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Peter Stafford

Programme Officer

The Commission of Future of Policing in Ireland.

Dear Sir,

There is an old saying that 'an ounce of prevention is better than a ton of cure' which I believe is the corner stone on which policing should be based.

However in recent year the whole emphasis would appear to be based on a response time to an incident rather than on prevention. This has resulted in Gardaí in rural stations operating from the District H.Q rather than their own station. Statistics on this, that and the other would appear to be what policing is based on ,it's as if the police force is managed by a statistician and where prevention no longer exists as it cannot be easily quantified.

I am a retired member of An Garda Siochana having worked for [REDACTED] and for [REDACTED] of those on my own in a small rural Garda station. I have seen significant changes in how policing has operated and how it is affecting rural communities. Some thirty odd years ago a new system of rural policing was piloted in the Garda Districts of Claremorris and Thomastown and this was based at that time on dividing the district into two, with members concentrated in two stations within the area in order to have a number of members available to respond to calls. This could work where the man power was available and the distance between stations was less than twenty miles, however a form of this policing was then rolled out across the country despite the fact that in some cases it was totally unsuitable, taking manpower, size of district, available vehicles and no suitable second station in to consideration.

This has now resulted in the concentration of manpower into the District H.Q. to the neglect of small rural stations. There are members officially attached to all rural stations that are supposed to be open, but the reality is that these stations are in fact closed to all intent and purpose as the members attached are working out of the District H.Q. There is no opening time displayed for these rural stations that are supposed to be open, only a note in the window giving the phone number to contact the District H.Q. If a Garda station is open then the local people should know the time.

In my experience I was never stopped in a patrol car and given information about anything. Community alert schemes were set up in my opinion to give the communities a sense of participation in policing and in response to the then wave of rural crime and one was set up where I worked, in fact I believe each Superintendent was encouraged to set up as many as possible in his/her District, but the reality is that after it was set up I **received not one extra call**, other than from people who had previously contacted me. Management could tick boxes about what they were

doing and it went along with the then trend but in reality did it substitute for members on the ground ?, I do not believe so.

The only way to know what is going on is, to work in an area, live in the area, get involved in the community and become part of that community which is impossible to do working miles away. The trend towards the centralisation of manpower to the District H.Q has had the consequence of fewer and fewer Gardaí living in the smaller rural Garda station areas. The rank structure in An Garda Síochana has not changed since the foundation of the force with the exception of the addition of more senior managers; in view of the number of regional Commissioners is there a need for the rank of Chief Superintendent, surely they should be able to take direct charge of the Superintendents. There is no incentive for any sergeant to take the role of station sergeant other than promotion as they lose money due to not being able to work unsocial hours, I would suggest that all District H.Q's have an inspector in charge.

I do not believe that there is a real appreciation at senior management level of what is involved in being a rural community Garda. In my time I was called to all sorts of incidents many of which had nothing with policing, like being called to a heart attack patient when they could not get the local Doctor, many family problems etc. I collected firearms fees in all sorts of places, once on a golf course, and at many different social events. You only get the trust of people when they get to know you and this cannot be achieved at check points or driving by in a patrol car.

Five years ago I was in a pub in a village in the west of Ireland where a discussion started at the bar among about fifteen men about the fact that one of them had read in the Western People that the local Sergeant had retired. None of them knew there was in fact a local Sergeant, one man had heard the name but thought he was stationed in a nearby town which is where I know the District H.Q is located, this clearly shows that what is officially the fact, i.e. that there was a Sergeant stationed here, had nothing to do with the reality, that he was most likely working full time from the District H.Q. and no one knew him. This I believe is showing an increasing disconnect between the community and the Gardaí which can only be to the detriment of society in general. The only time one will engage with the Gardaí will be when one is in trouble or at a checkpoint.

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[REDACTED] s. I see a general move towards centralisation across a number of Departments I deal with, leading to a greater disconnect between the State and the population, it's all about control and so called value for money with little or no real engagement with the end user and where some occurs its often just a box ticking exercise.

I wish your commission every good wish and hope that your report is not another that will be welcomed, then watered down and/or possibly in the long run ignored.

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