



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

MacGill 2016

**TRANSFORMING AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA INTO
A MODERN, EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE POLICE FORCE – HOW?**

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[Check against delivery]

Introduction

Members of the public, civil society groups and politicians rightly have strong views about crime and policing. Police services the world over are conferred with great powers. Society consents to the use of those powers and trusts that they will be used in the common good. This simple equation asks a lot of police services; in Ireland we ask a lot of the Garda Síochána.

We ask them to keep us, our families and our communities safe – in our homes, in our cars, in public places. We ask them to keep our country secure. We ask them to work with communities to meet diverse needs and expectations. We expect them to respond when we're victims of crime. We expect them to be the backstop for a whole range of society's problems. In carrying out their work we expect Gardaí to use the powers given to them in law to protect us, but we also expect them to use those powers proportionately and properly. They do so every day across the country, and they willingly take risks on our behalf. I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon by acknowledging with appreciation the service the Garda Síochána provides to the Irish people.

Those expectations we have of the Gardaí, and the work they must of necessity do – and some of the really sharp end was discussed here last Wednesday when we heard from a panel about international terrorism – influences in a very real way the culture of the organisation. And that is to be expected.

Transforming the Garda Síochána into a modern, efficient and effective police force- How?

Turning to the question posed in the title of this session of how to transform the Garda Síochána into a modern efficient and effective police force, the first comment I would make is I would like to add the word "more" to the title. The Garda Síochána is very good at a lot of things. We see evidence of this all the time but I know the Commissioner would say, because she has said it to the Authority, its very hard to get the media interested in good news!

My second comment that the title should be rephrased to refer to a modern efficient and effective police **service**. This is not just a pedantic point. Words are important in changing culture and I know



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the matter is often debated – I even saw an old article from the United States which suggested that police officers regard the word service as too feminine – but the word “service” underlines that the job of the Garda Síochána is one of public service, of serving the community. It is incorporated in the Mission the Garda Síochána have set for themselves but it is not in the vernacular so we have to keep saying it. Apart from anything else, it’s in the law since 2005!

My more serious answer to the question of “How to transform....” is to say that it is ultimately the job of the Gardaí themselves, especially Garda leadership. You don’t “do” transformation **to an organisation** . The rest of us – civil society, public commentators, the Tánaiste, the Oireachtas, the Garda Inspectorate, the Policing Authority, you - we can and must play our part by helping to change the context, but transforming any large organisation, public or private is down to the leadership and direction set by the head of that organisation and the top team, and her and their determination. It is not easy to transform any large long established organisation. It is particularly not easy when you have to keep the lights on while re-wiring the house, to coin a phrase.

Commissioner Noirin O’Sullivan spoke here at MacGill a couple of years ago about her aspiration for the Garda Síochána to be a world class police service and recently she published a very ambitious 5 year plan of modernisation and renewal. It is highly significant that the Commissioner has publicly set out the Garda plans in such detail – with detailed initiatives, commitments, dates and timelines – and I have no doubt about Commissioner O’Sullivan’s commitment to that Plan.

The Policing Authority has congratulated the Commissioner on publishing the plan. We were particularly welcoming of the commitment to place victims at the heart of the Garda service, to increased visibility of Gardaí and to the priority given to crime prevention.

The act of publishing a plan like this is itself a change agent for culture, but implementation often bedevils such plans in all organisations – Eddie Molloy’s Implementation Deficit Disorder comes to mind -The Authority will expect to see measurable progress in relation to its implementation.

Changing the context

I spoke a few minutes ago about changing the context. I’d like to explain what I mean. As I see it right now, the Garda have a number of very good reports prepared by the Garda Inspectorate – most particularly the last two because they’re the ones I know best, which provide very useful guidance for change. As I understand it, the Gardaí have accepted many of the recommendations. The Government has provided a capital envelope for some way-overdue funding for technology and equipment and has committed to a much larger Garda organisation over the next five years. Funding and Government support are two critical inputs if you’re trying to change a public sector organisation.



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Over the next few years, the Gardaí are facing a demographic cliff like a lot of the public sector. Losing skills, knowledge and experience will be difficult but on the positive side, renewing the team presents another opportunity and can be a key enabler of change.

The most significant context changer, arguably, is you. Openness, Transparency and Accountability are quite properly being demanded by you of the public service. A more enlightened, interested, informed public is challenging public service organisations, and the accountability of the public sector all over the place, and the Guards are no exception.

This brings me nicely to the Policing Authority and its role as a context changer.

What part can the Policing Authority play?

I am passionate about the importance of public confidence in key State institutions. Effective policing in which the community has confidence is essential in a democracy. It is enormously important for the well-being and coherence of society, and for the security of the State. International experience shows that public confidence in policing is enhanced by civilian oversight, enhanced transparency in how the police do their work and minimal political involvement in appointments and in the day to day running of police services. This is where the Authority comes in.

Proposals for the establishment of a civilian body to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána and to take certain functions away from Government have been made many times, including by politicians, academics, civil society groups, even Garda representative associations. Indeed they have been debated at previous MacGill Summer Schools. Against a background of dented public confidence in the Garda Síochána which has been well rehearsed, the Authority was established with effect from 1 January 2016. It was described by the Minister for Justice and Equality as “the most far reaching reform of the Garda Síochána since the foundation of the State”, It represents a significant depoliticisation of policing in Ireland. It changes the context in which the Garda Síochána do their work, and it also changes the context for the political system.

We’re a very new body – not quite seven months old - with a broad remit summed up as “to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána in relation to their policing functions”. We have developed and just this week published the Authority’s first Strategy Statement. Our overarching objective is captured by our **Mission to drive excellent policing through valued and effective oversight and governance.**

Delivering on the Authority’s Mission will take time, constructive engagement, some intrusive challenge of Garda performance, governance and use of taxpayers money, and the provision of opportunities to showcase excellent work done by Gardaí and Garda staff.



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How will another oversight body help in the transformation?

I've been asked recently who we are and what do we know about policing. I don't plan to waste my 15 minutes by reading out a list of qualifications – you can read that on the website -but there are nine of us and we are required by law to have between us expertise in policing, equality and human rights, public administration, governance and community engagement. And we have a very fine group of Authority members which fulfil that requirement: Noel Brett, Bob Collins, Vicky Conway, Pat Costello, Judith Gillespie, Valerie Judge, Maureen Lynott, and Molling Ryan.

The range of expertise connects directly to our long list of functions which I also don't propose to read out. I would like to focus today on the functions which have the most potential to support, encourage and drive the transformation of the Garda Síochána and Garda culture. Some of them are seemingly boring managerial things like setting policing priorities and performance targets for 2017, approving the Garda Strategy Statement for the next three years which we have just done and sent to the Tánaiste for her consent. But while they might appear routine, these documents used to be approved at political level, and now they are approved by the Authority. They will form a basis for overseeing performance, asking questions about deployment, about response times, about Victim services, about response to serious and organised crime, about Roads policing to mention just a few examples. We will also ask questions about implementing third party reports including the recommendations made by the Inspectorate. We will certainly be asking for measurable progress in implementing the Modernisation and Renewal Plan. We can ask about most things except security. We can also review training, recruitment and governance. We will also appoint the Garda Audit committee – another job which used to be done by the Minister.

Joe Mulholland, in the text in the programme for this session, drew attention to a series of investigations and Inquiries whose findings did not reflect well on Garda performance. The persistence of performance failures over many such inquiries is something that concerns the Authority greatly. Not in an academic sense but because of the impact on victims of crime, the damage to public confidence in the Guards which can impact on compliance with the law and the reporting of crimes, and the damage to the good work done every day by rank and file Gardaí and Garda staff.

From that point of view, the most significant context changer in my view is that the Authority meets the Commissioner and her senior team at every month except August to ask questions. This year five of those meetings are in public and, like MacGill, are webcast and archived so they are there for everyone to see. And we have no choice about this. This is our job according to the law. So while inquiries were once-off, done and finished, we are not. And that is different and sets a very specific new context for transforming the Garda Síochána. A context of continuous oversight

From the point of view of culture, another important change is that we are responsible for nominating the next Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners; we are responsible for appointing senior civilians and we will shortly have responsibility for senior Garda appointments. This is a



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significant depoliticising of the day to day running of the Garda which will in time impact on the culture of the Garda Síochána

A particular change which I would like to underline relating to culture is that the Authority will by the end of the year produce a Code of Ethics for the Garda Síochána. We have already had a preliminary public consultation and in the next month we will publish a draft text for public comment. Anyone here who is interested in Garda culture and ethics might want to keep a look out for it and you are very welcome to send comments.

Like so many other things, putting a Code of Ethics in place is only step one. Giving it life, making it real to the women and men of the Garda Síochána organisation will be a challenge for Garda Leadership and the Authority but we have to make a start. The Gardaí have agreed to commission an independent culture Audit which will help us to measure progress and that is very welcome.

Transparency

A wise colleague used to say to me “It’s not done until it’s told”, which is another way of looking at transparency. You may have heard the expression about the disinfecting qualities of light and transparency. It is one of the key values of the Authority. And like all good disinfectants, it can sting but it’s good for you.

Having meetings with the Garda Commissioner in public, publishing our own material, encouraging and advising the Garda Commissioner to put as much data, reports, policies etc as she safely can in the public domain are among the ways the Authority will deliver on this value and we’ve already had some welcome responses.

In the context of one of the Authority meetings, the Commissioner published the Garda Protected Disclosure Policy for the first time. We will shortly review the Policy and that work remains to be done – but it is visible, it’s out there, and that is good in itself. The Commissioner also published a public attitude survey recently which had been available to the Authority for some time but we were keen that everyone should see it. It’s a very good piece of work with some interesting data – data about the experience of victims, about unreported crime, about the public’s view of the types of crime which should be prioritised - and there are a few puzzles there. Seventy per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided to their local community which is a number a lot of agencies would be proud of.

But in conclusion I would like to focus on one finding which is that you, the general public, have a great deal of trust in the Gardaí –85% of you have middle or high trust in the Gardaí. Given the backdrop of controversy and Inquiries, given the absolute centrality of policing to society’s well being, this is very good news. While there are problems – which the Commissioner has acknowledged – and lessons to be learned, and work to be done, and work for the Policing



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Authority to do, we should acknowledge as a nation that community confidence in the Gardaí deservedly remains high.

If I paraphrase the Policing Authority's vision, it is of a police service that continues to deserve that trust and to deserve public support by being professional, impartial and constantly improving. The Authority will work very hard in the coming years to fulfil that vision.