of anti-social behaviour increasing even further in the spring and summer, and finally a fear of vigilantism and further violence if the problems in the community were not addressed soon.

The following responses were given to questions two and three, which were similar:

2. What progress has been made on any of these issues?

3. What is happening that is helping it to be safer?

- Slight increase in Gardaí, one has been seen on a bike
- Return of Community Policing is welcomed – but we do need more
- Hope that more Garda allocation will allow for uplift in the area
- One or two troublesome families have been moved along from the area
- Environmental group cleaning up the area has helped with community spirit. Community spirit in turn helps to combat fear and intimidation
- New Cafés and other businesses appearing also helps
- Mural on Emmett Road that the young people helped design etc. seems to have calmed things down around there somewhat. Young people should be asked to get involved more
- Choice based lettings have helped where they have begun to be operated by DCC
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Looking out for one another
- WhatsApp group alerting residents/businesses to activity in the area
- The Transition Year of the Mercy Secondary School have completed their “Give Mercy to Inchicore” Project – the aim of this project was to highlight the fear they were feeling as young women in the Inchicore area – Street lighting was a big issue and they were told by DCC that this would not be looked at until the regeneration of the area happens
- Secondary school project that highlighted young people in the area
- Both the Primary and Secondary school’s interaction with the community
- The local Youth Project is trying to engage with the young people causing trouble – but there was a feeling that they are playing catch up due to the severe cutbacks of recent years
- Positive commitment of the Family Resource Centre to the area

RESPONSE FROM SUPERINTENDENT JOHN GORDON

Community Sergeant Martin Comerford is back in his role, which had been requested by the community.

Superintendent Gordon is aware of the issues around St. Vincent Street and the LUAS. Charges have been made against criminals; however, it was acknowledged that the issue has not gone away.

Gardaí CAN take action against underage culprits; public was encouraged to keep reporting issues, as children involved can be brought back to parents if out late etc. Gardaí have a duty of care and referrals are made to TUSLA on a regular basis.

Reporting is important; there has been a very recent increase in community Gardaí, from 2 to 3 sergeants and from 7 to 15 community Gardaí, who will now have more capacity to respond. The new model of Divisional Policing also means that more Gardaí are on the beat rather than doing administration, and Superintendent Gordon is dedicated entirely to community policing.

Gardaí working with the government to implement recommendations made in the Commission on the Future of Policing report published last year.

Gardaí will link in with LUAS officials about the issues that were brought up about safety.

Drug dealing an issue across the wider area also but more resources can now be given to this problem also. Undercover activity is taking place.

Superintendent asked to speak privately to (or about) victims of intimidation; community police will give these individuals a visit

DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE (John Paul McCabe)

- ❖ DCC running a community clean-up on the 27th of April, all groups encouraged to get involved
- ❖ Choice-based lettings-scheme has been successful in Inchicore
- ❖ Paul White runs a clinic in Inchicore every Tuesday and Thursday from 9.30 to 11am at Goldenbridge Integrated Services at Emmet Crescent, Inchicore
- ❖ Took note of the issue around dangerous cycling around the canal, and lighting; will bring this to the relevant DCC departments
- ❖ Evictions from privately owned properties are a matter for the Residential Tenancies Board