
FINE GAEL 

**Submission to the
Commission on the
Future of Policing
in Ireland**





Fine Gael believes that one of the most fundamental obligations of the State is to keep its citizens safe. An Garda Síochána is at the core of that duty. The economic recession impacted An Garda Síochána, particularly following the closure of the Garda College in Templemore in 2010 and the imposition of

a moratorium. As soon as we had stabilised the public finances, Fine Gael re-opened the Garda College in 2014 and the current Programme for Government commits to an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021. We recognise that policing is about so much more than “boots on the ground”; that is why the personnel plan includes 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

As Minister Flanagan has often stated, Fine Gael is dedicated to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

Public safety and security will remain a top priority as we press on with the far reaching reforms in the oversight and management of An Garda Síochána. In Government we have already introduced major landmark changes to our policing service such

as establishing the Policing Authority as an independent body to oversee the performance of An Garda Síochána in relation to the policing service in Ireland. The establishment of the expert Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland makes clear our commitment to delivering a world class policing service; we see it as an opportunity to capture all that is good in An Garda Síochána while setting out a blueprint that will positively change the face of policing in Ireland.

I welcome the public consultation process currently being undertaken and wish the Chairperson, Ms Kathleen O'Toole and all of the dedicated members of the Commission every success in this most crucial of tasks. I look forward to receiving the Commission's final report later this year.



Colm Brophy, T.D.

Member, Joint Committee on Justice and Equality
Chairperson, Fine Gael Internal Committee on Justice and Equality

INTRODUCTION

Fine Gael welcomes the public consultation process being undertaken by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and recognises the significance and importance of the Commission's work. We thank the members of the Commission for taking on the important work programme established by the Government.

Since the foundation of the State, Fine Gael has strongly supported the work of An Garda Síochána; recognised the immense challenges it has faced, particularly during The Troubles; celebrated its success as an unarmed police force embedded in the communities it serves; and willed it to succeed and be a model of international best practice.

Culture of Change

The controversies that have emerged in recent times have been extremely disappointing and point to a clear need for a major programme reform. While recognising that reform must come from within the Force and be fully embraced by its members, at the same time, it is recognised that significant structural and cultural reform of a large organisation is always extremely challenging, particularly when the core work of day to day policing must continue.

Accordingly, Fine Gael believes that any proposals or reforms put forward by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland should be accompanied by an external support structure that will ensure implementation and do so in a positive way. So often, reforms are seen as threatening, we believe it is important to create a vision for An Garda Síochána that encourages its members to embrace change.

Accountability and Oversight

Fine Gael believes that the establishment of the Policing Authority as an independent body providing oversight of policing was a very positive development and notes that the Policing Authority has pursued its work with vigour and determination. We believe it is worth considering a different model of accountability whereby the Policing Authority would be accountable to the Oireachtas for policing matters, and given appropriate powers to ensure that this accountability model is satisfactory. We note the trend towards an intense politicisation of policing matters, and in particular of the role of Garda Commissioner, that has taken place in recent years and consider this to be a negative development that does not serve the public interest.

It is essential that there is transparency and accountability within An Garda Síochána and that its members are held to the highest standards but it is also essential that the core purpose of such transparency and accountability is the public good.

Furthermore, now that there is a Policing Authority in place and continuous oversight of An Garda Síochána, we would expect that this will prevent poor practices from becoming entrenched and the highest standards employed and maintained. Fundamentally, there must be accountability and transparency within An Garda Síochána but we believe careful consideration should be given to how this can best be achieved in the public interest.

Further, we recognise that there are now a myriad of structures in the policing sphere including the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission and the Garda Inspectorate, each carrying out important work. The Commission has an opportunity to consider how these various structures operate together and make proposals for change as it considers appropriate.

Civilianisation

Fine Gael is strongly supportive of the civilianisation programme within An Garda Síochána and believes that civilians can considerably strengthen the organisation from within by bringing vital skills to bear in a wide range of areas. Moreover, this expertise would, undoubtedly, help prevent some of the poor practices that have damaged An Garda Síochána overall in recent years. Fine Gael believes the civilianisation programme should be intensified and should be done in a strategic manner to ensure real added value and the public that it serves.

Garda Reserve

Fine Gael believes it is regrettable that the Garda Reserve has not yet lived up to its promise. We see a critical role for the Reserve in providing visibility in communities, recognising the very high value that citizens place on Garda visibility – while also recognising that much Garda work in preventing crime and apprehending criminals means it cannot always be visible in the manner the public would like.

Joint Policing Committees

Fine Gael believes that Joint Policing Committees offer a valuable forum for community engagement and that it is timely to examine these structures to measure their effectiveness to date in delivering on their purpose and identify what more can be done to encourage greater engagement by communities.

Training and CPD

Fine Gael believes that the highest standards in initial training and continuous professional development (CPD) are vital. We believe closer links should be forged with universities in Ireland and overseas. Gardaí should undertake regular CPD throughout their careers to ensure appropriate re-skilling and up-skilling and to help to foster greater professional pride. We are conscious of ever evolving technologies and the need for Gardaí to be provided with modern resources and trained to ensure this technology is maximised.

Also, we recognise the need for specialised Gardaí who are experts in areas such as fraud, other so-called "white collar" crimes, internet/online crimes, modern counter-terrorism and so forth.

We welcome the increased victim-centred focus in the criminal justice system and note that this requires special training of Gardaí in terms of victim liaison and family liaison. Similarly, where An Garda Síochána encounter children in the course of their work or are required to partner with organisations such as Tusla, the highest levels of training and appropriate expertise are of paramount importance.

We believe that there should be opportunities for members of An Garda Síochána to gain work experience in other police forces and to enrich the organisation with their experiences upon their return.

Recruitment

Fine Gael believes that it is important that An Garda Síochána draws recruits from a diverse pool of people and that the organisation reflects the communities it serves. Accordingly, strategies should be employed to ensure proactive recruitment of women, ethnic minorities and other minorities in line with our Equal Status legislation. Recruitment is only the beginning, the organisation must be an inclusive and collegiate environment for its members and appropriate structures and strategies should be employed to ensure this. Recruitment campaigns should be very proactive and cast the net as wide as possible.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we believe the Commission on the Future of Policing offers an opportunity to reimagine An Garda Síochána, as it approaches its centenary. There is much in the proud history of the organisation that must be captured and celebrated but it is also timely that the organisation should modernise and reflect a model of policing excellence that is recognised nationally and internationally.