



AN ROINN DLÍ AGUS CIRT AGUS ATHCHÓIRITHE DLÍ
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND LAW REFORM

White Paper on Crime

Report on the Consultation Session with Older Citizens on the Issue of Crime

(3 November 2010)

Published January 2011

ABOUT THE WHITE PAPER PROCESS - ROLE OF DISCUSSION DOCUMENTS

A White Paper provides a high level statement of Government policy, its rationale and the strategies to give effect to that policy. Development of the White Paper on Crime involves an end-to-end examination of the prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies to combat crime.

This is the report on a consultation session with older citizens on the issue of crime that was held on 3 November 2010. More information about published discussion documents and the outcome of public consultations to date can be found on the Department's website (www.justice.ie).

The publication of this report provides a further opportunity for organisations and members of the public to provide submissions on the issue of older citizens and crime. If you wish to make a submission, please do so by forwarding your observations to either:

White Paper on Crime Unit,
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
94 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

or

whitepaperoncrime@justice.ie

Submissions on this document should be made **before the end of March, 2011**.

If making a submission, please state if the views expressed are personal or are being made on behalf of an organisation. If views of an organisation are being submitted, it should be made clear which organisation is represented.

Submissions may be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts and may be published. Please indicate if you would prefer your submission to remain confidential or if you do not wish your name to be included in the list of contributors.

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INTRODUCTION

On 3 November 2010, the Department of Justice and Law Reform, in conjunction with the Office for Older People in the Department of Health and Children, held a consultation session with older citizens on the issue of crime. The consultation session with older citizens is part of a wider consultation process by the Department of Justice and Law Reform as it develops a White Paper on Crime. Consultation is a key component of the development of the White Paper on Crime and provides members of the public with the opportunity to contribute to both the White Paper and policy in this area. For policy to develop in a way that enhances our ability as a society to prevent, tackle and deal appropriately with crime, it is important that a wide range of people have the opportunity to voice what they think and to tell of their experiences.

Over the last year or so, many organisations and members of the public have provided submissions, both in writing and at various consultation meetings. This consultation was an opportunity for older citizens to articulate their perspective on crime. (See Appendices for details of the methodology applied, the themes discussed and bodies that nominated participants.) In total, 46 people participated in the consultation session. At the consultation session, participants were divided into workgroups that focused on particular themes and each group had an experienced facilitator to help shape its discussion. There were also two note-takers at each table. This report is based on an analysis of notes taken on the day of the consultation session. The analysis divides the qualitative data collected at the consultation session into three main sections: the vulnerability of older people to crime, the types of crime they and their communities have experienced and the role and responsibilities of the person themselves as well as the various relevant agencies and other people.

The Minister of State with responsibility for Older People and Health Promotion at the Department of Health and Children, Minister Áine Brady T.D., launched the consultation session. In her address to the consultation session, Minister Brady noted the importance of “taking time to reflect on concerns relating to personal safety and security as people grow older” and also stated that a key policy objective of the Government is to help people maintain a positive quality of life as they grow older.

Inspector Nuala Finn, from An Garda Síochána’s Community Relations and Community Policing, gave a presentation on An Garda Síochána’s *Older People Strategy* and Ms Bernadette Casey from the Health Service Executive spoke about elder abuse and the HSE’s support services.

The Department of Justice and Law Reform would like to thank those who contributed to the consultation session: Minister of State Áine Brady T.D., Inspector Nuala Finn, Ms Bernadette Casey, the Strategy Development Unit in the Office of Older People at Department of Health and Children and the people who participated in the consultation session.

The contents of this report reflect the views expressed by participants at the consultation session and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice and Law Reform.

SUGGESTIONS OF THE CONSULTATION SESSION

At the consultation session with older citizens, the following suggestions were made:

Personal Security Precautions

Participants identified from their own experiences precautions that might be taken to increase people's safety:

- When someone calls to the door, the householder should not open their door until they have validated the caller's identification by (1) asking for identification to be passed through the letter box and (2) confirming the identification is valid by phoning the caller's employer;
- In addition to keeping doors and windows locked, older people should install (1) a peep-hole in the front door and/or an intercom system, (2) a house alarm and (3) external security lights;
- Older people should wear an "emergency pendant" to raise the alarm if they feel threatened or in a vulnerable position and keep house windows clean as this suggests the house is occupied;
- The phone numbers of local Gardaí, family relatives and neighbours should be programmed into the speed dial function of the house phone and mobile phone;
- There should be a campaign to inform the public, especially older people, of the potential dangers involved in transacting business over the internet and make available guidelines to promote user protection;
- In public places, older people should try not to draw attention to their bags;

An Garda Síochána / law enforcement

- There should be a dedicated Garda for older people in each community - a single contact person would build trust and provide a consistency of approach;
- Each Garda Station should be aware of the older people living in their area and be able to identify when an older person is calling them for assistance so as to respond quickly;
- The role of community Gardaí should be developed into a particular specialisation within An Garda Síochána and those assigned to such duties should have the appropriate skills, as well as a genuine interest in working with communities;

- Community Gardaí should be encouraged to interact and to get involved with the community as much as possible;
- Community Gardaí should be more visible;
- The Department of Justice and Law Reform should encourage and facilitate members of An Garda Síochána and the community to work together on a regular basis;
- When a community Garda is being transferred to another station there should be an overlap time to allow the departing community Garda introduce their replacement to the local community and to provide them with a complete understanding of salient issues in the area;
- An Garda Síochána should use a system of roving check-points to act as a deterrent to burglars;
- The emergency service ('999') should be contactable by text;
- The proceeds from convictions secured by the Criminal Assets Bureau should be filtered back into community projects;
- People selling gold should have to provide identification and be able to show that it is their property;

The Community

- Members of the community should act together to prevent crime through *Community Alert* and *Neighbourhood Watch* schemes;
- Older people who do not know their neighbours should make a point of introducing themselves and make the effort to get to know them;
- Older people should participate in local clubs and associations as this can provide them with the opportunity to get to know others in their community and to mix with people of all ages;
- Older people, in co-operation with An Garda Síochána and local schools, should meet with young people and share stories and experiences;
- Set up a text-messaging system to alert members of the community to suspicious activity or break-ins or to raise the alarm if someone is in difficulty;
- Increased resources should be devoted to improving people's living conditions and to providing people with greater opportunities for employment in order to reduce the risk of criminal behaviour, especially amongst young people;

- Service providers should be aware of older people's concerns about crime, in particular how some want to lock their doors for the night or remain indoors after it starts to get dark, and alter how they provide services (e.g., deliver services during daylight hours, install utility meters outside people's houses); and
- People should be made more aware of victims' support service providers in their area.

CONSULTATION WITH OLDER CITIZENS ON CRIME

Vulnerability

In their discussions, participants at the consultation session considered how older people feel vulnerable to crime. They focused on specific risk factors as well as on how feelings of vulnerability contribute to a 'fear of crime' and the impact of this on their day-to-day lives.

Factors contributing to feelings of vulnerability

When participants discussed the factors contributing to older people being more at risk of crime, they focused on particular aspects of older people's lives, as well as on the impact of the wider societal context. The specific aspects of how older people live included living on their own or as dependents as well as the risks associated with public places or particular times of the day or year. The issues considered as part of the wider societal context focused on the impacts of changes in the relationships between people in Irish society and the deterioration in the economy.

Some participants believed that the risk of older people becoming victims of crime was greatest amongst people who either lived on their own (or in isolated areas) or as dependents in the family or residential home. One participant suggested that concerns about personal security would encourage them to move into a residential scheme. However, other participants noted that living within a 'gated community' does not guarantee a person's safety. In particular, there is a risk of 'tailgating', where someone follows a person into the residential area before the gates close. Participants from rural areas suggested that crime was more prevalent in isolated areas as it is easier for criminals to operate and move about undetected. A few participants felt that people who live as dependents are at risk of being victimised by a carer (see section on Elder Abuse below).

A number of participants associated a wide range of public places with an increased sense of vulnerability to crime, including streets, public transport, shops / changing rooms, hospitals, and outside their local church. These participants noted that older people feel especially insecure on side streets, as they perceived these to be less well patrolled than the main streets.

While some participants reported that they were concerned about crime on a continuous basis, they associated differing levels of vulnerability with the time of the day and year. They felt especially at risk at night time and in winter (when it gets darker much earlier than in the summer). One participant noted, "you have to be very aware of what you are doing at night" while another said she "doesn't like to go out in the dark". Amongst a number of female participants, concern about going out at night time was particularly salient.

As well as focusing on how aspects of older people's day-to-day lives made them feel vulnerable to crime, participants also discussed factors associated with the wider societal context in which they live. For one participant "the trust in society is gone".

Another participant reported how a neighbour broke into and ransacked their house. A participant who helps with the church collection reported noticing how everyone now keeps their doors locked. One participant argued that, in recent times, the effects of poverty and crime are more evident on the streets of Dublin city, there is more poverty and edginess, and this is leading to more street crime, crimes older people believe that they are especially at risk of encountering.

Some participants suggested that there is a sense of “chaos”, “instability” and “unease” in Irish society; a sense of negativity is evident at all levels. They suggested that this situation might be related to a lack of confidence in government and leadership, to concerns about high levels of unemployment and lack of opportunities for people, and to problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse. They also expressed concern that reported cutbacks in rehabilitative programmes for offenders and drug addicts would lead to increased costs in the longer term.

Despite their concerns about Irish society, several participants said that they wanted to live in a safe society, safe not only for themselves but also for their children and their grandchildren. Some participants suggested that a job strategy would make an important difference as a person who has a job is less likely to commit a crime – they are not going to feel demoralised or bored or become engaged in petty crime or anti-social behaviour. Others said that there is a need to move away from the “benefit trap”, from where it “pays not to work” and that young people should have to carry out some work for their social welfare payments.

Feelings of 'fear of crime' and how it affects day-to-day lives

Participants spoke about their fear of crime and how this impacts on their day-to-day lives. While they believed that fear of crime increased with age, for one participant it was also associated with the random nature of crime in Dublin – something she characterised as crime lacking any direct or motivated intent against the victim.

It was noted that the day-to-day impact of fear of crime could lead to isolation. People are reluctant to leave their homes, especially in the evenings, even just to get milk from the shop or from a neighbour. People are reluctant to answer their doors at night. One participant noted that after 6pm, neither she nor any of her neighbours answer their front doors. Family members are required to ring ahead before calling to the house or to use a special pre-arranged knock. One participant reported how they no longer want to go out to the local pub, preferring instead to stay at home with a bottle of wine.

A number of participants characterised fear of crime as constant and paralysing. They were clearly frustrated at a situation where they are afraid to go out and are afraid of being confronted in their homes. In the words of one participant, “we feel we are being locked into our houses”, while another participant stated “we shouldn't have to be prisoners”.

Crime and People's Experiences

At the consultation session, participants discussed a variety of crimes and how these impact on their own lives and community. A number of participants reported that either they or a family member or someone they know has been a victim of crime. Participants' direct experiences of crime ranged from house break-ins to bag snatching to being threatened with a syringe outside a bank. People also discussed issues relating to white collar crime and fraud.

There is another element to what participants had to say about their experiences of crime. They spoke about their sense of a "crime" having been committed, even though a criminal act may not have taken place. What participants had in mind were events such as late night disturbances in a neighbourhood (e.g., people leaving a party) or groups of young people hanging around the area. While events such as these can be very intimidating and upsetting and can lead people to be fearful for themselves or their property, fear is not something people are willing to report to An Garda Síochána.

Breaking and entering

Those participants who discussed the impact on people's lives of having their home broken into agreed that it had a devastating effect on older people in terms of damage to property and injury (either through assault or from a sense of violation). As one participant stated, "our house is our person. If you violate our house, you violate our person". A number of participants noted that while there was an acute sense of violation associated with a break-in when the householder is absent, they were especially concerned about being at home during a break-in. They considered the latter event to be a most frightening and threatening situation especially given the potential for violence of either a physical or a sexual nature. In order to protect themselves, some participants noted that they lock doors and windows. However, as one participant noted, this is leading to additional concerns about how quickly they can get out of their house in an emergency.

Many participants believed that recent burglaries are related to 'cash for gold' schemes. They suggested that anyone selling gold should have to provide identification and be able to show that the gold being offered for sale is their property.

Street crime

Participants discussed a range of street crimes. The most salient street crimes were being mugged or having their bag stolen, being harassed by people begging, being scammed for money on public transport or at parking meters and people cycling on footpaths. They were concerned not only about their property but also about the injuries that might be inflicted if they did not do as their attacker instructed (e.g., they would be beaten up or attacked with a dirty needle).

One person recounted how someone from their neighbourhood was knocked to the ground, had money stolen from them and ended up in hospital as a result of the

assault. Some participants reported how they are reluctant to use ATMs and are concerned about being watched going in-and-out of the post office on pension day. Another person recalled how someone they know, having withdrawn their pension money from an ATM, was followed into their home and had their money and other items stolen.

A number of participants spoke about how they had their bags snatched as they were about to donate money to a person begging on the streets. They also spoke about intimidation from people begging.

When reference was made to official crime and victimisation statistics, a number of participants were not convinced by them, suggesting the statistics underestimated people's fears and concerns.

Drug crime

Many participants believed that the origin of most crimes could be traced back to drug crime. For one participant, "the main issue is drugs", while another referred to drug crimes and the "shootings and stabbings that are caused by them".

Drug crime is evident in all areas of the country and is associated with a wide range of other crimes from anti-social behaviour to theft to murder. A participant from Dublin city said that the older people in her area feel intimidated by drug pushers. A participant from a rural area said that the main suspects for theft in their area are drug users who come from Dublin.

One participant noted that the incidence of drug-related crime in the inner city had declined slightly following the establishment of the methadone clinic.

Another participant believed that legislation should be passed to allow the proceeds from convictions secured by the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) to be filtered back into community projects.

Fraud and "Con Jobs"

Several participants expressed concerns about the vulnerability of older people, particularly those living on their own, to people calling to their homes purporting to provide services or represent charities. Some participants reported that supposed workmen will ask neighbours for the householder by name in order to give the impression they are carrying out genuine work for the householder. One participant said that the use of a fluorescent jacket gave these people the appearance of being "official". Another participant reported that this type of crime included attempts by people to manipulate older people into "investing" their money in bogus schemes.

A number of participants noted that older people sometimes feel threatened by these "con men" if they are on their own in the house and are afraid to say "no". They suggested that when anyone calls, the householder should not open the door, ask for identification to be passed through the letter box and confirm the identification is

valid by phoning the caller's employer. It was also suggested that pendant alarms would provide older people with reassurance in instances such as these.

Some participants discussed the issue of cyber crime (fraud over the internet). As technology changed and became increasingly sophisticated, they felt that older people were more likely to be exploited. It was suggested that there should be a campaign to inform the public, especially older people, of the potential dangers involved in transacting business over the internet and make available guidelines to promote user protection.

Elder abuse

A number of participants were concerned about the issue of elder abuse. In particular, they noted that older people with a dementia may be especially vulnerable. It was suggested that carer stress may lead to physical or psychological abuse of older people. Also, older people are at risk from financial abuse by family members and carers.

One participant informed the consultation session of a HSE video on elder abuse based in a residential setting and a person's home setting, "Open your eyes to Elder Abuse".

White collar crime

At the consultation session, it was suggested that white collar crime was treated differently to other crimes. While several participants demanded that those who committed financial crimes be prosecuted, there was a feeling those involved in such crimes regard themselves as being above the law and there is "one law for the rich and one law for the poor". Furthermore, they argued that the absence of prosecutions for white collar crimes, and in particular crimes associated with the financial crisis, was undermining respect for the law in general. (For instance, one participant associated the absence of prosecutions with an increase in graffiti.)

Some participants portrayed white collar crimes as part of a national culture of corruption in public life and low standards of probity. In discussing this point, they referred to public representatives abusing travel expenses and people making fraudulent social welfare claims.

Another participant was concerned that An Garda Síochána may not have sufficient resources available to deal with the complexities and volumes of material involved in investigating white collar crime. While An Garda Síochána have the resources to look after "traditional crime", they may need to employ people with particular skills in accountancy and information technology to investigate current white collar crime and to be in a position to investigate even more complex and sophisticated crimes in the future.

Preventing and Tackling Crime – Roles and Responsibilities

At the consultation session, participants discussed the roles and responsibilities of a number of different actors in tackling crime and dealing with its consequences. While many participants reported that they turn to An Garda Síochána for help when crime occurs, they recognised that they themselves as well as the people living in their communities have a very important role to play in both preventing and tackling crime. However, a few participants suggested that An Garda Síochána could do more to prevent crime and the Courts could do more to punish criminal behaviour. They recognised the need to report crime but expressed an acute sense of fear about how doing so might expose them to danger.

Older citizens themselves

Many of the participants at the consultation articulated a strong sense of personal efficacy. As one participant said, “being aware of crime allows you to take measures personally to prevent crime occurring”. They noted that older people could protect themselves against crime by exercising greater vigilance. In particular, older people should ensure that their doors and windows are locked, and refuse to open the door until they validate the caller’s identity.

In addition to locking doors and windows, some participants suggested that older people install security measures, such as, a peep-hole in the front door, an intercom system, a house alarm and external security lights. They also suggested older people wear an “emergency pendant” to raise the alarm if they feel threatened or in a vulnerable position. A few participants suggested that the Government should subsidise the installation of monitored house security systems. Other practical suggestions include using the speed dial function on their phone to pre-programme the phone numbers of An Garda Síochána and relatives and to keep house windows clean as this suggests the house is occupied.

When they are out and about several participants noted that there are a number of actions people can take to protect themselves. It was suggested that people should try not to draw attention to their bags (i.e., a person should hold their bag close in order not to draw attention to it). Some participants revealed that they carry personal alarms with them when they leave their house.

When participants discussed how they can protect themselves when they are out and about, there were some notable differences in the approaches that people were willing to adopt. For instance, while one participant explained that at night she will cross to the other side of the road if she sees that there is a group of young people ahead of her, another participant said that she “would never cross the road for anyone” and instead walks confidently, saying “good evening” to the young people in an effort to engage with them and to win their trust. This participant felt that engaging directly with people not only helps to gain their respect, but is also a signal that “I know you”. Similarly, while a number of participants reported that they do not carry handbags, wear jewellery or take other personal items to reduce the risk of being attacked, another participant felt that it was very unfair people felt afraid to carry whatever items they needed or wanted.

A number of participants believed that they had a responsibility to engage with younger people. As one participant outlined, by engaging with young people, and by building some sort of relationship with them, it is less likely they would target the older person or their property. They suggested that older people, in co-operation with An Garda Síochána and local schools, meet with young people and share stories and experiences. The benefit of this was noted by a participant who reported how she and the young people she met through the school now feel more comfortable when they encounter each other in public places.

Community

Several participants emphasised the role of the local community in tackling crime. Those who live in the local community are better placed to look out for and care for one another than members of An Garda Síochána or other service providers by the very fact that they live in the area – it is their community. For many participants, the proximity of neighbours provides a huge feeling of reassurance.

While a number of participants saw an important role for neighbours and communities in preventing crime in their own areas, some expressed the view that there is less neighbourly or community spirit today than there was in the past and this has lessened the impact of the community in preventing crime. One participant stated, “things aren't like how they were years ago when everyone knew who their neighbours were”. Another participant noted that there was not the same sense of community anymore and that young people do not have the same local connections or history with the area. Consequently, there was a demand amongst participants for greater community cohesion. One participant argued that strong and united communities are better able to combat crime than weak and divided ones.

To develop a sense of community spirit and grow community cohesion, one participant suggested that people who do not know their neighbours should make a point of introducing themselves and make the effort to get to know them. Participation in local clubs and associations can provide older people with the opportunity to not only get to know others in their community but also to mix with people of all ages. Some participants suggested that by making a greater effort to get to know each other people can build a strong sense of community spirit. One participant argued that a strong sense of community spirit can establish the standards that are expected in the community - “you can't act like that in this neighbourhood”.

A number of participants suggested that members of communities act together to prevent crime through *Community Alert* and *Neighbourhood Watch* schemes. Through these schemes, communities can take responsibility for tackling crime in their own areas. *Neighbourhood Watch* and *Community Alert* groups can provide advice to older people on how to protect themselves and their property and can also pass on information to An Garda Síochána. One participant reported that a *Neighbourhood Watch* scheme is very active in their area and they feel safe living there.

The challenge these schemes face is keeping them active and visible. Some participants noted that there has been a general demise in *Neighbourhood Watch* over the last decade or so, in part due to the absence of a Garda in their community to coordinate and organise local volunteers. Another challenge these schemes face is the difficulty of establishing and maintaining them in small villages or where people live a good distance from their neighbours' houses. One participant reported how criminals targeted houses in their area displaying the *Neighbourhood Watch* sticker.

A few participants also suggested that the use of text-messaging to alert members of the community of suspicious activity or 'break-ins'. One participant reported how the use of text-messaging proved to be very useful in tackling crime in their area. They also suggested having a system of alerting neighbours if someone is in difficulty though some were concerned about how well this might work at night.

Participants discussed the impact on communities of the wider social context. In particular, they were concerned about how poor living conditions and the absence of resources contribute to anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour. One participant suggested that, in recent years, urban planning has had a very negative effect on people's lives. This participant noted how young people had started hanging around vacated flats in their area. While these young people were not engaged in criminality, their presence in the area led some in the community to feel intimidated and uneasy and their behaviour was construed as bullying behaviour. The issue the older people had with the young people was not with them as individuals but with their behaviour as part of a group. When the issue was discussed with the young people's parents, the parents said there was nothing in the area for the young people to do, they were bored and they were struggling to find employment. To address this issue, and ultimately to reduce the risk of criminal behaviour occurring, it was suggested that there should be an increase in resources devoted to improving people's living conditions and to providing people with greater opportunities.

Participants also discussed how to engage with parents who have little or no control over their children. One participant reported how every window in his house had been broken by a group of children. Another participant said that they were afraid of young children in the area who throw eggs and stones. These participants were frustrated because they felt there was little point trying to discuss the issue with the children's parents and they were left with no means of deterring this type of behaviour by these young people. As one participant said, "parental control just does not exist in a lot of communities, unfortunately".

Some participants argued that the parents should be held accountable for the actions of their children and this should involve a financial penalty if the children damage property. Parents should be responsible for unruly children and it should not fall to An Garda Síochána to stop them annoying elderly neighbours.

Others argued that more resources need to be made available to families with some families needing additional help and support. It was noted that good results have been achieved when help is provided to parents to allow them to deal with some of their own issues and problems. Furthermore, some participants suggested that those who work with young people need to give more attention to encouraging good behaviour and deterring crime. These participants posited that addressing anti-social behaviour

in a prompt manner should reduce the likelihood of future crimes in the area and improve the living standards of all members of the community.

An Garda Síochána

During the consultation session it was noted that the number of Gardaí had increased significantly over the last decade or so. However, they felt this increase in Garda numbers was not evident on the streets. Instead, one participant argued that there seems to be less policing in their local neighbourhood. A participant from a rural area noted the poor Garda presence in their area.

A number of participants suggested that An Garda Síochána need to increase ‘on the street’ visibility through foot patrols and the use of bicycles. It was suggested that by having a more visible presence, Gardaí would be better positioned to observe what is happening in the community generally and be regarded as more approachable by all sections of the population. They believed that the increase in the number of Gardaí on bicycles made a big difference. The use of bicycles is more personable and less intrusive than patrol cars and provides Gardaí and the community with an opportunity to interact with one another. A few participants suggested that the Garda CCTV Schemes should be extended. While acknowledging that there would be a large initial cost, they believed the benefits would outweigh the costs over time.

An important issue for some participants was the fact members of An Garda Síochána no longer live in the communities they serve. It was thought that this change had undermined the link between members of An Garda Síochána and the community. One participant said Gardaí no longer know the people or the area. The local people have a sense that once a Garda’s shift is over so too is their involvement with the community. This lack of engagement with the community has undermined the confidence people have in local Gardaí. While a former member of An Garda Síochána noted how he used to live in the community he served, he was unsure as to whether it was desirable to return to such a situation. He wondered why Gardaí should not have to commute to work like everyone else. Other participants acknowledged that the situation was unlikely to revert to how it once was because Irish society had changed. It is no longer possible to know everyone in an area because the population has increased significantly and there are now more housing estates all over the country, even in small villages. Yet, despite these changes, people want to know the Gardaí working in their area.

While members of An Garda Síochána may no longer live in the communities they serve, the relationship between Gardaí and the community can be enhanced in a number of different ways to the benefit of all involved. A few participants suggested that the Department of Justice and Law Reform should encourage and facilitate greater collaboration between members of An Garda Síochána and the community, for example, Gardaí could actively encourage and support *Community Alert* and *Neighbourhood Watch* schemes.

Some participants noted that there is an existing and effective community policing model. One participant reported how a problem with young children roaming the streets in their area had been dealt with successfully following co-operation between

the community and local Gardaí. While these participants believed that this approach was a good thing, they made a number of suggestions as to how it could be improved.

Within An Garda Síochána, it was suggested that the role of community Gardaí should be developed into a particular specialisation and those assigned to such duties should have the appropriate skills as well as a genuine interest in working with communities - this was regarded as being of particular importance when working with young people. As one participant noted, while some Gardaí are “brilliant” with young people, others need to take a better approach with them. This participant believed, “if you approach someone in a better manner you get a better reaction”. To this end it was suggested that local Gardaí should give more talks in schools because the development of better relations between Gardaí and young people would help deter criminal behaviour.

A participant suggested that community Gardaí should be encouraged to interact and to get involved with the community as much as possible. As was noted by one participant, “a personal relationship is key to the success of this system. Knowing people on a first name basis achieves a sense of fellowship and establishes a common identity.” A few participants suggested that Gardaí should establish police fora with willing community groups and service providers and they should also visit community groups to talk about how best older people can protect themselves. These meetings would provide Gardaí with the opportunity to give people practical information on how they can better protect themselves. It was suggested by some that Garda information leaflets were a waste of effort. One participant noted how local Gardaí are very open to meeting with community groups and reported how they engaged in a discussion organised by the participant’s local church. At a more informal level, some participants suggested that Gardaí should take part in local charity events in order to socialise with members of the community. It was suggested that this approach would encourage teamwork in dealing with problems in the community and build trust and friendship.

Several participants raised a number of points about the service provided by An Garda Síochána. While An Garda Síochána is usually their first point of contact in an emergency and overall they have a high level of satisfaction with the service provided, not all were satisfied with the response of An Garda Síochána to reported crimes and some were critical of the standard of service and they suggested that it varied between areas.

In particular, one participant reported that their next door neighbour’s house had been broken into and while Gardaí came and did their job, nothing came of it - “break-ins are common, you call the Guards, they come and take fingerprints. End of story. Nothing else is done”. Another participant noted how people are reluctant to report crimes because they feel “there’s no point, nothing will be done” and “sometimes it’s more hassle than it’s worth to follow it up”. A participant argued that people have lost faith in the effectiveness of An Garda Síochána because when “you report someone for breaking a window and the next day you see them walking down the road, not a bother on them. It’s so disheartening”. Another participant suggested that Gardaí may know the perpetrators of crime in their areas but the way in which the Criminal Justice System operates means that there is little they can do to bring them to justice.

Moreover, some participants argued that An Garda Síochána were more reactive than preventative. One participant noted that the presence of An Garda Síochána in an area increases after a break-in and suggested that Garda visibility should instead be used as a preventative measure. A number of participants suggested that An Garda Síochána should use a system of roving check-points to act as a deterrent to burglars.

Several participants also focused on the difficulties they have encountered trying to make contact with a particular Garda. It was suggested that these difficulties are a consequence of the different shifts Gardaí work. To deal with this problem they suggested that there should be a dedicated Garda for older people in each community. A single contact person would build trust and provide a consistency of approach. It was also suggested that each Garda Station should be aware of the older people living in their area and be able to identify when an older person is calling for assistance so as to be able to arrive quickly. It was also suggested that the emergency service ('999') should be contactable by text - where there is an intruder, the householder may be afraid that they will be heard making a phone call.

A further difficulty older people encounter is Gardaí being transferred from one station to another. This issue is of particular importance to the efforts communities and Gardaí make to build a relationship with each other. For these participants, the transfer of a Garda to another area completely negates the efforts they have made at building a relationship and a new relationship has to be forged over a period of time. They suggested that when a transfer is to be made, sufficient overlap time should be allowed for the departing community Garda to introduce their replacement to the local community and to provide them with a complete understanding of salient issues in the area. One participant spoke about the frustration he felt when, having built a relationship with a local Garda, the Garda was then transferred to another station and he was left having to ring a general Garda number, and had to wait for whoever was free to come.

Criminal Justice System

A number of participants reported that they did not have a lot of confidence in the Criminal Justice System and were pessimistic about the State's ability to tackle crime. There was a feeling that the Criminal Justice System was letting people down and there was "no end to criminal activity". One participant went so far as to suggest "criminals are winning and the innocent victim has no chance". While there was some discussion of the different levels of crime in urban and rural areas, the consensus was "it's gotten worse everywhere". It was also noted that criminals have become increasingly more aggressive in their behaviour and more "sophisticated" in their use of technology. Despite the pessimistic outlook, there was a general sense of determination amongst these participants that the long-term effects of crime need to be addressed and it is imperative that immediate actions are taken in order to deter crime in the future.

Reporting of crime

A number of participants disagreed with the suggestion that they should regard themselves as the “eyes and ears for the communities”. They believed that it was unfair to ask people living by themselves to carry out a role that may lead to them being victimised.

One participant noted how in some areas older people are scared to report an incident to An Garda Síochána because they are fearful of retaliation by the perpetrator. Another participant reported that following a break-in, they were told that their house would be “torched” if they pressed charges. Even the presence of a Garda car outside a person’s house could result in them being harassed or intimidated. Another participant outlined their fear that a convicted person may, following their release from prison, take their revenge on a witness who was just doing their civic duty.

Some participants noted that people may also be reluctant to report a crime because the offender is a family member or someone who lives nearby. One participant noted how their willingness to report a crime was tempered by their wish to continue living in the neighbourhood, “you have to live in the same community”. Another participant felt aggrieved because Gardaí had not informed them the person who broke into their house lived close-by.

Many participants acknowledged that if there is to be any chance of justice, crime has to be reported and Gardaí need witnesses to be able to build a prosecution. They noted how people can provide information to An Garda Síochána on a confidential basis. It was also suggested that one of the conditions of an accused person’s bail is that they stay away from the victim and witnesses. At a more practical level, another participant noted that a crime has to be reported to An Garda Síochána in order to be able to make an insurance claim or to have any chance of reclaiming their property.

Justice and the Courts

Some participants argued that the Criminal Justice System was unfair as people were not treated equally. One participant suggested that people from different areas are treated differently by the Courts, including when it comes to imposing sentences. Another participant contrasted how a person on social welfare who was unable to meet loan payments was jailed for a number of months, while those who engaged in much more serious crimes are not reprimanded or held to account. It was suggested that this sense of unequal treatment was contributing to a culture of “get away with what you can”.

While some participants suggested that the law is not strong enough to convict individuals who have committed crimes, others focused on the role of the legal profession. One view expressed was that members of An Garda Síochána, in trying to deal with day-to-day policing issues, are constrained by the law and the Courts. One participant believed that the legal system inhibited the ability of An Garda Síochána to carry out their functions. Too much Garda time was taken up having to go to the Courts to get search warrants and that their time would be better spent tackling crime.

As one participant said, “the laws of the land seem not to punish the perpetrators of crime”.

Some participants believed that members of the judiciary and the legal profession are disconnected from Irish society and as a result they are not aware of the issues citizens have to deal with in their day-to-day lives. A number of participants raised the issue of people’s anxiety about giving evidence in Court and how this may be undermining their willingness to report crime. One participant noted that older people are afraid of having to face the offender in court, either as a victim or as a witness, and suggested that there should be better separation of victims / witnesses from the accused. They were also concerned about having to go through a gruelling cross-examination by counsel in Court. Other participants thought that some judges are too lenient and, as a result of this leniency, offenders are being released on bail to “run amok”, or are serving only small proportions of their sentences. A number of participants spoke about how the Courts did not offer justice and their dissatisfaction with what they perceived as delays in the court process and with the sentencing of offenders convicted of crimes.

Restorative justice

At the consultation session it was suggested that restorative justice could help the victim of a crime achieve closure and receive compensation for the damage suffered. Compensation should not necessarily involve the payment of money but could also include repairing damage caused or community work such as improving the local environment. Furthermore, restorative justice may offer young offenders an opportunity to change their ways by helping bring them into society rather than locking them away and isolating them.

However, several participants argued that a restorative justice scheme would be of no real benefit, especially in terms of reforming offenders. One participant expressed the view that if these people cared in the first place they would not have acted in the way they did and, irrespective of age, they should serve prison sentences.

However, some participants accepted that restorative justice might be effective in individual cases. For one participant, restorative justice should only involve offenders who have committed a small number of crimes. Another participant believed restorative justice might be a good way of engaging parents in their children’s lives; of reinstating some parental control. In the case of those convicted of violent crimes, a participant suggested that they should be shown the serious impact of violence on people and their health and should have to perform community service in a hospital.

Other service providers

A number of participants stated that other service providers could play an important role regarding older people and crime. They suggested that service providers be made aware of older people’s concerns and alter their services to take account of their concerns. As older people feel safer when they lock their home and gates as it starts to get dark, these participants suggested that service providers should conduct their

business during daylight hours. For instance, in some areas refuse bins are not collected until around 8pm and older people find it is too late and dark to go out to collect their bins from the street. It was also suggested that utility meters should be installed outside people's houses to enable the meters to be read without disturbing older people. Service providers, such as postmen and those who work for companies such as the ESB or An Bord Gáis, should carry official identification.

A number of participants suggested that those who experience crime should have access to victims' support and that people be made more aware of such service providers in their area. One participant reported how they found the victim support service very helpful in overcoming the experience of being mugged. A few participants noted that while some 'over the telephone services' can be very helpful, sometimes what a person has experienced requires a more personalised intervention.

Appendix A - Methodology

This section sets out how the Department of Justice and Law Reform went about consulting with older citizens on the issue of crime. After considering a number of methodologies, it was decided to structure the consultation around thematic work-groups (see Appendix B for the details of these themes).

The discussion themes were arrived at following an examination of relevant quantitative and qualitative data as well as the National Crime Council's (2009) *Fear of Crime in Ireland and its Impact on Quality of Life*¹. While official crime statistics and the CSO's *Quarterly National Household Surveys* indicate that older people are less likely than younger adults to be victims of crime, older people are more likely to be concerned about crime and to see it as a 'very serious' problem. Concern about crime can manifest as 'fear of crime' - 'an emotional response of dread or anxiety to crime or symbols that a person associates with crime'² and incorporates:

- emotional concerns about crime;
- emotional concerns about the consequences of criminal activity;
- perceptions of risk; and
- the role of the environment in eliciting fear.

Fear of crime can impact on people's lives in a number of different ways. For instance, fear of crime may prompt people to isolate themselves from their community, and doing so may impact on their physical, social and emotional well-being. However, fear of crime may not always have such negative impacts as it can encourage people to engage in behaviours to protect themselves and their property.

The analysis of the qualitative data suggests that older people's concerns around 'fear and security' focus on 'place' (i.e., in the home and outside the home) and the 'role of various agents' in addressing their concerns (i.e., self, community and An Garda Síochána).³ The qualitative data also suggests that the consultation session should provide room for participants to discuss issues around the role of the media, the role of private security, sanctions for criminal behaviour and victims and victim support.

The five themes participants at the consultation session considered were:

1. When I am in my home;
2. When I am out and about;
3. Who I can turn to;
4. When I think about crime; and
5. When I think about the future.

¹ National Crime Council, (2009), *Fear of Crime in Ireland and its Impact on Quality of Life*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

² Ferraro, K., (1995), *Fear of Crime: Interpreting Victimization Risk*. New York: SUNY Press: 4

³ The Department of Justice and Law Reform is very grateful to the Office for Older People for providing the data from their research. The interpretation of the data is solely that of the Department of Justice and Law Reform. In total, the raw dataset contained 253 statements and, of these, 225 were coded as having some relevance to the issue of crime.

By setting out the themes in advance, there is a risk of inadvertently excluding relevant and salient issues. The method employed in deriving the themes was part of a strategy to minimise this risk, a strategy that also included circulating the themes to participants in advance of the consultation session and providing participants at the session with the opportunity to highlight any issues they believed should have been addressed in the discussion by their group.

The aim of the consultation session was to capture the views and experiences of older citizens, national interest groups that represent older citizens and community bodies that provide services to older citizens (see Appendix C). The Department of Justice and Law Reform wrote to 45 national and community bodies asking them to nominate people who would be interested in participating in the consultation session. The community bodies were asked to consider nominating people who use the services they provide. While these bodies nominated people, the participants volunteered to attend the consultation session and, as such, this report captures the views and experiences of a self-selecting group of participants. Those who attended the consultation session were predominantly from Dublin, though several people from outside Dublin were also able to attend, and their contributions provided additional views and experiences to what would otherwise have been an urban focused consultation session.

Appendix B – Themes for Discussion (as sent to participants)

THEME 1 - When I am in my home

We would like you to think about how crime can affect you when you are at home.

While the most obvious crime is that someone breaks into a person's house, and we are very interested in hearing what you have to say about that, perhaps other types of crime that affect people in their homes come to mind.

Some people that we have spoken to say that they feel quite vulnerable in their homes. What do you think can be done so that they may feel less vulnerable?

THEME 2 - When I am out and about

We would like you to think about how crime can affect you when you are out and about, away from your house.

While the most obvious crime is that someone tries to rob money from a person while they are on the street, and we are very interested in hearing what you have to say about that, perhaps there are other types of crime, or locations, that come to mind.

Some people that we have spoken to say that they are very reluctant to leave their homes, even for a short period. What do you think can be done to encourage them?

THEME 3 - Who I can turn to

We would like you to think about who you can turn to:

1. if you were the victim of a crime, and,
2. if you were a witness to a crime.

What is it that you think they ought to be able to do to help you?

Some people we have spoken to have said that it was not worth the hassle of reporting a crime that they are the victim of or a witness to. How can people who hold these opinions be encouraged to come forward?

We are also very interested in hearing how you think the system can be improved to make it more accessible to those who have been the victim of a crime or who have witnessed a crime.

THEME 4 - When I think about crime

We would like you to think about crime in general.

How serious is crime as an issue in Irish society? Is it the most important issue that the Government should tackle or is it an issue that the Government should give priority to or are there other more important issues that the Government should focus its attention on as crime will always be there and there are plenty of agencies and policies in place to deal with it?

How important is crime as an issue in your local area? In thinking about crime, do you worry that you will become a victim of crime? Does this worry affect your day-to-day life?

THEME 5 - When I think about the future

We would like you to think about the concerns you may have about the longer term implications of crime.

What we mean by this is that some people think about crime in terms of particular events, their house was burgled or their bag was snatched while other people when they think about crime, focus on the types of crimes that take place over longer periods of time, that is they are not once off events but a series of events or actions.

These types of crime may not have an impact on their lives or on the lives of their children and grandchildren until some point in the future.

What types of crime come to mind?

How can Irish society best tackle these types of crime?

Appendix C – Bodies that nominated participants and numbers attending

Active Retirement Ireland	2
Age Action Ireland	1
Age and Opportunity	1
Ballyfermot / Chapelizod Partnership	2
Ballymun / Whitehall Area Partnership	2
Blanchardstown Area Partnership	2
Crime Victims Helpline	1
Darndale Belcamp Senior Citizens Group	3
Friendly Call Service	1
Friends of the Elderly	1
ICON Senior Citizens Working Group	1
Irish Association of Older People	1
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament	1
Lorcan O'Toole Day Centre	2
Muintir na Tire	7
Northside Partnership	1
Older and Bolder	1
Older Women's Network	1
Pavee Point	2
Rathmines Pembroke Community Partnership	2
Sandymount Neighbourhood Watch	2
South Inner City Development Association	2
Simon	1
Southside Partnership	1
St Vincent de Paul	1
Tolka Area Partnership	2
Whitefriar Aungier Area Community Council	2